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Unlocking the Potential of Digital Payments for Social Protection in Barbados

Full Report

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About the World Food Programme

Reaching nearly 150 million people in over 120 countries each year, the World Food Programme is the world's largest humanitarian organization saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity, for people recovering from conflict, disasters and the impact of climate change.

WFP Caribbean works with national, regional and international partners to strengthen the region's resilience to the climate crisis, and other risks. WFP adopts a systems-focused approach as part of its capacity strengthening efforts through research and advocacy, digitalization, human resource development, south-south cooperation, and by investing in critical infrastructure and assets. WFP works with partners to provide direct assistance to populations impacted by shocks when events surpass national and regional capacities.

These investments place the most vulnerable people at the centre of efforts to minimize the combined impacts of climate, economic and other shocks on the Caribbean. WFP Caribbean's multi-country strategic plan¹ supports 22 countries and territories across the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean through leveraging its expertise in vulnerability analysis and mapping; end-to-end supply chain management; shock-responsive social protection; food systems strengthening and climate risk financing.

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¹ https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000135918?_ga=2.66316206.168143545.1679498584-1123234837.1677265273

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| ACH | Automated Clearing House |
| ATM | Automated teller machine |
| BACHSI | Barbados Automated Clearing House Services Inc. |
| BCCULL | Barbados Co-operative & Credit Union League Limited |
| CBB | Central Bank of Barbados |
| EFT | Electronic Funds Transfer |
| FLB | Financial Literacy Bureau |
| FSC | Financial Services Commission |
| FTC | Fair Trading Commission |
| FLB | Financial Literacy Bureau |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| KYC | Know Your Customer |
| MIST | Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology |
| MPEA | Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs |
| NFLP | National Financial Literacy Programme |
| NPSA | National Payment System Act |
| NISS | National Insurance and Social Security Service |
| OTC | Over-the-counter |
| POS | Point of sale |
| RTP | Real-Time Payments |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

1. Executive Summary

The Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), supported by the World Food Programme (WFP), is actively working to improve the delivery of financial assistance to vulnerable populations in Barbados. The aim is to modernize social protection programs, ensuring that households receive timely and efficient assistance, especially during emergencies. Central to this transformation is the adoption of digital payment systems, which can streamline operations, reduce administrative costs, and enhance financial accessibility for economically excluded and underserved communities. Through digital tools, Barbados can move toward a more resilient and inclusive social protection system.

Digital financial inclusion—providing digital access to formal financial services—is increasingly critical. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the demand for digital solutions, with a notable shift to online banking among Barbadians, though mobile wallet adoption remains low at only 10%. A Central Bank survey from 2022 found that while 80% of respondents used online banking, in-store mobile payments lagged behind (CBB, 2022a). Addressing these gaps requires collaborative efforts and innovative solutions to scale up mobile wallet usage and other accessible digital payment options.

Between October 2023 and May 2024, the Ministry and WFP conducted consultations, focus group discussions, and a Digital Readiness Survey to understand consumer preferences and challenges in adopting digital financial services. Findings from these engagements revealed a shift toward digital payments driven by convenience and cost-effectiveness. However, limited financial literacy and low mobile wallet usage point to the need for targeted digital literacy initiatives and tailored digital options, especially for social assistance beneficiaries, including options designed for individuals with disabilities and low-income groups.

This report presents an in-depth analysis of Barbados' digital financial landscape and provides recommendations for advancing digital financial inclusion. Expanding digital payment options for social assistance programs and integrating financial literacy training and entrepreneurship support, such as through the One-Family Programme, will strengthen Barbados' resilience to economic shocks and ensure that vulnerable populations are better protected. By adopting these recommendations, the MPEA, with its partners, can build a robust and responsive social protection system that aligns with the vision of an inclusive and sustainable digital future.

2. Introduction

Digital payments are rapidly expanding across Barbados and the wider Caribbean. While cash and cheques continue to play a vital role in the region's economies, the financial services landscape is undergoing significant change. Increased internet connectivity, combined with the emergence of new financial players, has led to the emergence of innovative digital payment options, many of which leverage mobile technology. This shift is influencing various aspects of daily life, including financial transactions of households, businesses, and government entities.

Cash grants are a cornerstone of social assistance in Barbados and the wider Caribbean. The growth of digital payment solutions presents valuable opportunities to enhance social protection programmes aimed at reducing poverty and supporting individuals through crises and shocks. Specifically, digital payments can offer a more efficient and user-friendly way to deliver cash transfers to vulnerable households (IDB, 2024). In times of emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital payments have proven to be an essential tool for governments to rapidly scale up social assistance payments. By supporting the adoption of digital payment tools, social protection programmes can also contribute to greater financial inclusion for vulnerable groups.

As the Government of Barbados seeks to build a more efficient, inclusive, and shock-responsive social protection system, there is an increasing focus on optimising programme delivery through the adoption of digital technologies for cash assistance. To explore this potential, the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) collaborated to develop a joint research agenda that examines the state of digital payments in Barbados and the opportunities they offer for enhancing social protection.

The research explored the broader digital financial landscape, with a specific focus on digital financial inclusion and the challenges faced by social assistance beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups in accessing financial services and using digital tools. The study incorporated insights from financial regulators, financial institutions, and a diverse range of stakeholders, as well as feedback from focus groups with social assistance recipients. These discussions provided valuable insights into the experiences, needs, and preferences of beneficiaries regarding social assistance payments and digital financial services more broadly. By adopting a people-centred approach, the research aimed to identify actionable, practical opportunities to enhance the delivery of social assistance.

In addition to recommendations for improving social assistance payment processes, the research also sought to identify opportunities for advancing financial inclusion and economic empowerment among social protection beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups. This report highlights the key findings and actionable recommendations, providing a foundation to inform and guide future efforts in these critical areas.

2.1. Research methodology

The study examined the state of digital payments and digital financial inclusion, as well as opportunities for leveraging digital financial technologies for social protection payments. It focused on the following research questions:

- What is the state of digital payments and digital financial inclusion in Barbados?
- Are beneficiaries of social protection programmes aware of and using digital payment solutions? Are there specific gender or age-related factors to consider in the adoption of digital payment solutions?
- What are the current challenges and bottlenecks in delivering social assistance payments? What opportunities are there to unlock the potential of digital payments to improve the delivery of social assistance grants, including in emergencies?
- What are the challenges and opportunities to promote digital financial inclusion and economic empowerment of the most vulnerable? What role can social assistance play in increasing the uptake of digital payments and improving digital financial inclusion?

The research methodology involved a comprehensive review of relevant literature and secondary data, complemented by both qualitative and quantitative data collection to address the research questions. Primary data collection comprised four key components:

| Research component | Objective |
|--|--|
| Key informant interviews (October 2023 - March 2024) | Analyse the digital financial ecosystem and digital financial inclusion (see Annex 2 for a list of interviewees). Key informants were selected based on a stakeholder mapping (see Annex 1). |
| Focus group discussions (January 2024) | Explore the experiences, perceptions, and demand for digital financial services among social assistance beneficiaries. |
| User Journey Workshop with key institutional stakeholders (April 2024) | Map user journeys for various payment options, identifying pain points and opportunities to improve user experiences. |
| Digital Readiness Survey of micro, small, and medium-sized retailers and businesses (June 2024) | Assess retailers' access to and use of digital financial services, and gauge their interest in providing cash withdrawal services for social assistance programs (see Annex 3 for detailed survey results) |

3. Transforming Social Assistance Payments in Barbados

Understanding social assistance delivery is key for identifying and addressing bottlenecks and streamlining payment processes for the administrators and recipients of social assistance programmes. Such analysis can also provide a starting point for adopting dedicated payment instruments and protocols for the rapid disbursement of cash to affected populations in emergencies. This section reviews the current social assistance payment delivery processes, identifying challenges and highlighting ongoing efforts to transition towards digital payment solutions.

In Barbados, financial assistance is available through a variety of programmes and payment methods (see Table 1). Non-contributory social assistance is primarily governed by the National Assistance Act (Cap 48), which covers National Assistance and Old-Age Pensions. The Act provides for support to specific groups in need, including children, the disabled, and unemployed adults. The National Assistance Programme, managed by the MPEA's Welfare Department, is the flagship social assistance programme, offering cash and in-kind assistance to vulnerable households. Eligibility is determined based on a needs assessment conducted after an application is submitted. The Welfare Department also provides food vouchers, rent and utility bill payments, and burial assistance. In addition to the National Assistance Programme, the MPEA launched the One-Family Programme in 2023. This programme provides financial grants to 1,000 vulnerable households as part of a broader effort to help them transition out of poverty. Furthermore, the non-contributory old-age pension, administered by the National Insurance and Social Security Service (NISS), offers financial support to elderly individuals who do not receive a pension from other sources.²

Table 1: Non-contributory social assistance cash transfers

| Entity | Benefit | Caseload | Payment method | Benefit amount |
|---|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), Welfare Department | Public Assistance | 8000 individuals access welfare services, inter alia of cash grants, rent and bill payment ³ | Cheques; Direct Deposits; Bill payments: Local Purchase Orders / Direct Deposits to suppliers | Cash grants: BBD46.20 per week for an able bodied adult; BBD162.40 for a severely disabled person; BBD63.00 for children ⁴ |

² National Assistance Act (Cap. 48) (Act No. 1969/37)

³ As of April 2023

⁴ As of June 2023

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA) | One-Family Programme | 1,000 households | Cheques (same as Welfare Department). Introduction of debit cards ongoing. | Food grants: BBD45.00-75.00 per week per household Cash grants: BBD83.00 - 162.40 per week per household ⁵ Stipends (paid as required): BBD25 per day per class attended |
| Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT) | Primary School Textbook Grant | <i>[Figure not available]</i> | Direct deposit | BBD100 one-off grant per academic year per child |
| National Insurance and Social Security Service (NISS) | Non-Contributory Old-Age Pension | <i>[Figure not available]</i> | Direct deposit, cheques | BBD 230.00 per week |
| National Insurance and Social Security Service (NISS) | Special Needs Grant | <i>[Figure not available]</i> | Direct deposit, cheques | BBD 230.00 per week for adults; BBD 115.00 per week for minors |

Source: MPEA, METVT, NISS.

Traditionally, National Assistance grants are distributed via paper cheques, which impose a significant administrative burden on the Welfare Department. Cheques are issued on a set schedule, with recipients receiving two cheques by mail each month, each covering a two-week period. While structured, the process remains heavily reliant on manual input and email communication, leading to inefficiencies and bottlenecks. Welfare Officers submit individual cases with recommendations to Senior Welfare Officers for approval. These officers, already under heavy workloads, must ensure each requisition includes detailed client information, adding to the time-consuming nature of the process. Once approved, requisitions are emailed to the accounts department, where cheques are printed according to a strict schedule. Delays in submitting requisitions on time can result in payment delays for clients. Emergency grants, such as food grants, which fall outside the National Assistance legislation, further complicate the system. The One-Family Programme also uses the same cheque-based system, adding to the administrative load. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Welfare Department has taken steps to digitalise parts of the cheque processing, such as storing client information digitally. However, the lack of full automation continues to make the system cumbersome and prone to delays. As a result, the MPEA is exploring digital

⁵ Amounts determined by the need of each household and based on number of household members who require assistance.

solutions to streamline and improve the delivery of social assistance grants. In addition to these administrative challenges, focus group participants expressed concerns about the social stigma attached to “welfare cheques” and indicated a strong interest in transitioning to more modern methods, such as debit cards and digital banking (see section 5.2).

The government has begun exploring the use of debit cards to deliver social assistance grants.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, reloadable ATM cards provided a valuable alternative to the cheque-based system. The Adopt-A-Family Programme, launched in April 2020, used ATM cards to support vulnerable households severely impacted by the pandemic. The initiative was led by the Household Mitigation Unit of the Prime Minister's Office, with support from the MPEA and the COVID-19 Social Response Unit. By July 2020, over 2,800 households had received assistance, totalling BBD 4.2 million (Government Information Service, 2020). A beneficiary survey showed high satisfaction, with 96% reporting positive experiences using the ATM cards. Focus groups also expressed satisfaction but emphasized a strong desire for additional functions beyond ATM withdrawals (see section 5.2 for details). The funds were mainly used for food, bills, rent, educational supplies, and hire purchase payments. However, some operational issues arose, including the issuance of duplicate cards, which led to overdrawn accounts. The programme, which successfully piloted prepaid cards for social assistance, also highlighted effective collaboration across public and private sectors, including the Prime Minister's Office and MPEA, ensuring timely assistance during the pandemic. Public donations and private sector contributions played a key role in supporting the initiative. Building on this success, the MPEA is pursuing the procurement of prepaid debit cards as an alternative to paper cheques. Developed in partnership with a major financial institution, this prepaid card solution would allow recipients to access funds and conduct transactions conveniently. It would also enable the MPEA to provide rapid assistance during emergencies, even to individuals without active bank or credit union accounts.

Various institutions are transitioning to direct deposit for delivering social protection benefits.

Since 2020, the NISS has made significant progress in moving to direct deposits for benefits, including non-contributory old-age pensions and payments to clients abroad. The NISS aims to make direct deposit the primary payment method, supported by a targeted communication campaign and close collaboration with banks, which have helped clients submit banking details. However, some clients prefer receiving payments by cheque due to factors such as the lack of nearby banks, not having bank accounts, or older clients valuing the social interaction of collecting cheques from the post office. For many, the routine of cheque collection every four weeks is an important social opportunity. While NISS has implemented a monitoring system to ensure payment accuracy, issues like incorrect account details, closed accounts, or data entry errors still occur, requiring coordination with financial institutions to recover funds and correct payments.

In May 2024, the MPEA's Welfare Department introduced direct deposit for recipients of National Assistance grants, allowing them to have funds deposited into bank or credit union accounts instead

of receiving cheques by mail (Government of Barbados, 2024). Beneficiaries can submit their banking details via paper form, email, or online form. Additionally, the One-Family Programme pays stipends for class attendance via direct deposit, although regular grants continue to be issued by cheque.

This gradual transition to digital payment methods is part the MPEA's wider efforts to digitalise the management and delivery of its social protection programmes. As part of these efforts, the MPEA launched the PULSE-MIS (Poverty Reduction Utilizing Labor Social Empowerment Management Information System), which aims to digitalise the management of various social programmes, streamlining and unifying the delivery of social assistance on a single platform. The PULSE-MIS seeks to enhance efficiency, transparency and oversight, by improving cross-validation and verification of beneficiary data, and by enabling beneficiary management through a dedicated case management module. The platform is also aligned with the MPEA's ongoing institutional reform which aims to amalgamate its social service departments into a single Department of Children and Family Services under the Barbados Social Protection Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan for a Rationalised National Social Protection System (BARSPIS) 2021 – 2024 (Barbados Weekly, 2022). In 2024, the PULSE-MIS had completed a pilot phase, which emphasized the importance of change management and overcoming key technological challenges in the digitalisation of social protection. The ongoing digitalisation through PULSE-MIS reflects the government's wider efforts to modernise its social protection system and improve access to services for vulnerable populations (Synergy, 2024).

The digitalisation of social assistance payments is part of the government's broader effort to modernise public service delivery, including through e-government services and electronic payment options. As part of these efforts, the government introduced its EZPay+ payments platform in 2020 which allows individuals to pay for land tax, NIS contributions, driver's license renewals and other public services using online payment options (CBB, 2021).

4. Exploring the Digital Financial Landscape in Barbados

Understanding the digital financial service ecosystem and regulatory environment are key to exploring the potential of digital payments to enhance social assistance payments and promote wider digital financial inclusion.

This section analyses the country's financial sector, looking at digital solutions offered by both traditional and non-traditional providers as well as the overall regulatory framework and ongoing efforts by the government to modernize the country's digital payment infrastructure. It also presents the results from a survey with retailers and businesses in Barbados which explored their use of and attitudes towards digital financial services.

4.1. Overview of Financial Service Providers and Digital Payment Trends

Barbados has a well-developed financial sector, with banks and credit unions dominating the landscape of financial service providers. Six commercial banks are licensed to operate in Barbados, offering a wide range of services such as retail banking, corporate banking, and wealth management (CBB, 2023; PWC, 2005). These commercial banks largely operate as subsidiaries of foreign-owned financial holdings with headquarters in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago.⁶ The Barbados Bankers Association serves as the umbrella organisation representing the individual banks in Barbados. Barbados is also a domicile for various international banks and companies operating in the capital market and investment fund industry, such as mutual funds and securities companies (FSC, 2024).

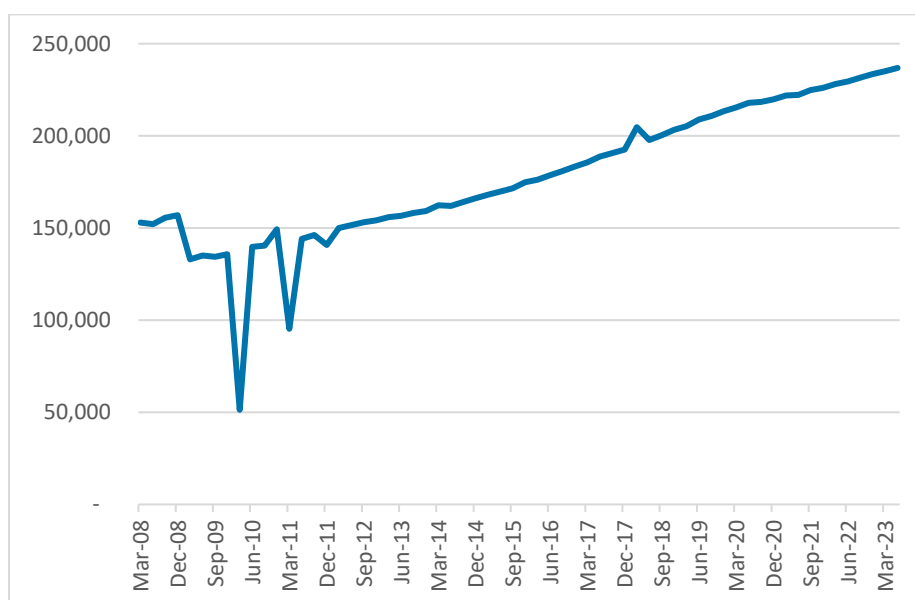
Credit unions play a crucial role in Barbados' financial landscape, particularly in promoting financial inclusion. The credit union movement in Barbados, comprising 25 credit unions and over 230,000 members, has been a significant player in promoting (digital) financial inclusion, particularly for lower- and middle-income households. Similar to other Caribbean islands, Barbados is among the countries with the highest credit union membership per capita, with a customer penetration rate of 125% in 2022 (WOCCU, 2023).⁷ Credit unions in Barbados are represented by The Barbados Co-

⁶ Republic Financial Holdings Limited (RFHL), headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago, is the registered owner of Republic Bank (Barbados) Limited. First Citizens Group Financial Holdings Limited (FCGFH) is the parent company of the First Citizens Bank and is licensed as a financial holding company in Trinidad and Tobago. Scotiabank (Barbados) Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Canada. RBC Royal Bank (Barbados) Limited is a subsidiary of the Royal Bank of Canada, a Canadian multinational financial services company. CIBC Caribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited (formerly CIBC FirstCaribbean International Bank) is a subsidiary of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC). Sagicor Bank (Barbados) Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sagicor Financial Company Ltd. (incorporated in Bermuda) since 2021.

⁷ Penetration rate is calculated by dividing the total number of reported credit union members by the economically active population age 15–64 years old.

operative & Credit Union League (BCCULL), which acts as an umbrella organisation and advocacy body for the credit union and wider cooperative movement. With over BBD 3 billion in assets, credit unions offer savings and loan services, and many have introduced online banking and debit card services, further enhancing financial access. These member-owned cooperatives provide financial services such as savings, loans and other financial products. They serve as an alternative to commercial banks and promote financial inclusion by catering to individuals and small businesses with limited access to traditional banking services. Their member-focused business model emphasizes member education and consumer protection, including advocacy for clear and transparent contracts. Credit unions in Barbados have played a vital role in promoting financial inclusion, especially for lower-income groups. They have been key in making loan terms more accessible, transitioning from the previous add-on interest method to a reducing balance system, which provides more affordable credit options for both mortgage and consumer loans. The number of credit union members has increased steadily after a temporary drop following the 2008 financial crisis (see Figure 1). Statistics on credit union deposits show that membership spans all economic segments, with deposits in the BBD 0-1,000 range representing 54% of the total number of deposits in 2023 (FSC,2023).

Figure 1: Credit Union Membership in Barbados (2008 – 2023)



Source: FSC.

In addition to the traditional financial sector, various companies offer different types of financial services in Barbados, including loans, bill payments and remittances. Several microlending companies have emerged in the Barbadian market, offering rapid access to credit in the form of personal and small business loans outside of licensed financial institutions, including Term Finance Ltd. (operator of FastCash), Axcel Finance Ltd., and Unicomer (Barbados) Ltd. (operator of Courts Ready Cash). Payce Digital, which is operated by Cave Shepherd Card (Barbados) Inc, offers a

revolving credit product through a VISA card. Remittance services are provided by agents of Western Union and MoneyGram, alongside the newer market entrant ZeeMoney. These companies are licensed by the Central Bank of Barbados to facilitate the acceptance of foreign remittances (Central Bank, 2024).⁸ It is estimated that personal remittances received in Barbados accounted for 1.3% of the country's GDP in 2023, equivalent to USD 85.2 million (World Bank, 2024). Similar to other Caribbean countries, the FinTech market in Barbados is still in its early stages, despite the emergence of non-traditional service providers that offer a range of financial solutions such as digital wallets and bill payment services online and over-the-counter.

Like many other Caribbean economies, Barbados continues to rely heavily on cash and cheques, despite the increasing importance and volume of electronic transfers (CBB, 2023). The country's financial services landscape is evolving, with digital payments having become a regular part of daily life and transactions. Financial institutions and regulators interviewed for this study highlighted a general trend towards digital payment services, including an increasing use of debit and credit cards, points-of-sale machines, as well as online and mobile banking. Correspondingly, in 2023, for a second consecutive year since the inception of the country's automated clearing house (ACH), electronic fund transfers (EFT) surpassed paper-based payments (cheques) accounting for 54.7 percent of all ACH transactions (CBB 2024). The CBB's 2022 Digital Financial Literacy Survey also highlighted the widespread use of online payments, with 54% of respondents frequently transferring money to others online and 65% regularly paying their bills online in the past 12 months (CBB, 2022a). Despite this shift towards electronic payments, cash remains a popular way to pay in Barbados – and currency in circulation (outside of deposit taking institutions) has seen an increase from 2017 to 2023 (ibid.).

Banks and credit unions are expanding their digital service offerings. All commercial banks operating in Barbados offer debit and credit card products. Larger credit unions provide international debit cards for transactions both locally and internationally, while some smaller credit unions have introduced prepaid debit card options, which come with lower requirements and implementation costs for credit unions. To address the evolving financial landscape, some larger credit unions have considered offering credit card products in partnership with commercial banks. However, this matter has proven challenging due to the complexities and risks associated with credit management. For example, one credit union's attempt to launch a credit card product through a bank failed, demonstrating the hurdles faced by individual credit unions no meet necessary requirements. In this context, the Barbados Cooperative Credit Union League (BCCULL) has expressed an interest in introducing a unified credit card system for all credit unions in the future to expand revolving credit access. Furthermore, all commercial banks have expanded their digital service offerings to include personal online banking. Most have also launched mobile apps that enable customers to access their

⁸ Massycard (Barbados) Limited is an agent of Western Union

accounts, conduct transactions, and manage their finances conveniently from their smartphone. Likewise, the three largest credit unions have introduced their own online banking services, including mobile banking apps.⁹ Additionally, the BCCULL has announced plans to implement an integrated digital wallet solution across the league in the future, offering members an alternative method for digital transactions. This planned digital wallet, implemented through a partnership with VENTI Global Digital Solutions and the Sagicor Bank (Barbados), would allow credit union members to securely access and transfer funds between financial institutions, including commercial banks, using their smartphones. With capabilities such as processing credit card payments and facilitating merchant transactions, this initiative is set to significantly enhance financial inclusion for both small businesses and individuals (Barbados Today, 2024).

There is a growing demand for digital merchant solutions, including for small businesses. Many retailers and businesses on the island now accept card payments through traditional or wireless point-of-sale (POS) terminals. Various commercial banks offer service packages for merchants to facilitate electronic payments, which typically include POS terminals, payment processing and after-sales support to streamline business transactions and reconciliations through digital solutions. While many of these offerings focus on traditional merchant services, such as wired POS terminals, several banks also provide mobile POS devices that can connect wirelessly via mobile hotspots. However, the pricing and onboarding requirements can be prohibitive for small businesses, partly due to the difficulties in providing financial reports and other documentation needed for Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance. In light of these challenges, financial institutions and other stakeholders interviewed for this study highlighted a growing demand for simpler merchant solutions for non-traditional payment acceptance, including tap-2-phone solutions, QR codes and virtual POS that enable online card payments. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly using P2P transfer services through personal bank accounts as a convenient solution for business transactions. For instance, the CIBC Caribbean International Bank's 1stPay service enables local money transfers from a mobile device using the payee's mobile number, email address or a unique QR Code, offering a convenient way for merchants to receive payments for goods and services. In response to these trends, banks interviewed for this study indicated efforts to expand their merchant service offerings to include customised solutions for micro and small businesses, which may entail introducing a risk-based onboarding approach to tailor solutions for different merchant categories. Additionally, some banks are exploring partnerships with external providers that offer turnkey solutions for merchant payment services. The emergence of non-traditional financial service providers has led to new merchant payment solutions via digital wallets that provide an alternative to traditional POS payments. For example, Payce Digital, in partnership with Trust Loans Barbados, has launched a merchant feature that enables micro and small businesses to accept payments from mobile wallet users by allowing

⁹ City of Bridgetown Credit Union (C.O.B.); Barbados Public Workers Cooperative Credit Union (BPWCCUL); Barbados Worker's Union Co-Operative Credit Union Limited (BWUCCU)

them to scan a QR code, and gain immediate access to the funds from these sales through multiple methods. Merchants can transfer funds from their mobile wallet to their bank account, withdraw cash over the counter at a Payce location, or use their Payce Digital credit card to access their sales proceeds. While the Payce Digital Card does not offer revolving credit, it can be used for both local and online purchases, allowing small businesses to acquire raw materials or cover other operating expenses. At the time of this study, Payce Digital had over 500 registered mobile partners, including collaborations with companies like the pickUP Barbados app, which provides on-demand taxi services.

The payments sector in Barbados is also evolving with the emergence of non-traditional financial service providers that offer a variety of digital solutions, including bill payments.

Several local and international companies, including mMoney, Payce Digital, and ZeeMoney, have entered the market with their own digital wallets. Table 2 provides an overview of the types of digital financial services available from these providers, highlighting features of digital wallets and options for bulk payments. Various companies have developed popular solutions to facilitate bill payments to third-party providers, offering an expanding range of options for everyday expenses such as utility bills and mobile top-ups. For instance, SurePay provides an online platform and a mobile app that enable payments to the island's utility and mobile network providers, insurance companies, educational institutions, and other businesses. This digital service complements SurePay's extensive network of payment outlets, where customers can also make traditional OTC cash payments. Both digital and OTC options provide a streamlined single-payment facility, allowing users to settle all their outstanding bills in a single transaction. Other digital wallet providers such as Payce Digital, as well as several banks and credit unions in Barbados, have integrated SurePay's technology as a backend solution for online bill payments. Some providers have introduced further innovative digital financial services, such as ZeeMoney, which specializes in the remittance-to-wallet sector, facilitating the direct transfer of remittances into bank accounts and digital wallets (see Table 2). Other digital wallet providers, such as Payce Digital, are exploring opportunities to enter the remittance market, contingent on the forthcoming guidelines regarding regulatory and compliance requirements under the 2021 National Payments System Bill (see Section 4.2 on the regulatory framework).

Table 2: Financial services offered by non-traditional financial service providers

| | Island Pay* | mMoney | Payce Digital | SurePay | ZeeMoney |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Digital wallet | x | x | x | - | x |
| Mobile app | - | - | - | x | - |
| Physical locations for cash-in and cash options/OCT payments | 5 self-service kiosks | 6 merchants + head office | 2 locations | 40 payment location island-wide | 4 branches island-wide |

| DIGITAL WALLET FEATURES | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| P2P payments | x | x | x | - | x |
| Mobile phone top-ups | x | x | - | x | - |
| Bill payments | x | x | x | x | |
| Wallet-to-bank transfer | x | - | x | - | x |
| Mobile payments to merchants | x | x | x | - | - |
| Receipt of remittances | - | - | - | - | x |
| BULK PAYMENT OPTIONS | | | | | |
| Pre-paid (debit) card | ATM withdrawals; POS transactions; Online purchases | - | - | - | - |
| Digital token (via SMS code) | - | - | - | - | x |
| Bulk payment to digital wallet | x | x (pending automation) | - | - | x |

Source: Key Informant Interviews; desktop review.

* In July 2023, Island Pay Barbados became part of mMoney. The Island Pay digital wallet was officially discontinued as of September 2024.

Despite the emergence of digital wallet solutions, key challenges persist for providers and users, hindering their broader adoption. These challenges are outlined below:

- While several digital wallet solutions are available in Barbados, they currently operate as closed-loop systems, limiting users to making payments within a restricted network of registered merchants and service providers, as well as conducting P2P transfers among other users of the same wallet. These wallets are not interoperable, which means that users of different wallets are unable to send or receive funds across various wallet services. However, digital wallet providers interviewed for this study expressed strong interest in collaborating and integrating with other wallet services in the future. At the time of this study, international open-loop wallet solutions such as Google Wallet and Apple Pay had not yet been introduced in Barbados or most of the English-speaking Caribbean (Apple, 2024; Google, 2024). Such open-loop or multi-purpose wallets could offer a more flexible and convenient payment option, allowing for transactions across a wider range of merchants and locations.
- The limited acceptance of digital wallet payments by merchants poses a significant challenge to the broader adoption of digital wallets in Barbados. Digital wallet payments are not yet widely

accepted, limiting users' ability to transact flexibly across the island. This issue adds to the existing challenge of lacking interoperability among the different wallets. The CBB's 2022 Digital Financial Literacy Survey revealed that just 10% of respondents used their mobile phones for in-store payments frequently over the past 12 months. The limited acceptance of digital wallet payments by merchants affects demand and uptake among customers, a concern that was also raised in focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries (see section 5.4).

- Integration of digital wallet solutions with commercial banks poses a challenge for providers. Several wallet providers highlighted challenges in setting up corporate bank accounts and enabling wallet-to-bank or bank-to-wallet transfers, which are crucial for broader adoption. Collaboration with banks is essential for the full integration of digital wallets into the financial ecosystem. Despite these barriers, Island Pay has successfully integrated with the local ACH, allowing wallet users to transfer funds to their bank accounts, and with VISA, enabling users to load money via debit cards. Payce Digital emphasized the need for regulatory recognition and a level playing field with traditional financial institutions. Stronger partnerships between wallets and banks are seen as critical to the success of digital payment strategies, fostering both competition and collaboration in the broader ecosystem.
- Wallet providers on the island provide limited options for physical cash deposits and withdrawals. At the time of this research, OTC cash withdrawals and deposits are limited to the provider's office and a small number of agents or physical self-service kiosks. As such, there is significant potential for expanding the number of withdrawal and deposit locations for improved geographic coverage across the island to enhance convenience and flexibility for wallet users.

4.2. Regulatory and Legal Framework for Digital Payments

The growth of digital payments in Barbados is supported by regulatory efforts to foster a digital economy and shift from paper-based to electronic transactions. The main financial regulators are the Central Bank of Barbados (CBB), the Financial Services Commission (FSC), and the Fair Trading Commission (FTC). The CBB supervises commercial banks, merchant banks, finance companies, and mortgage institutions, ensuring financial stability and crisis management by integrating monetary policy with prudential supervision. The FSC regulates non-bank financial institutions, such as credit unions and insurance companies, often aligning with CBB guidelines but occasionally overlapping in regulatory responsibilities. Established in 2001, the FTC oversees service providers and business conduct, focusing on consumer protection and competition. The FTC ensures businesses adhere to legal standards and educates both businesses and consumers about their rights, aiming to protect consumers from unfair practices and promote transparency and fairness in the financial sector.

Recognizing the evolving financial services landscape, the Government of Barbados has been working to establish a new legal framework for the sector. The Barbados National Payment

System Act (NPSA), enacted in February 2021, aims to promote equitable market access, foster innovation, and enhance consumer protection. It grants the CBB authority to regulate payment system participants and encourage wider adoption of electronic payments. The legislation establishes clear licensing criteria for payment service providers, addressing security and operational risks. Existing institutions do not need to re-license, but new entrants must meet specific criteria, with a transition period distinguishing traditional and non-traditional players.

The lack of a specific regulatory framework for non-traditional financial service providers has left many operating in a legislative "grey area." In response to the rise of new financial players offering innovative digital products, the CBB and FSC introduced a Regulatory Sandbox in 2018. This initiative created a controlled environment for testing novel financial services while managing risks to consumers and the financial system. The Sandbox allowed entities outside existing regulations to trial their products in a semi-regulatory space, aiming to identify regulatory gaps, particularly for businesses dealing with securitized tokens and crypto assets. It helped the CBB and FSC determine whether these services required licensing or new regulations. In July 2019, Bitt Digital Inc. became the first—and remains the only—company to successfully exit the Sandbox. This enabled Bitt to test its blockchain-based FinTech products, ultimately positioning it for regulation under the National Payments System Act (NPSA), which was being developed at the time.

The NPSA aims to address market rigidities by eliminating barriers for new entrants and tackling challenges faced by non-traditional financial service providers, such as difficulties in opening bank accounts, collaborating with stakeholders, and accessing clearing and settlement infrastructure. Financial service providers interviewed for this study expressed strong support for the NPSA, particularly non-traditional providers who welcome the opportunity to obtain a license under the new legislation. These companies view the NPSA as a means to formalize their regulatory status, improve clarity, and promote interoperability. They also believe the legislation will reduce operational challenges, accelerate market expansion, and facilitate the integration of the informal sector into the digital economy.

The CBB has focused on modernizing the country's payments infrastructure to improve settlement times and reduce digital transaction costs, which are key drivers for adopting electronic payments. The NPSA enabled the expansion of the Automated Clearing House (ACH) to include credit unions, facilitating cheque clearing, direct payments, and daily inter-bank settlements. In February 2023, the ACH was upgraded to support real-time payments (RTP) for time-sensitive transactions, including outside regular hours. Following the RTP launch, there was a noticeable shift towards this option. All local banks and two major credit unions joined the ACH/RTP system, with others planning to follow. To ease the transition from paper-based to electronic payments, the CBB introduced remote cheque capture, allowing digital representation of cheques for faster clearing and fund access. In 2023, electronic funds transfers (EFTs) accounted for 54.7% of all ACH transactions, marking a significant shift from 2015, when cheques accounted for nearly 90%. In 2024, the Barbados

Payments System Modernisation Project was launched, supported by the World Bank, to further enhance the local payment system, focusing on legal, regulatory, and digital financial literacy improvements. In January 2024, the CBB, under its NPSA oversight authority, mandated that commercial banks cannot charge fees for electronic transactions, including ACH and RTP payments (CBB, 2024e). This decision followed a 2021 initiative to standardize the interchange rate for Visa/Mastercard debit card transactions (CBB, 2021a), resulting in the elimination of fees for point-of-sale (POS) transactions in Barbados (CBB, 2024f).

The CBB has enhanced consumer protection and regulatory oversight, particularly in relation to digital payments. The 2021 NPSA outlines general principles for market conduct and security but requires further regulations and guidelines for full implementation. The legislation establishes a National Payments Council, consisting of representatives from financial regulators, banks, credit unions, and consumers, to advise the CBB on regulatory matters, system interoperability, and operational standards. This mechanism aims to enhance market visibility, coordination, and innovation while protecting consumers (Barbados Today, 2021). In July 2024, the CBB introduced the Market Conduct Guideline, which standardizes operations for commercial banks and deposit-taking finance companies. It covers fees, account management, complaint handling, and access for vulnerable groups. The guideline sets procedures for introducing or raising fees, outlines services exempt from fees, and mandates transparency, requiring institutions to clearly display fee information on their websites and social media. It also requires accessible, free dispute resolution mechanisms (CBB, 2024c). Additionally, the FSC provides a complaints mechanism for non-bank financial services, and discussions are ongoing about creating a financial services Ombudsman.

As part of its push towards electronic payments, the Government of Barbados has invested in digital technologies to improve public service delivery. These platforms aim to enhance user experience and increase the efficiency of administrative processes. Launched in 2020, the EZPay+ payment platform enables citizens to access a range of government services, including property tax payments, National Insurance and Social Security Service (NISS) contributions, and driver's licence renewals. Additionally, the Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Smart Technology (MIST) has partnered with Payce Digital to enhance payment capabilities through the Payce Digital Mobile App, which provides another convenient channel for accessing the EZPay+ platform.

4.3. Exploring Digital Solutions for Social Assistance Payments

The emergence of innovative digital payment solutions presents opportunities to enhance Government-to-Person (G2P) payments, particularly in the delivery of social assistance. These options include solutions offered by non-traditional financial services providers. Various technologies can facilitate bulk payments to social assistance recipients while also enabling the rapid scale-up of support for households impacted by disasters and other emergencies.

This study identified several tools that could facilitate payments to social assistance recipients:

- **Digital wallet transfers and SMS payment codes.** The provider ZeeMoney offers a bulk payment feature for institutional clients, allowing funds to be loaded onto an institutional wallet and disbursed to a selected list of users. Recipients with a digital wallet account can receive funds directly in their wallets. Alternatively, users may receive a digital token via SMS, which they can subsequently cash out at any ZeeMoney branch. This bulk payment feature also includes dashboard access for multiple stages of payment approval, based on specified user profiles. The local digital wallet provider mMoney is also equipped to facilitate bulk payments for wallet users and aims to automate this feature and integrate it into its digital wallet.
- **Pre-paid cards.** The provider Island Pay offers a pre-paid gift card solution through which cards of a fixed amount can be provided in bulk to an institution, including the option to pre-position cards for future activation and disbursement in an emergency. These cards, which are not personalised and do not use the chip and pin technology, can be used for POS transactions or online payments. One key advantage of reloadable cards is that they can be prepositioned for disaster response, allowing for quick reloading and distribution. This feature can enable rapid scale-ups of assistance to individuals, regardless of whether they have bank accounts. Alternatively, standard reloadable cards can be provided that can be used for ATM withdrawals as well. The Government of the Bahamas previously partnered with Island Pay to provide social assistance payments via prepaid cards and mobile wallets during the COVID-19 response. The Government of Barbados has already used prepaid cards for social assistance payments as part of the Adopt-A-Family Programme (see section 3). Additionally, the MPEA, has been pursuing the procurement of pre-paid cards as an alternative to cheque-based grants (see section 3). Island Pay and the Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology (MIST) in Barbados have also explored the option of integrating a payment solution with the new Trident identification card launched in 2022 to facilitate government payments to beneficiaries through Island Pay's network of self-service kiosks. However, at the time of this study, the government had not completed the chip and pin process on the ID cards.
- **E-vouchers.** The bill payment provider SurePay currently offers paper vouchers and is exploring the rollout of an e-voucher system for electronic issuance. These e-vouchers could be used for payments through SurePay's online channels or at its physical outlets. The upcoming electronic voucher system aims to provide fully customizable vouchers, which could be personalised for specific users or limited to specific billers. In the future, this feature could facilitate payments for social assistance recipients, making it easier for them to manage their utility bills. The personalised vouchers could also reduce misuse and improve the targeting of financial assistance programmes, positioning SurePay as a potential partner on social protection initiatives. In Guyana, the SurePay franchise already enables payouts of certain government benefits, such as the old age pension, via its outlets (Department of Public Information, 2021). While SurePay is exploring similar options

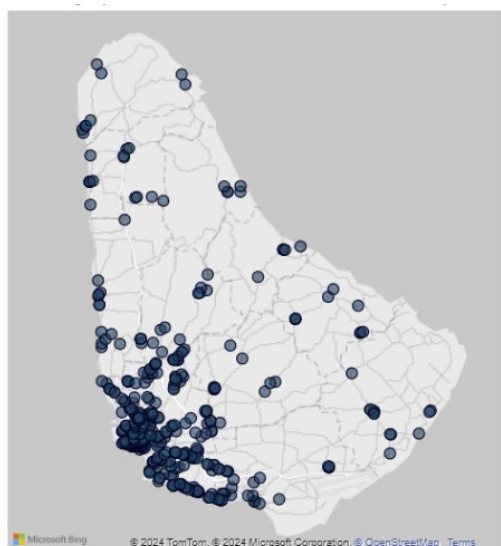
in Barbados, these services would entail new regulatory and compliance requirements given that SurePay it is not a deposit-taking institution.

The examples presented above highlight the potential for public-private partnerships to harness innovative payment solutions for social assistance programmes and other G2P payments in Barbados. By actively collaborating with service providers, the government can accelerate and customize the development of new financial products to minimize administrative burdens and enhance user experience for beneficiaries, while also facilitating rapid scale-ups of assistance to a large number of individuals during emergencies.

4.4. Findings from Digital Readiness Survey of Retailers

Retailers and vendors across Barbados play an important role in facilitating wider adoption of digital financial services. By carrying out day-to-day transactions through a range of payment options, retailers can create a more accessible environment for a range of digital financial services and contribute positively to the user experience. Identifying challenges and opportunities among vendors is critical to unlock the potential of digital payments in Barbados.

Figure 2: Distribution of businesses



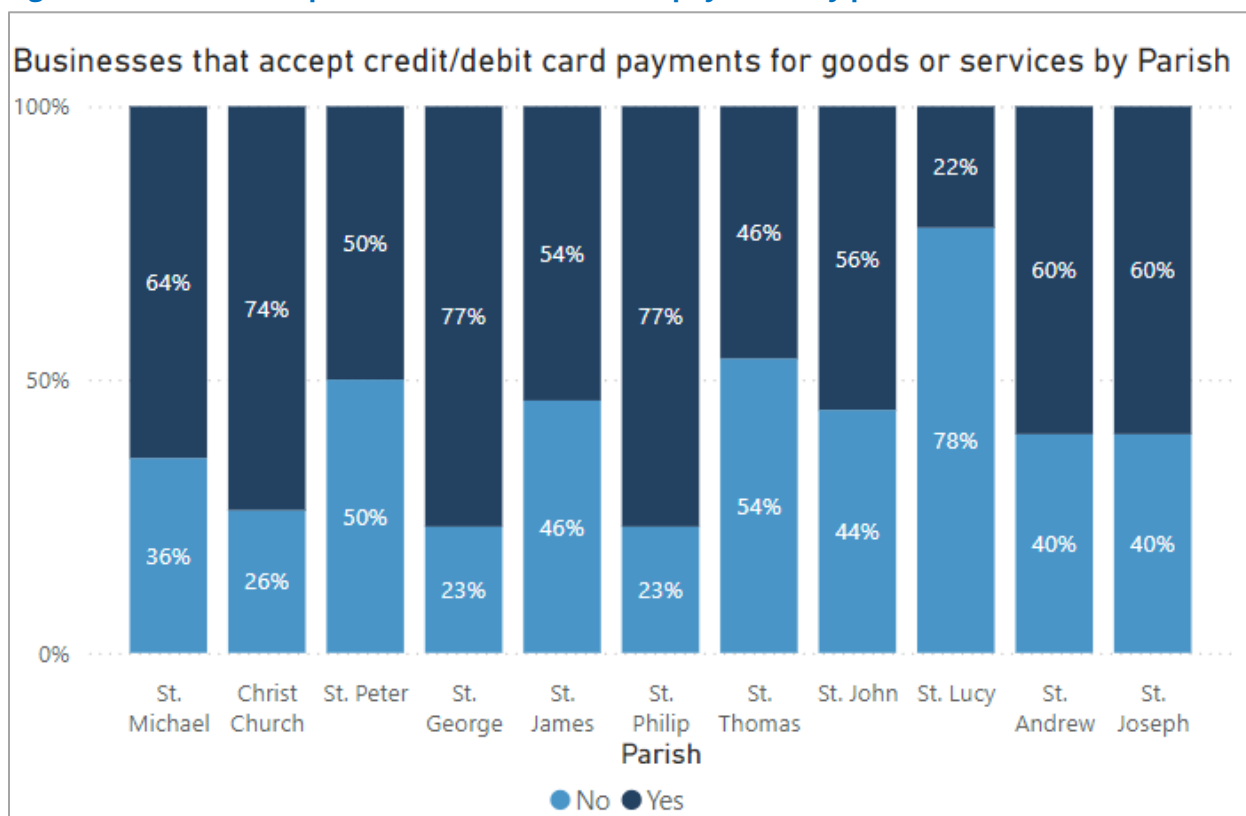
This section presents the findings from an island-wide survey which focused on the capacities and perceptions of retailers and businesses to facilitate digital financial services by examining i) the prevalence of non-cash payment facilities (mobile money, card payments), ii) the supporting infrastructure for digital payments, iii) interest in providing cash payout services to social assistance beneficiaries and iv) enabling environments for digital payment systems. Implemented in June 2024, the survey collected data among a sample of micro, small and medium sized retailers and other businesses across the island. The survey collected data from 452 businesses across all parishes (see Figure 2).

To get a comprehensive representation of businesses in Barbados, a business registry dataset compiled by the Barbados Statistical Service was used as a sampling frame to determine the spatial distribution by parish. A mixed sampling approach was used for the survey. Cluster sampling was used for the geographical targeting with each parish representing a cluster. Within each cluster, convenience sampling was used to locate businesses for participation. The economic centre of Bridgetown and surroundings had the highest number of businesses surveyed whereas the more rural parishes had fewer surveys representative of the profile of the parishes. Most businesses surveyed were micro-businesses and small businesses which accounted

for 93% of businesses. The presence of micro-businesses was most pronounced in the rural parishes whereas large businesses were predominantly found in the more commercial parishes of St. Michael, Christ Church, and St. James (90%). Of all survey respondents, 81% were owners or General Managers and 19% were employees in a role able to respond on behalf of the business. The main findings from the survey are presented below:

- Most businesses surveyed have the internet infrastructure in place to support digital payment systems.** Internet connectivity was found to be present in most businesses (90%). It is of note that 11% of businesses with no internet connection stated that they were in the process of installing the service implying that this figure will potentially increase in the future. The businesses that did not have connectivity stated that lack of interest or no perceived need for the service (41%) was the main reason for not having an internet connection. Businesses also had a high prevalence of devices that can connect to the internet (96%), with the most common device being smartphones (43%), computers (31%) and tablets (20%). The use of bank accounts by businesses for business operations was found to be common with 86% of businesses using a bank account for financial services. The banks that were most used were i) Royal Bank of Canada (32%), ii) Republic Bank Limited (24%) and CIBC First Caribbean International Bank Limited (22%). The businesses that did not use bank accounts stated there was no need for a bank account (58%), and that the cost of the service being too high (37%) as the main reasons for not having a bank account.
- Credit and debit card payments are relatively widely accepted, with some differences across parishes.** Most businesses accepted credit card/ debit card payments for goods and services (64%). St. Lucy (22%) and St. Thomas (54%) were the only two parishes that had less than half of respondents accepting credit card/ debit card payments (see Figure 3). The most used card machines used for payments were Royal Bank of Canada (32%), Republic Bank Limited (24%) and CIBC Caribbean International Bank (22%). Nearly a quarter of respondents estimated that over half of their monthly payments were received as credit and debit card payments. Only 29% of respondents estimated that credit and debit card payments accounted for less than a quarter of their monthly payments. There is a prevalence of businesses (98%) that accept credit/debit card payments stated that there was a monthly cost to facilitate these payments with 40% citing a cost of BBD101 - 500 and 29% citing a cost of over BBD500. This cost was stated as transaction fees (47%) and device fee (38%). Only 8% stated that there was no cost for facilitating this service. Further to the cost of offering the service, only a small number of businesses (6%) stated that there was a cost to customers who used credit card and debit cards to make payments. Of the businesses who did not facilitate credit and debit card payments, 30% stated this was because they were not familiar with the technology, 14% stated that there was no demand among clients. 17% of businesses stated other reasons such as i) the intention to set up systems either in the application stage or the planning stage and ii) not perceiving a need for credit card and debit card payments in the business.

Figure 3: Business acceptance of credit/debit card payments by parish

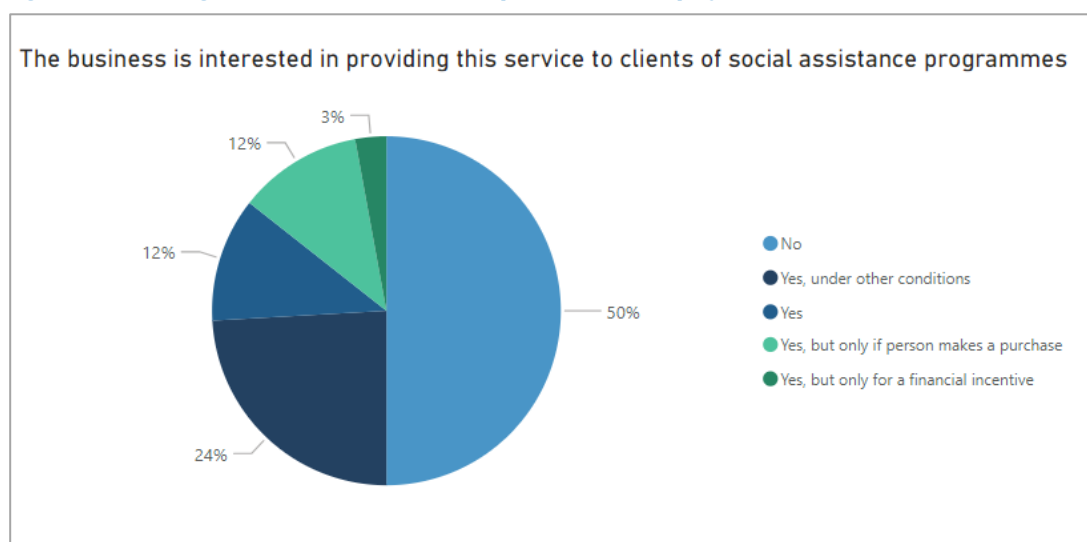


- Nearly a third of surveyed businesses (29%) offer e-commerce or online sales options.** These services were offered through an e-commerce platform or website managed by the business (52%) or sales via social media accounts using online money transfers (48%). The main reasons given for not offering e-commerce services were that they did not see the benefit to the business (27%) and that the business did not have the human capacity (staff) to support the service.
- The use of mobile wallets as a means of payment is uncommon, with only 17% of surveyed businesses using this service.** The businesses who accept mobile wallet payments the majority (35%) were uncertain of the service provider used, 32% used First Pay, and 25% used Apple Pay. Most businesses (47%) were unable to estimate the percentage of monthly payments received through mobile money. Of those able to estimate the percentage of monthly payments received through mobile money 39% estimated it be below 10%. Most businesses (92%) who facilitated mobile wallet payments stated that there were no monthly costs to this service. Only 3% of businesses with mobile wallet payment services stated that there was a cost to customers using the service, 51% stated that there was no cost and 47% were uncertain whether there was a cost. The businesses who did not facilitate mobile wallet payment services stated that there was no demand from customers, with 80% stating that customers do not request the service. The parishes with the highest perceived demand for mobile wallet payments were St. James (42%) and

St. Thomas (40%). There was a very low percentage (8%) of businesses who facilitated cash-in/cash-out for mobile wallet providers.

- **Aside from payment options, mobile top-ups are the most common financial service offered, provided by 25% of surveyed businesses.** The number of businesses offering other services, such as gift cards/vouchers, loyalty/cashback cards, and hire purchase options, was not significant. The survey aimed to assess the types of financial services and transactions businesses provide in order to identify transferable skills that could support third-party payouts for social assistance programmes.
- **Most respondents (70%) do not see any challenges for people accessing cash withdrawal services at the community level.** Among the remaining participants, the main issues identified were the lack of ATMs (52%) and the absence of bank or credit union branches in the community (26%).
- **There is limited interest among surveyed businesses in providing cash payout services for social assistance beneficiaries.** A small percentage of businesses (12%) are interested in providing cash-out services for social protection programmes unconditionally. An additional 15% would consider offering the service if beneficiaries made a purchase, and 3% would do so if there was a financial incentive (see Figure 4). Qualitative responses indicated that timely and regular repayment of disbursed funds was another key condition. The maximum amount businesses were willing to disburse monthly ranged from BBD 20 to 10,000, with the most common amounts being BBD 500 (20% of interested businesses) and BBD 1,000 (19%). Interest in providing cash-out services was highest in the parishes of St. Thomas, St. James, St. Lucy, St. Peter, St. Philip, and St. Andrew, where over half of businesses expressed interest.

Figure 4: Willingness of businesses to provide cash payout services for social assistance



- **Limited cash flow and a lack of trust in the government's ability to repay disbursed funds are the main concerns about providing cash-out services for social assistance.** Half of all businesses surveyed stated they would not be interested in providing cash-out services as part of social protection programmes. Among these businesses, the main concerns for providing this service was limited or insufficient cash flow (24%), and distrust in the governments' ability to repay disbursed funds (13%). Further to this, the quantitative component of the question detailed that a major concern was the timeliness of reimbursement after disbursement of funds. When asked what conditions would need to be fulfilled for the business to begin accepting payments through mobile wallets the most responses were demand from customers (44%), training and sensitization (26%).

5. Examining Digital Financial Inclusion in Barbados

Barbados has a relatively low proportion of unbanked individuals. A 2020 financial inclusion report, citing the 2016-2017 Barbados Survey of Living Conditions, found that nearly 100% of respondents had either a savings or checking account, indicating widespread access to basic banking services (Mooney & Giles Álvarez, 2020). However, significant barriers to financial inclusion persist, particularly in relation to access to and use of digital services.

This section examines these barriers, focusing on the challenges faced by low-income and other vulnerable groups in accessing financial services. It also highlights key insights from focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries.

5.1. Barriers to Digital Financial Inclusion

Based on key informant interviews and desktop research, this study identified several factors that hinder digital financial inclusion in Barbados. These challenges also offer valuable opportunities for policymakers, financial regulators, financial institutions, and other stakeholders to promote the adoption and use of digital financial services, particularly among vulnerable populations. The barriers and opportunities for addressing them are explored in detail below.

- **Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements and onboarding processes:**

Despite widespread access to formal financial services, KYC requirements remain a significant barrier to opening accounts with financial institutions. Key informants interviewed for this study indicated that commercial banks often impose stricter requirements than those mandated by regulatory standards. While credit unions are theoretically subject to the same Anti-Money Laundering (AML) requirements as commercial banks, some institutions apply additional measures, such as requesting two forms of identification. While these extra precautions may reflect a risk-averse approach by financial institutions, they have sparked calls for a more balanced strategy. Critics argue that the overly cautious stance may be driven by a 'herd mentality' rather than sound risk management practices.

Given these challenges, KYC requirements continue to hinder certain socioeconomic groups from accessing formal financial services, increasing the risk of financial exclusion. Interviewees pointed to the example of informally employed individuals who may struggle to meet certain KYC requirements, like proof of address, which could discourage them from opening accounts. Many interviewees advocated for a more flexible, tailored approach to onboarding clients. Some institutions, including

wallet providers, have already adopted a tiered system with varying requirements based on client activity levels.

The onboarding processes of financial institutions, coupled with stringent KYC requirements, are widely considered overly cumbersome and potentially discouraging for individuals seeking to open accounts. Social assistance beneficiaries who participated in focus group discussions for this study also highlighted onboarding processes and minimum opening balances as significant barriers to opening accounts (see section 5.2).

Despite the perceived burdens of the onboarding process, some financial institutions are embracing innovative solutions. For example, Sagicor Bank (Barbados) Limited has implemented digital onboarding, leveraging AI-powered facial biometrics authentication. This allows individuals to easily sign up for an account via their smartphones by uploading a picture of their ID and proof of address. Moreover, non-traditional financial service providers have introduced innovative products, such as digital wallets, which offer a streamlined online sign-up process and enable low-cost, near-instant payments. These providers typically adopt a tiered approach to onboarding clients, with varying requirements based on user activity levels or thresholds. Similar onboarding approaches could be adopted and replicated by other financial institutions to streamline the onboarding process and promote greater financial inclusion.

- **Fees for financial services:**

Under the NPSA framework, the Central Bank of Barbados (CBB) has engaged with financial institutions to address fee-related concerns and has intervened by limiting or eliminating fees for specific services (see section 4.3 for details on market conduct guidelines). As part of this broader reduce fees and enhance consumer protection, the CBB has mandated that all commercial banks offer at least one e-banking account with no maintenance fees (CBB, 2023c).

As of June 2024, three out of six commercial banks required a minimum opening balance of BBD 20 to BBD 100 for their "No Maintenance Fee Accounts" (CBB, 2024f). Concerns persist, however, regarding the minimum opening balances and maintenance fees for chequing accounts, which continue to affect vulnerable groups. As of July 2024, four out of six banks imposed a monthly fee on Minimum Chequing Accounts, ranging from BBD 5 to BBD 15 (CBB, 2024f). While commercial banks in Barbados do not charge fees for point-of-sale (POS) transactions, inter-bank ATM withdrawal fees are still applicable. However, the CBB has mandated that banks cannot charge clients for using their own ATMs, and fees for using ATMs from other banks are capped at BBD 3.00 per transaction (CBB, 2023c).

Despite existing barriers, significant progress has been made in strengthening consumer protection regarding fees for financial services. Under the 2024 Market Conduct Guidelines, banks and finance companies are now required to obtain a non-objection from the CBB at least 60 days before

implementing or increasing fees. Additionally, they must notify customers at least 30 days in advance of any changes to fees. This information must be clearly displayed on the institutions' websites and social media platforms, using plain language to ensure it is easily accessible and understandable for all customers.

- **Physical accessibility of financial services:**

Many commercial banks have reduced their physical branch networks, shifting their focus to expanding digital services and ATM networks. Simultaneously, several financial institutions have introduced fees for over-the-counter (OTC) transactions, such as in-branch withdrawals (CBB, 2024f). While these changes offer the potential for more convenient and accessible services, including digital onboarding, they also risk marginalizing individuals who are not familiar with digital technologies. For example, focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries revealed particular concerns among the elderly and people with disabilities regarding the use of digital financial tools and services (see section 5.2). Although Barbados has a relatively high density of ATMs, accessibility remains a challenge, particularly for people in remote areas. This concern was also raised by focus group participants in rural parishes, who cited transportation difficulties and limited cash availability in ATMs as key challenges (see section 5.2).

In response to these challenges, some financial institutions have implemented dedicated support desks for elderly clients. Additionally, First Citizens Bank has committed to maintaining a physical presence with a network of branches across the island in addition to developing smart ATMs that function as "mini branches" for improved geographic coverage across Barbados. Such initiatives could be scaled up and enhanced across financial service providers to ensure improved accessibility for the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

- **Access to loans and business financing:**

Access to affordable loans and business financing remains a challenge to financial inclusion. Concerns have been raised regarding the high-interest rates charged by money lending companies such as Courts Ready Cash and FastCash, which can reach up to 35-40%. This issue is particularly concerning for vulnerable socioeconomic groups who may turn to these services due to limited access to loans from traditional financial institutions. In this context, focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries revealed that some individuals rely on these services to cover urgent expenses (see section 5.2). The FTC has highlighted the need for greater transparency in loan agreements, as many consumers are unaware of the full costs due to complex contract language. Limited access to affordable loans can also present a significant barrier for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Credit unions in Barbados have played a crucial role in advancing financial inclusion, particularly for lower-income groups. They have made loan terms more accessible by transitioning from the previous add-on interest method to a reducing balance system, which offers more affordable credit options for

both mortgages and consumer loans (see section 4.1). Focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries also indicated strong interest in the services offered by credit unions (see section 5.2).

Furthermore, institutions such as the Barbados Agency for Micro Enterprise Development Ltd. (FundAccess) and the Small Business Association (SBA) have played key roles in supporting MSMEs through credit and business development services. The SBA offers advocacy, education, and skills training to ensure small businesses. FundAccess is a developmental financing agency which aims to provide access to credit, enterprise training, technical assistance and other professional development services for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Barbados. Clients are required to attend training sessions on key topics such as financial management, customer service, HR practices, and National Insurance benefits. Additionally, FundAccess has partnered with the Financial Literacy Bureau (FLB) to offer financial management workshops. Coordination with the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) also exists, allowing for referrals of young entrepreneurs seeking funding to start or grow their businesses.

Despite these efforts, there is significant potential to strengthen partnerships and develop referral mechanisms between social assistance programs and financing providers like FundAccess. Such collaborations could improve access to business financing for vulnerable groups and further promote their economic empowerment.

- **Merchant solutions for micro and small businesses:**

Key informants noted that larger financial institutions continue to focus on traditional point-of-sale (POS) systems, despite the growing demand for simpler alternatives such as tap-to-pay technology, QR codes, and virtual POS services. Smaller businesses, in particular, face challenges qualifying for traditional merchant services due to the extensive paperwork and regulatory requirements involved. As a result, many small businesses turn to services like the CIBC Caribbean International Bank's 1stPay, which, although not specifically designed as a merchant solution, provides a convenient way for merchants to receive payments for goods and services. This example highlights the potential for developing similar solutions specifically tailored to the needs of small businesses.

Some digital wallet providers have begun offering merchant solutions. For instance, Payce Digital has introduced a feature that enables registered merchants to accept payments from mobile wallet users and access funds through card solutions, wallet-to-bank transfers, or over-the-counter cashouts. However, challenges persist, including the limited reach of registered merchants and the lack of interoperability between wallet providers (see section 4.2.2). Expanding merchant networks and promoting the development of innovative solutions for merchants is critical to advancing financial inclusion for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

- **Digital and financial literacy:**

Financial literacy remains a concern in Barbados, especially among lower socioeconomic groups. Key informants in the financial literacy field highlighted gaps in fundamental concepts, such as reading balance sheets and understanding product pricing, which can lead to poor financial decisions—even among those with high levels of formal education. Social assistance beneficiaries also emphasized the need for clearer communication and more user-friendly processes in financial services (see section 5.2).

The CBB's 2022 digital financial literacy survey found that, while Barbados residents generally scored well on financial literacy, with an average score of 72 out of 100, there are areas for improvement. Key gaps include unfamiliarity with investment accounts (41% of respondents) and a lack of understanding of topics like inflation, compound interest, and the legal validity of digital contracts. For instance, 26% of respondents incorrectly believed that digital contracts require a physical signature to be valid.

The government's Financial Literacy Bureau (FLB), through its National Financial Literacy Programme (NFLP), is crucial in improving financial literacy, especially among youth. In 2024, the FLITE initiative was launched to teach financial education in primary and secondary schools, with plans to include special needs students and integrate financial literacy into summer programmes and camps (Barbados Today, 2024a, 2024b). Beyond the FLB, several organizations, including the CBB, are investing in financial education. The CBB's 2024 MoneySmart campaign focuses on saving, budgeting, and understanding inflation, addressing gaps identified in the 2022 survey. The campaign will engage the public through social media, blogs, and videos. The credit union sector, through the BCCULL and individual credit unions, also promotes financial literacy through educational programmes and outreach to schools. Despite these efforts, there remains significant potential to enhance financial literacy, particularly among vulnerable socioeconomic groups, the elderly, and in digital financial services.

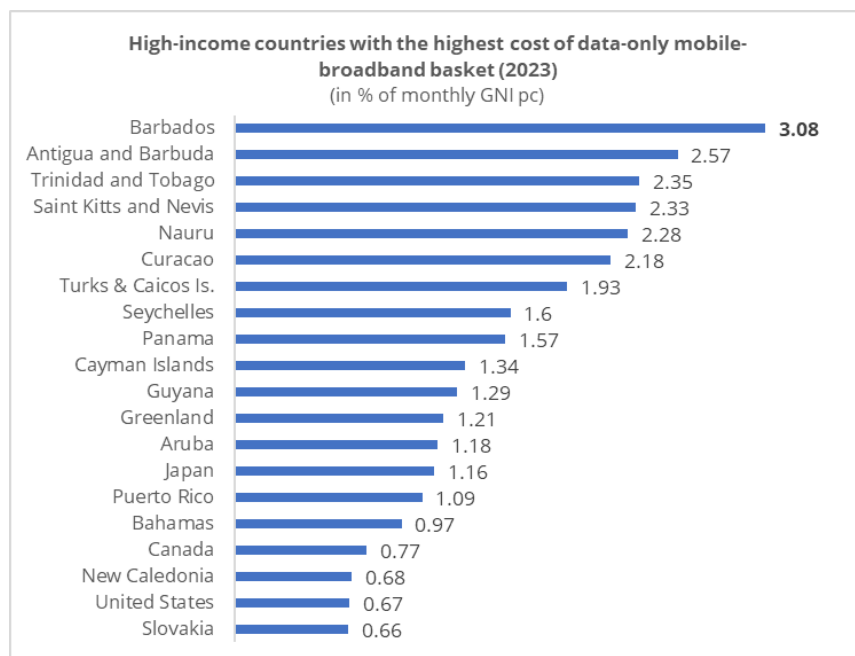
- **Digital Connectivity and Mobile Data Affordability:**

The transition to digital technologies has great potential to facilitate and expand access to financial services, by supporting convenient and efficient processes for onboarding, transacting and managing finances. However, the lack of mobile connectivity and affordability can pose a risk of marginalising certain socioeconomic groups.

Barbados has strong digital infrastructure, including high levels of internet connectivity and 4G LTE mobile network coverage (GSMA, 2024). According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), mobile cellular subscriptions exceeded 100 per 100 inhabitants in 2022 (World Bank, 2024d). Despite this overall context, the high cost of mobile data remains a barrier to digital inclusion, particularly for lower-income groups. In 2023, Barbados ranked first among high-income countries for

the cost of a standardized mobile broadband basket as a percentage of monthly Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (see Figure 5).¹⁰

Figure 5: High-income countries with the highest cost of a data-only mobile-broadband basket in % of monthly GNI per capita (2023).



Source: ITU (2023).

The affordability challenge is also reflected in the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index, which tracks key enablers of mobile internet adoption across 170 countries against four key enablers of mobile internet adoption, namely, infrastructure, affordability, consumer readiness, and content and services.¹¹ In 2023, Barbados ranked 95th out of 170 countries with a total score of 61.7, placing it among the 'transitioners', defined as countries with a score above 50 that perform well in two or more 'enablers' of the index. However, it ranked 127th in mobile data affordability, with a score of 37.5, a significant decline from 49.88 in 2014 (see Figure 6).

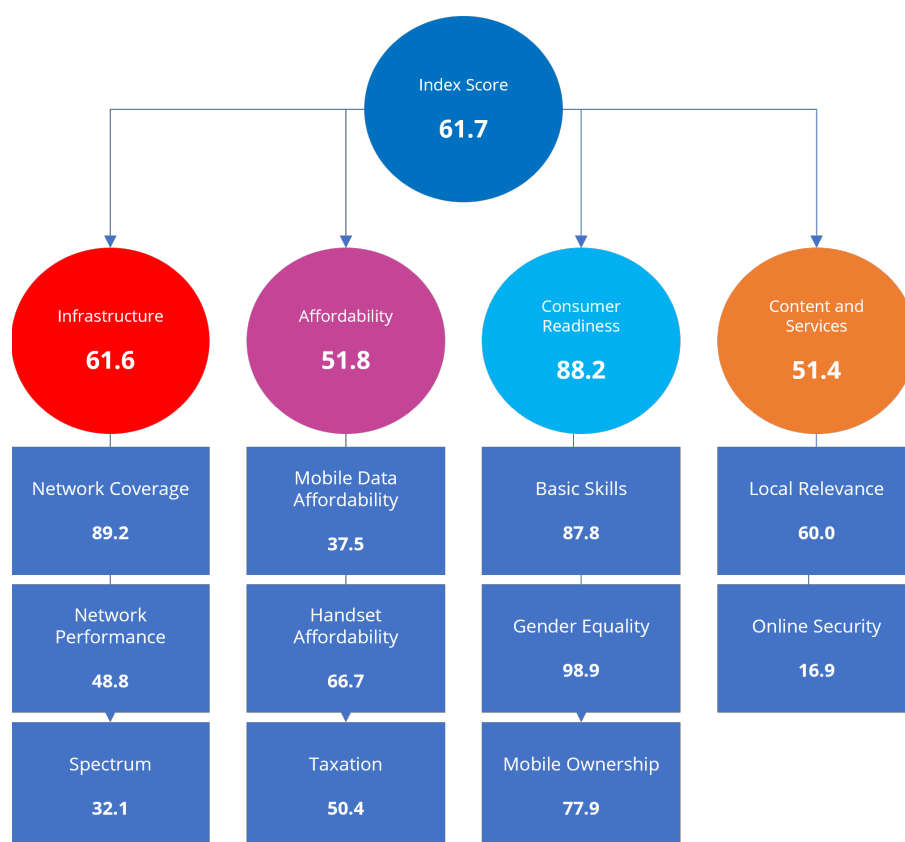
The FTC is responsible for ensuring fair competition and consumer protection, including in the telecommunications sector, following its gradual deregulation by the Telecommunications Act in 2001 (Brown, 2013). In 2005, the FTC introduced a price cap mechanism to ensure that customers have

¹⁰ Data-only mobile broadband 2GB, which refers to the cheapest plan providing at least 2GB of high-speed data (≥ 256 Kbit/s) from the operator with the largest market share in each economy. Prices presented as a percentage of countries' monthly GNI p.c. using GNI p.c. values from the World Bank for 2020 (as published in July 2021).

¹¹ The index is built up through 39 specific indicators feeding into 13 dimensions which are aggregated to give a score for each of the four equally weighted 'enablers'. Scores fall within a range of 0-100. A higher score is associated with a more enabling environment for delivering mobile internet connectivity. (Source: GSMA, 2024b)

access to telecommunications services ‘at just and reasonable rates’ while at the same creating an incentive for the provider to undertake cost-reducing innovation (FTC, 2010; Hope & Moore, 2007). However, the price cap mechanism only applies to Cable & Wireless (C&W), trading under the name FLOW, which was then and remains the country’s sole provider of landline services.

Figure 6: GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index score for Barbados (2023)



Note: Scores fall within a range of 0-100. A higher score is associated with a more enabling environment for delivering mobile internet connectivity. Source: GSMA (2024a).

Unlike fixed-line services, mobile and broadband services in Barbados are not subject to price controls, presenting further opportunities to improve the affordability of mobile connectivity from a regulatory standpoint. However, the FTC can investigate telecommunications providers based on customer complaints regarding unfair trade practices and contract terms (FTC, 2021). In 2020, Cabinet approved a proposal by the FTC and the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Smart Technology (MIST) to establish new quality of service standards for mobile and internet services and expand the FTC’s regulatory remit (FTC, 2021a). To support this, the FTC and MIST signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in regulatory duties and quality of service implementation (FTC, 2021). In 2023, the FTC introduced a Mobile Telecommunications Code to promote consumer-friendly business practices and improve compliance with consumer protection laws. While FLOW and Digicel

have signed the Code, it remains voluntary with no penalties for non-compliance, relying on public accountability for adherence.

Recognizing the challenges of internet affordability, the telecommunications provider FLOW partnered with the MPEA on the 'Jump Programme' which offers highly subsidized broadband services, equipment, and training to families on government assistance programmes, promoting digital inclusion in Barbados (see Box 1). There is considerable potential to expand such initiatives to improve mobile connectivity for vulnerable socioeconomic groups.

Box 1: Jump initiative for greater digital inclusion in Barbados

The Jump programme was launched by telecommunications provider FLOW to create a more inclusive digital society and help bridge the digital divide by providing subsidized internet connections, mobile devices and digital literacy training to families in need.

As part of the initiative, FLOW partnered with the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA) to provide 1000 low-income families on the government's One-Family Programme with access to high-speed WiFi (125 MBPS), free laptops and digital skills training. Funded with support from the government and private sector companies, the initiative aimed to connect some 5000 low-income families across the region by the end of 2023, partnering with various governments under similar social assistance programmes. Other Caribbean countries also benefitting under the initiative include The Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia.

5.2. Key Findings from Focus Groups with Social Assistance Beneficiaries

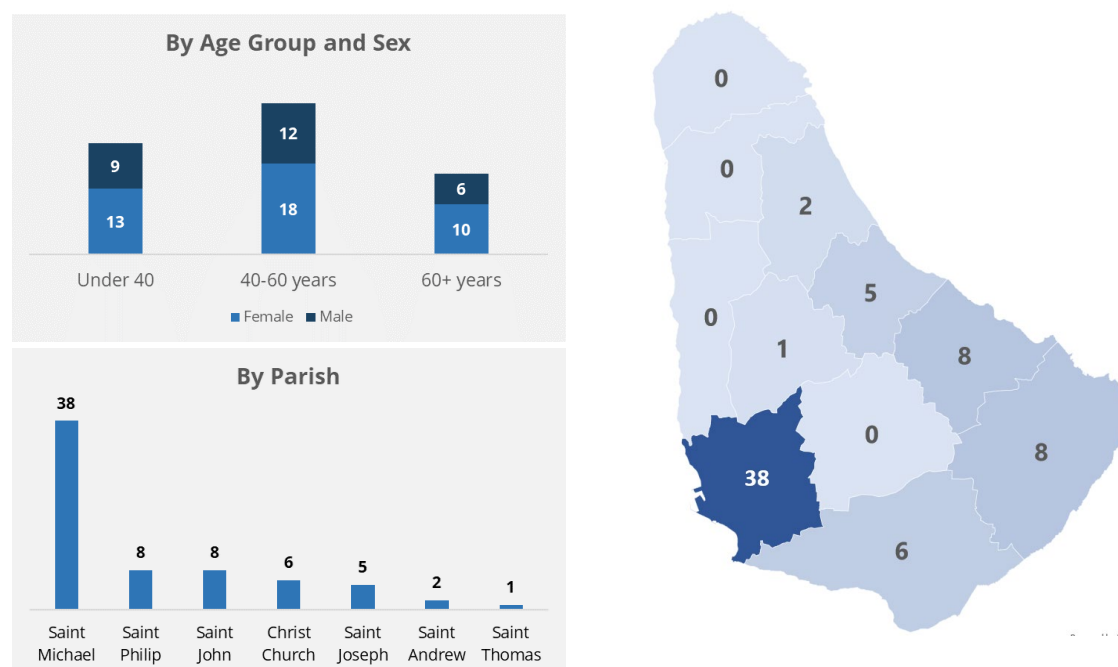
Understanding consumer behaviour and preferences regarding digital payment methods is essential for unlocking the full potential of these technologies, especially in the context of social protection. Vulnerable groups, including social assistance beneficiaries, may already be excluded from traditional financial systems and could face further marginalization with the introduction of new payment technologies. A user-focused analysis of their experiences can provide valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for increasing digital payment adoption, leading to more inclusive and accessible payment systems. This approach is particularly important when designing rapid cash assistance solutions for the most vulnerable populations during emergency response efforts.

This study aimed to analyse the needs, preferences, and constraints of social assistance beneficiaries in Barbados regarding financial services, to inform the design of effective social protection programs and payment solutions. By exploring the experiences of women, men, the elderly, and people with disabilities, the research sought to offer nuanced insights into their financial behaviours, attitudes, and concerns.

This section presents the findings from focus group discussions conducted with 68 social assistance beneficiaries from 16–19 January 2024. These focus groups centred on topics such as household

income sources and spending, the use of bank and credit union accounts, digital financial tools (including cards and e-wallets), savings and borrowing behaviours, and interest in financial education. Participants were also encouraged to share their experiences with social assistance payments and preferences for alternative payment options. Participants included clients from the MPEA’s Welfare Department, the One-Family Programme, and the Adopt-A-Family Programme (see section 3 for an overview on the programmes). Separate sessions were held for men, women, and mixed senior groups (60+ years) to explore commonalities and differences. Sessions were organized by parish clusters—rural (St. Andrew, St. John, St. Joseph), residential South (St. Philip, Christ Church), and urban/central (Bridgetown, Saint Michael)—to examine geographic variations (see Figure 7). A dedicated session was also held for Adopt-A-Family clients, who piloted ATM card distribution for social assistance. Of the 68 participants, 41 were female and 27 male (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Breakdown of focus group participants



Key findings from the focus group discussions are outlined below:

Household income and daily expenditures are largely cash-based.

"I ain't got no bank account. [Cash], that's my only source of funds." – Male, St. Joseph

"Cash cash cash. When you change the cheque, it's cash. I use my card to withdraw my funds from the ATM"
– Male, Christ Church

Household income is primarily received in cash, including public assistance through Welfare cheques, which are often cashed at post offices or used directly for in-store groceries. For many participants, social assistance is the main and sometimes the only reliable income stream. In addition, many participants rely on informal and unpredictable sources of income, such as small vending, financial support from family members, and earnings from odd jobs. Formal employment is less common, and for those who are self-employed, income can fluctuate significantly. Among those with formal employment, some are paid via direct deposit, but casual jobs and self-employed labor, typically paid in cash, are more prevalent.

As income is primarily received in cash, focus group participants rely heavily on cash transactions for daily expenses, including over-the-counter (OTC) bill payments. One participant remarked, "It is availability for me," highlighting that the availability of cash is the main reason for choosing cash-based transactions. Another participant shared her experience of receiving her salary via direct deposit and making online payments, describing it as "easy and instant." However, after losing her job, she had to revert to cash payments, which she found much less convenient.

While many participants find cash transactions inconvenient, some appreciate the convenience of paying bills in person at over-the-counter (OTC) services like SurePay. The proximity of branches and the ability to pay multiple utility bills in one location are seen as key advantages. However, participants face challenges such as long lines at SurePay locations or post offices, as well as transportation issues. Those living in remote parishes, such as Saint John or Saint Joseph, highlighted the added difficulties of having to walk or take the bus to redeem Welfare cheques and pay utility bills, often incurring transportation costs. One participant summed up this struggle: "When you want a bus, you don't see a bus," illustrating the logistical challenges, especially in rural areas.

KYC requirements and limited income restrict the use of bank accounts and financial services.

"The moment I get my money, it (is) gone, why put it on a bank account?" – Female, St. John

"I don't think it makes sense to have a bank account since I don't work. [...] If I had savings, maybe." – Female, St. Joseph

"There is not enough funds to keep the account active and move funds to the account. They make it more challenging" – Male, St. Michael

Managing household finances is primarily focused on paying utility bills, food, and child-related expenses. Utility and internet bills, Wi-Fi, and food are the highest budget priorities. Many participants make partial payments towards utility bills to ensure they can allocate enough funds for food and other essentials. Some have experienced service disconnections and now have payment plans with utility companies to settle arrears. Regularly paying these arrears is a priority for some to avoid disconnection, while others share the cost of utility bills within the household.

For most participants, bank accounts are seen as unnecessary due to limited income, particularly among those without formal employment. Those who have accounts typically opened them to receive salary payments, often selecting the bank recommended by their employer. One female participant explained, "Unless I get employment, I don't want a bank account. I don't think it's necessary or useful." Another echoed this, saying, "I don't think it makes sense to have a bank account since I don't work. If I had savings, maybe." Limited budgets and bank fees also make it difficult to maintain accounts, with some participants reporting their accounts were closed due to inactivity. As one male participant stated, "There's not enough funds to keep the account active, and they make it more challenging." Many also struggle to meet minimum opening balances.

While some participants have bank accounts, they often face challenges such as fees and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. Many find the process of opening accounts cumbersome, particularly those without formal employment. One unemployed male participant, who had never opened an account, reflected, "I always wanted to do it when I was working. Now I regret that I didn't." However, one participant shared a positive experience opening an account online with Sagicor Bank, which required only one ID and no minimum deposit or proof of address, calling the process "a breeze." Others, unaware of this option, expressed interest in online account opening and sought assistance.

Those with active bank accounts use them mainly for POS payments and ATM withdrawals with debit cards. Some also use them for savings and loan services. For many, having a bank account helps them manage spending and save more.

Despite widespread internet access and interest in digital financial services, their adoption remains limited.

Mobile phone ownership is nearly universal among focus group participants, with smartphones being the most common. Phones are primarily used for calls, WhatsApp, social media, and internet browsing. Most participants access the internet daily, and Wi-Fi access at home is a priority, especially for supporting children's school assignments. For many, internet access is as essential as water, electricity, and gas. Wi-Fi is more prevalent than mobile data, as the latter's high cost is unaffordable for most, limiting its use (see section 5.1). Some participants, unable to afford Wi-Fi or mobile data,

rely on neighbours' networks or public hotspots in restaurants and public spaces. Pre-paid and post-paid plans are uncommon due to affordability concerns, with participants topping up only when necessary, such as for important calls or emergencies.

Despite widespread smartphone and internet use, few participants engage in digital banking. This is largely due to cash-based household incomes and the lack of bank accounts for some (see previous point). Among those who use online banking, it is valued for its convenience in making payments from home and tracking expenses through automated reports in banking apps. One participant called it "the easiest way," while another appreciated the ability to avoid waiting in line for payments. Participants also value person-to-person (P2P) money transfer services like CIBC's 1stPay, which allows quick payments using just a mobile number. Some small business owners, such as a mobile barber, use P2P transfers to receive payments..

Debit cards are seen as convenient, but ATM fees and accessibility raise concerns.

"If I had money in an account, I would swipe (my card)." – Male, St. Philip

"I would prefer the account if I could. I would prefer using the card for POS. I don't want to stand in line in the noise. POS payments would be much better." – Female, St. John

Few participants use of debit cards, mainly because most household income is cash-based. The lack of bank accounts is another barrier to using debit cards, as several participants without a bank/credit union account expressed interest in using a card if they had an account. Debit cards are mainly used by those who are formally employed and receive their salary via direct deposit into their bank account. These participants highlighted the convenience of using their debit card for making cash withdrawals and POS purchases. Many appreciate the convenience of POS transactions, especially when walking without cash.

Despite the perceived convenience of debit cards, some participants also expressed concerns about potential fees associated with POS payments: *"There's a lot of hidden charges, if you tap (your card). If they are not using the same bank for the POS machine. I realise there is a fee"* – said one participant. [It is important to highlight that POS transactions in Barbados do not incur fees (see section 4.4). However, findings from the focus group indicate a limited awareness of fees associated with digital transactions. This issue underscores the need for enhanced public sensitisation, as concerns about potential fees could deter the adoption of certain digital financial services.

Despite the general interest in cards, participants also raised concerns about inter-bank fees related to ATM withdrawals using debit cards. Residents of Saint John highlighted transportation challenges in accessing ATMs, as they need to travel to neighbouring parishes—Saint George, Saint Joseph, and Saint Philip— where cash is frequently depleted.

Despite general interest in digital solutions for social assistance, concerns persist among the elderly, people with disabilities, and the unbanked.

"I feel safer with the direct deposit. There is more transparency. It's easier to track what happens, if [there is] a mistake with the transfer [...] I think it is safer in terms of not your cheque being missing or someone take it out of your mailbox." – Male, Christ Church

"The online banking is bare problems. You can't remember the questions to log in. I get fed up with it." – Female, St. Joseph

Participants raised several concerns about receiving social assistance via paper cheques. Assistance is distributed in the form of two monthly welfare cheques, typically cashed at post offices or used for groceries. Many recipients split the first cheque to pay utility bills and buy food while waiting for the second cheque's validity. Some rely on an informal system provided by community vendors to redeem both cheques immediately, though this often incurs high fees unless a purchase is made. A key concern is the stigma attached to redeeming welfare cheques, prompting many to prefer direct deposits for greater anonymity. Many participants also expressed interest in receiving assistance through a card solution for cash withdrawals and POS payments, viewing these options as more confidential and convenient. Most participants acknowledged that digital payments are the future. As one female participant said, "Even the pensioners have already gone digital. Let's face it, the world is not waiting on us, it's moving along. We have to catch up with it."

Despite the perceived benefits of electronic transfers, several participants emphasized the need for the government to help 'unbanked' clients open accounts to enable the transition to direct deposits for social assistance grants. Older individuals and those with disabilities raised concerns about the accessibility and user-friendliness of digital tools. While some participants are generally reluctant to use digital tools, many expressed a willingness to learn how to use digital tools such as budgeting apps and digital wallets.

Beneficiaries of the Adopt-A-Family Programme, who received financial assistance through prepaid cards, found them convenient for discreet ATM withdrawals. However, some were frustrated by the card's limited functionality, which only allowed ATM withdrawals after POS payments were discontinued. Despite overall satisfaction with the card and the availability of technical support, participants expressed a desire for additional functionalities, such as the ability to make online purchases and receive balance notifications. Additionally, the restriction of ATM withdrawals to a specific bank created transportation challenges for some participants.

Awareness and usage of digital wallets are limited, with concerns centred on convenience, retailer adoption and mobile connectivity.

"As long as (the digital wallet) app is not widely available, there is no point [...]. You need to be able to use it everywhere" – Male, St. Philip

"I don't like the online thing because of hackers - they could hack the QR code!" – Male, St. Michael

Participants generally lack familiarity with digital wallets and the available providers on the island. While none currently use digital wallets, some recognize their potential benefits, including the convenience for purchases and P2P transfers, as well as the added security of not carrying physical cash. Additionally, digital wallets are seen as a way to reduce transaction costs by minimizing reliance on physical withdrawals.

Several participants mentioned they would consider using digital wallets if they were widely accepted by retailers and offered flexibility for various purchases and payments. As one male participant put it, "If it's not widely available, there's no point. You need to be able to use it everywhere." Another female participant noted, "It would need to be as convenient as my bank account." Some participants also suggested that having a job would be necessary to begin using a digital wallet, with the perception that digital wallets are primarily designed for groups such as businesspeople. A major concern was the need for internet connectivity, as many participants do not use mobile data. One male participant explained, "We have to buy data all the time, and it's getting more expensive," highlighting the financial burden.

Despite these concerns, many participants expressed an interest in learning how to use digital wallets. One participant shared, "It's interesting. As long as I can manage the digital wallet app, I would like to try it. You can learn a lot about these things." Some indicated they would feel more comfortable transitioning to digital wallets gradually, similar to how they adapted to using debit cards. Others mentioned they would rely on their children for guidance in navigating these digital tools.

Formal savings and borrowing are limited, but there is strong interest in learning about income generation and financial investments.

"What can you save? Nothing. I'm at zero. Everything goes to one hand and goes to the next. I'm not trying to be a millionaire. I am just trying to live comfortably." – Male, Christ Church

"I am trying to clear up all the debts that I have. I have not started back my savings because I want to pay off my debt" – Male, St. Philip

Most participants struggle to save due to limited income, with all earnings directed toward basic needs. While some attempt to set aside small amounts for emergencies, this often means keeping

money at home, which raises security concerns. One participant noted, "I keep some money at home, but I wouldn't call it savings." Many expressed a desire to save in a credit union or bank if their financial situation improved, with a few already saving small amounts in credit unions to benefit from dividends. In emergencies, most participants rely on family or friends for support or dip into their cash savings. However, many lack a financial safety net.

Formal borrowing is uncommon due to concerns about repayment. One participant explained, "You don't want to explain your business to people or how you'll repay it." Others echoed this sentiment, saying, "I only borrow if I can pay it back." Many also avoid group loan systems, known as "meeting turns," due to limited resources and the risk of not being able to repay. While some have taken formal loans from financial institutions, mainly for health or education-related expenses, others turn to money-lending companies. However, informal employment often prevents access to these loans. One participant shared, "I don't go to these places because they need a payslip, and I don't get one where I work." Many also feel that financial institutions are unfair, with one participant remarking, "They don't treat everyone the same."

Given these challenges, most participants expressed a strong desire to increase their income. Many are focused on finding ways to earn more, with some interested in job opportunities or courses that include job attachments. Earning enough income is seen as essential for accessing financial services, including savings products. Participants also showed interest in learning about building savings through passive income and investments, though few mentioned cryptocurrency or trading. Face-to-face group or one-on-one sessions are the preferred formats to learn about these topics.

There is significant interest in the services offered by credit unions.

"The credit union gets a little dividend. But the bank does not give you anything. The only thing it gives you is [...] fees. The credit union gives you a little something. There is an incentive on the credit union." – Male, St. Joseph

Many participants expressed a preference for credit unions over banks, citing their competitive services. One male participant noted, "The NISS told me they wanted to do direct deposit, so I chose the credit union. I think the credit union is safer. They offer better interest and service than the bank." Participants also value credit unions for the opportunity to own shares and earn dividends. As one male participant said, "The credit union is better than banks because you get shares."

In contrast, some participants expressed frustration with banks, particularly about not earning interest on their funds. One participant asked, "How long is your money supposed to sit there to make more?" Many view credit unions as more affordable and offer better interest rates. Fees, however, were a significant concern with commercial banks, especially for the unemployed. One male participant shared, "I used to bank with all the banks in town. I used to have accounts and split my

money, but because of the fees, I stopped going to the bank. I closed my account and went to the credit union."

Most participants indicated a preference for credit unions if given a choice of financial institution. However, some raised concerns about delays in salary transfers through credit unions, as well as perceived rigidity in loan repayment terms.

Concerns about social assistance mainly revolve around issues of communication, transparency, and timeliness.

"It takes years before welfare even give me small change to help. I was applying with them to get some help for housing. My situation is a result of government failure." – Male, Christ Church

"I would like to know how if you approach one officer, you get one amount, if you apply to another one, you get another amount" – Male, St. Philip

Many participants expressed concerns about their experience applying for social assistance, citing a lack of clear communication, responsiveness, and transparency throughout the process. The absence of visibility into the criteria for granting assistance led to a widespread belief that decisions are made subjectively. One male participant said, "It's a favouritism system. You get one amount from one officer, another amount from someone else." Several others also mentioned a sense of stigma in their interactions with officials.

Participants also raised concerns about the long waiting periods for application review and approval, noting the lack of a standard timeline. As one participant noted, "If you have a nice officer, you might get it the week after, with no delays." The uncertainty of the review period caused significant stress for many, who were unsure how to proceed during the wait.

Regarding payments, participants pointed out the lack of personalized notifications when Welfare cheques are posted. While most are aware of the monthly posting dates, they rely on word-of-mouth from other beneficiaries to confirm when cheques have been issued. Some reported occasional delays in receiving their payments.

Overall, while most participants preferred cash grants over in-kind assistance, they consistently felt the amounts were insufficient. Some believed that officials often failed to properly assess household needs, leading to an underestimation of what was actually required.

6. Conclusion

This report underscores the transformative potential of digital payments in enhancing social assistance in Barbados. The emergence of diverse financial players and an expanding range of digital financial technologies present significant opportunities to streamline social assistance payment processes, improve beneficiary experiences, and enable the rapid scaling up of financial support during emergencies. Key digitalisation initiatives, including the PULSE-MIS system for social protection programmes and the Barbados Payments System Modernisation Project, are already underway, establishing a robust framework for the digital transformation of social assistance payments. By leveraging strategic partnerships with the private sector, the government can harness and drive the development of innovative, tailored solutions to optimise social assistance delivery.

The report also underscores the importance of adopting an inclusive approach as digital financial services expand and social assistance programs transition to digital payment solutions. According to data from the Central Bank, digital financial services such as online banking, digital transfers, and e-commerce are already widely used in Barbados. This growth has been supported by regulatory measures designed to strengthen the underlying payments infrastructure, reduce fees, and enhance consumer protection. Additionally, focus groups with beneficiaries revealed strong interest in transitioning to digital tools for receiving social assistance, with cards and direct deposits viewed as more convenient and dignified methods by many. However, feedback from institutional stakeholders and social assistance beneficiaries highlighted the risk of certain groups being excluded or disadvantaged in the shift to digital financial solutions, including low-income individuals, the unemployed, informal workers, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

The report underscores the ongoing challenges faced by these groups, in accessing and effectively using formal financial services. Social assistance beneficiaries specifically highlighted concerns with navigating complex onboarding processes and meeting the Know-Your-Customer (KYC) requirements of financial institutions. While some institutions have introduced simplified account-opening procedures, including through digital platforms, a lack of awareness within these groups remains a significant barrier. This presents an opportunity to collaborate with financial institutions to enhance sensitization efforts and advocate for more accessible onboarding processes. Additionally, financial literacy continues to be a key obstacle in the transition to digital financial services. National initiatives, such as the National Financial Literacy Programme and the Central Bank's public education campaigns, can be leveraged to integrate financial literacy as a core component of social assistance programmes, empowering beneficiaries to navigate digital financial tools with confidence.

The report underscores the critical need to strengthen the integration between non-traditional financial service providers and the formal banking system. Non-traditional financial players continue to face significant barriers related to interoperability, lack of regulatory clarity, and limited access to

banking services. The 2021 National Payments System Act is widely viewed as a key piece of legislation that can foster a more inclusive and equitable financial ecosystem by promoting fair competition and encouraging broader participation from diverse financial actors. This new regulatory framework holds the potential to support the growth of non-traditional financial providers and foster the development of innovative solutions. To further accelerate the adoption of digital wallets, the report underscores the importance of enhancing interoperability and expanding merchant acceptance of mobile payments, as these are key factors in driving widespread adoption.

Looking ahead, fostering collaboration across a diverse range of stakeholders will be crucial to building a modernized digital payment ecosystem that is inclusive and accessible to all. A multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, financial institutions, and civil society organizations will be essential to fully realize the potential of digital transformation in the financial system. Concerted efforts among a diverse range of stakeholders will be key to streamlining social assistance payments while advancing financial inclusion and literacy, especially for the most vulnerable populations.

7. Recommendations

This study identified several opportunities to improve the delivery of social assistance payments and advance broader digital financial inclusion in Barbados. Key insights were gathered from government stakeholders, regulators and financial institutions, as well as from focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries. These findings were further complemented by a survey of retailers and small businesses across the island. Together, these inputs formed the basis for a series of actionable recommendations for policymakers.

The recommendations, along with their associated actions, aim to streamline the social assistance payment process, making it more efficient, user-friendly, and responsive to economic shocks. They also highlight key opportunities to promote financial inclusion and economic empowerment, while creating an enabling environment for the expansion of digital payment services in Barbados.

1. Streamline social assistance payments processes for more efficient, inclusive and shock-responsive delivery.

- **Continue exploring and testing various payment options for social assistance grants.** The MPEA should continue its ongoing efforts to transition from cheque-based systems to digital payment tools by actively exploring and testing a range of payment options. The Ministry has already started introducing direct deposits for national assistance grants and is planning to adopt debit cards for its One-Family Programme. By implementing pilot programmes, or testing tools among small beneficiary caseloads, the MPEA can continue to test and assess payment tools to identify improvements to payment processes. In doing so, the MPEA should build on lessons learnt from previous initiatives such as the Adopt-A-Family Programme which piloted the use of reloadable debit cards following COVID-19. There is also significant potential to learn from other entities that have already transitioned to digital methods, including the NISS' experiences with transitioning clients to direct deposits (see section 3 for more information on these issues).
- **Harness public-private partnerships with various financial service providers for implementing tailored payment solutions.** The MPEA can actively engage financial institutions for the testing, customisation and development of payment technologies, for example by establishing MoUs or similar agreements. In engaging financial institutions, the MPEA should also place stronger focus on engaging non-traditional financial service providers. This study found that these offer a range of technologies that can facilitate rapid bulk payments to social assistance recipients in emergencies (see section 4.3). By actively collaborating with these service providers, the government can accelerate and customize the development of such financial services for both routine assistance and emergency response solutions.

- **Actively seek feedback from social assistance beneficiaries for improving payment processes.** In testing and rolling out new payment tools, particular attention should be given to the experiences of beneficiaries, gathering their feedback on specific payment tools and overall processes through various formats such as focus groups. Such exchange will help to inform ongoing improvements to payment tools and processes. For example, focus groups conducted for this study revealed overall satisfaction with the prep-paid debit card under the Adopt-A-Family programme, but participants indicated they would have appreciated greater multifunctionality of the card, including POS and online purchases (see section 5.2).
- **Implement dedicated payment tools to enable rapid assistance scale-ups during emergencies.** Based on the testing and assessment of various payment tools, the MPEA should identify and implement specific payment options for rapid scale-ups of financial assistance during emergency responses. These solutions should focus on providing scalable, inclusive and efficient methods for providing timely assistance to individuals, with a focus on those persons who are not already registered under routine social assistance programmes. For example, procuring and pre-positioning pre-paid debit cards that could be activated and reloaded in the event of an emergency would enhance the MPEA's preparedness by providing an option to rapidly provide payments to disaster-affected populations (see section 4.3). Providing digital payments via SMS codes could also enable quick disbursements to people without the need to collect and verify bank details. These efforts can build on the MPEA's ongoing initiative to procure a card solution for routine social assistance (see section 3). Furthermore, the government can engage payment providers for the design of additional digital operational features to support rapid scale-ups of assistance payments, such as user platforms and dashboards for managing payment lists, sending notifications to recipients and monitoring redemption of payments. This study found limited uptake of mobile payments and a lack of interest among surveyed retailers in facilitating cash payout services for social assistance programmes (see section 4.4). However, these findings highlight a significant opportunity to engage businesses on these issues to pursue additional avenues for social assistance delivery in the future.
- **Develop and test Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for rapid disbursements during emergencies.** Formalising payment procedures for emergencies is crucial for a quick, effective government response. Having SOPs that clearly outline steps, roles and responsibilities will help to streamline the process, minimizing delays and ensuring that critical support reaches affected individuals quickly. A well-developed emergency response framework for payments would allow the government to mobilize resources efficiently, scaling and adapting depending on the crisis severity. As mentioned above, these efforts should include identifying and testing specific tools such as cards or digital payments. These SOP should include the end-to-end payment process, specifying how new beneficiaries will be registered, assessed and receive payments.

- **Provide beneficiaries with a choice of different options to receive cash assistance.** In the longer term, the MPEA should consider offering a diverse set of payment options tailored to meet beneficiaries' unique needs and circumstances, thus helping to unlock the potential of digital payments with a user-centric focus. Offering various channels—such as direct deposits, digital wallet transfers or more traditional cash-based options—will empower individuals to select the method best suited to them, particularly important for the elderly and those with disabilities. Partnering with non-traditional financial service providers could further expand these options, providing greater flexibility and choice for recipients.
- **Establish mechanisms to notify beneficiaries of payment receipt.** The MPEA, in partnership with payment providers and telecommunications providers, should consider designing mechanisms to notify beneficiaries on the availability of their entitlements, thus improving the user experience and access to their entitlements. Focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries found that the lack of payment notifications can increase transactional cost, for due to beneficiaries having to go to the ATM to check their available balance (see section 5.2). Consideration could be given to a range of communication channels including WhatsApp/SMS notifications, or use of a web portal and mobile app. Given the piloting of the PULSE-MIS, there is a potential to integrate these mechanisms within the platform (see section 3).
- **Develop a clear communication strategy for routine social assistance grants.** In addition to developing mechanisms for notifying beneficiaries on payment receipts, the MPEA should thrive towards developing a communication strategy to increase awareness and visibility of how benefit amounts for social assistance grants are determined and calculated, thus increasing transparency and accountability of social assistance delivery. Focus groups with social assistance beneficiaries showed lack of visibility on how such decisions are made, leading to perceived unfairness and frustrations (see section 5.2). The public communication component could leverage various channels and platforms, in addition to including dedicated mechanisms for more targeted communication with beneficiaries, including clear grievance mechanisms. By leveraging tailored digital technologies and platforms, the MPEA could provide beneficiaries with higher visibility into their personal entitlements, payment history or upcoming payments. The MPEA should also consider how such features could be integrated within its PULSE-MIS in the future (see section 3). Clear, consistent public communication about social assistance programmes, entitlements and eligibility criteria will enhance transparency and visibility, ultimately enhancing beneficiary satisfaction.

Implement measures to support social assistance beneficiary with utility bills and internet access. Focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries revealed that utility and internet payments are a key concern and represent the most significant expense for most households (see section 5.2). Internet access is essential for households with children who are enrolled in school. The MPEA already supports certain beneficiaries with utility bill payments but

could consider expanding targeted support for other beneficiaries, thus complementing cash grants. Collaborative initiatives with utility and bill payment providers can be leveraged to support social assistance beneficiaries in accessing these essential services, for example by further expanding subsidized access to internet, including mobile data.

The MPEA already partners with the telecommunications provider FLOW under its Jump initiative, providing beneficiaries of the One-Family Programme with subsidised internet and computers (see Box 1). Given the cost-of-living crisis, and the high cost of mobile data in particular, such initiatives could further be expanded to other social assistance beneficiaries. Community Wi-Fi hotspots, designed in partnership with internet providers, could also enable beneficiaries to connect reliably, bridging the connectivity gap that often hinders digital financial inclusion. Additionally, the MPEA should explore further options for providing direct support with utility bill payments. Aside from exploring subsidised access with utility providers, the MPEA could work with bill payment providers to explore digital vouchers for utility payments (see section 4.3).

2. Strengthen linkages between social assistance programmes and initiatives focused on financial literacy, inclusion, and economic empowerment.

- Integrate financial literacy components into social assistance programmes as part of a 'life skills' component.** By linking the delivery of social assistance cash grants to financial literacy training, the MPEA can support households in financial management. Implementing dedicated training on various digital financial services can also support the MPEA in successfully transitioning beneficiaries to digital payment tools, ensuring that they feel comfortable in the adoption and use of such technologies. The MPEA's One-Family Programme, launched in 2023, already focuses on equipping beneficiaries through holistic service delivery, which includes mandatory digital financial literacy training for households that receive subsidised internet access under the Jump initiative (see Box 1). Such efforts should be further expanded to other social assistance programmes, including as part of a mandatory component for newly onboarded clients. Formats could include dedicated practical sessions on the management of digital financial tools, including interactive training at community level, building on a Training of Trainers model. This process should be linked to efforts for actively gathering feedback from beneficiaries (see recommendation 1).
- Collaborate with financial providers and other institutions to implement financial education training and sensitisation.** The MPEA should closely work with financial institutions and other institutions to develop financial education material as well as training to be provided social assistance beneficiaries (see point above). Such collaboration would also provide financial institutions with the opportunity to sensitise social assistance beneficiaries on their service offering as well as clarifying fee structures related to digital products. Focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries showed widespread interest but also limited awareness of

digital financial services, leading to significant concerns about potential fees for digital transactions (see section 5.4). These issues point to the potential for providing targeted education and sensitisation for these groups to increase their awareness of these services. The MPEA should also continue engaging with the FLB to foster joint initiatives as it relates to financial education for social assistance beneficiaries, linked to the FLB's efforts under the National Financial Literacy Programme (see section 5.2).

- **Work with financial institutions such as banks and credit unions to facilitate onboarding and financial inclusion for vulnerable clients.** The MPEA could engage with banks and credit unions to advocate for simpler KYC and onboarding requirements for social assistance clients and facilitate the opening of bank accounts, e.g. by waiving certain requirements for beneficiaries of social assistance programmes. Focus group participants highlighted the need for assistance and guidance to open accounts with financial institutions (see 5.4). Focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries revealed significant interest in credit unions, driven by their perceived competitive offerings and favourable product terms (see section 5.4). These insights highlight the opportunity to work closely with credit unions to develop targeted initiatives aimed at promoting financial inclusion, literacy, and economic empowerment for social assistance beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups.
- **Establish linkages social assistance and microfinance, job placement, entrepreneurship initiatives.** Focus group discussions revealed strong interest in receiving support for income generation, skills training and employment support (see section 5.4). Social assistance programmes that incorporate both immediate support and graduation pathways for financial independence will support beneficiaries' economic empowerment. To this end, the MPEA should consider investing in strategic partnerships and support the referral of social assistance beneficiaries to initiatives providing them access to microfinance, job placement, and entrepreneurship support. The Ministry's One-Family Programme already focuses on providing holistic services to clients, aiming to achieve their economic empowerment and self-sufficiency for the families through access to training and other opportunities. Such efforts can be further strengthened and expanded to other social assistance programmes.

For example, the MPEA should consider developing a strategy with clear selection criteria for graduating beneficiaries from national assistance, including linkages to relevant microfinance, job placement, and entrepreneurship initiatives. Establishing Memoranda of Understanding and referral mechanisms with relevant entities will be crucial to help beneficiaries transition from social assistance towards economic independence and resilience. Such strategic partnerships should focus on microfinance providers such as FundAccess as well as financial institutions, leveraging the popularity of credit unions among social assistance beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups.

3. Strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration to promote more inclusive financial services and drive the expansion of digital payments.

- **Facilitate dialogue among financial regulators, government stakeholders, non-government organisations and the private financial sector to advocate for the needs of different social segments.** Deepening stakeholder engagement, including with financial regulators, digital wallet providers, credit unions, and community representatives, is key to establishing a cohesive digital assistance system. This collaborative approach will ensure that all stakeholders actively contribute to and support the social protection landscape, promoting a robust, inclusive system.

The government should continue proactive engagement with various stakeholders and advocacy efforts focused on expanding the reach of financial services to vulnerable groups. Such inter-institutional exchange provides a key opportunity to ensure that the needs and preferences of social assistance beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups are considered when designing digital financial solutions and shaping the wider financial ecosystem, helping to overcome barriers and leverage opportunities for improved financial inclusion. Engagement with financial institutions should particularly focus on solutions tailored to the elderly and persons with disabilities, such as the expansion of specific 'service desks' for senior citizens. Additionally, advocacy efforts could focus on increasing the coverage of financial services in rural parishes, including through ATMs or self-service desks. This multistakeholder engagement can be facilitated through joint workshops or focused consultations around specific issues or topics, as well as through the development of a joint roadmap or financial inclusion strategy with key milestones.

- **Capitalise on the widespread credit union membership and utilise their existing infrastructure to foster the adoption of digital solutions.** Given that credit unions are widely preferred by social assistance beneficiaries and have a high penetration rate among the general population of Barbados, it is worth exploring the potential of leveraging these factors to support the development of a digital financial products and solutions, which could be deployed as part of social assistance programmes and initiatives.
- **Engage financial institutions on the development of merchant solutions for microentrepreneurs and small businesses.** Financial institutions and other stakeholders interviewed for this study highlighted a growing demand for simpler merchant solutions for non-traditional payment acceptance, including tap-2-phone solutions, QR codes and virtual POS that enable online card payments. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly using P2P transfer services through personal bank accounts as a convenient solution for business transactions. The government can engage financial institutions to expand the scope and features of such solutions, in addition to targeted sensitisation for microentrepreneurs and small business owners to increase the awareness and adoption of these services as part of wider social assistance graduation strategies.

- **Facilitate outreach to and engagement with retailers or merchants to promote the adoption of digital wallets.** An important step towards the increase in the uptake of digital solutions lies in the expansion of agent networks. Focus group discussions with social assistance beneficiaries revealed that extensive merchant networks as well as close-by cash-in/cash-out locations are seen as key requirements the adoption of digital wallets. It is essential to strengthen these networks to enable wider use and improve user experience. These collective efforts should build on cooperation with the private sector and relevant business associations.

In summary, these recommendations outline a comprehensive approach for the MPEA to improve social assistance payments, while advancing digital financial inclusion and promote economic empowerment for vulnerable group. By implementing varied payment channels for social assistance, prioritizing both communication and accessibility of services, while fostering critical partnerships with various stakeholders, the government can support the ongoing modernisation of the social protection system with a dual focus on inclusivity and digitalisation. Additionally, establishing SOPs for emergency disbursements and critical partnerships with the private sector will ensure that digital solutions are scalable, efficient and meet the needs of all users. Together, these strategies form a robust foundation for a transformative digital payment ecosystem and an enabling environment for the adoption of digital financial services.

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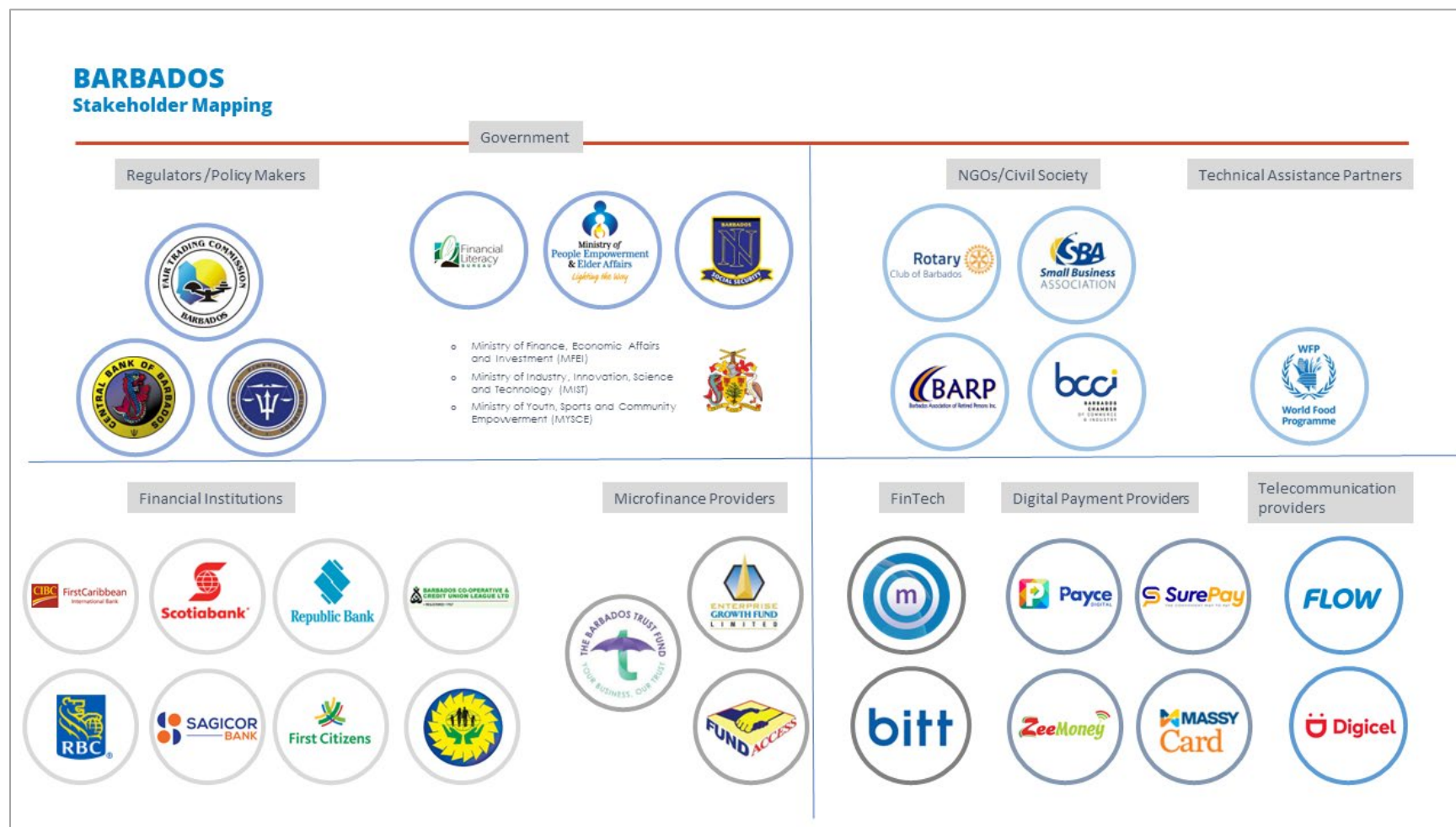
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Annex I: Stakeholder mapping



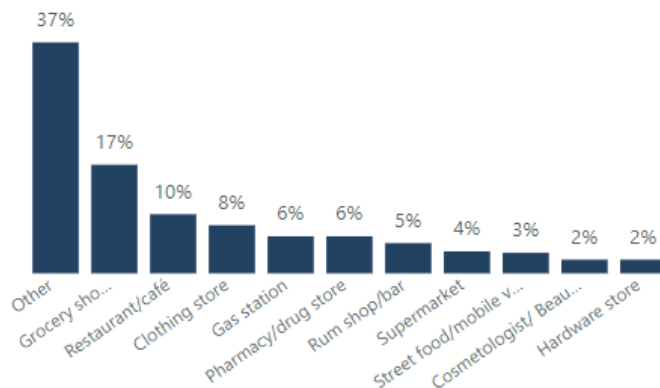
Annex II: Key Informant Interviews

| Institution | Name |
|---|---|
| Barbados Agency for Micro Enterprise Development Ltd. (FundAccess) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Esther Lord-Graham, General Manager |
| Barbados Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philip Lewis, Council Member |
| Barbados Co-operative & Credit Union League Ltd | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anthony Pilgrim, General Manager |
| Cable and Wireless (FLOW) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dwayne Jones, Manager, Commercial Operations Fixed, Mobile & FMC Barbados David Sharpe, Senior Manager, Platforms, VAS and Partnership Products Carol Robertson, Senior Business Development Partner (Regional) & Caribbean Government Lead Zoe Lawrenson, Strategy Director |
| Central Bank of Barbados | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michelle Doyle-Lowe, Deputy Governor (Acting) |
| Fair Trading Commission (FTC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marsha Atherley-Ikechi, Chief Executive Officer |
| Financial Literacy Bureau, Ministry of Energy and Business Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. David Simpson, Technical Advisor/Consultant |
| Financial Services Commission (FSC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denise Hinds-Jordan, Manager, Securities Curtis A. Lowe; Manager, Credit Union Division |
| First Citizens Bank (Barbados) Limited | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walwyn Williams, Chief Executive Officer (Ag.) |
| CIBC Caribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jennifer Fuller, Director, Enterprise Payments, Cards & Merchant Services |
| IslandPay Group (Barbados) Ltd. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omar Watson, General Manager Richard Douglas, CEO Marie Nuon, VP Operations |
| Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology (MIST) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antoinette Bourne, Systems Administrator |
| Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicole Daniel, Social Development Project Manager One Family Programme |
| Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), Welfare Department | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharon Yearwood, Senior Welfare Officer |
| Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleviston Hunte, Director of Youth Affairs |
| mMoney (Abed Group Inc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anthony Abed, Manager |

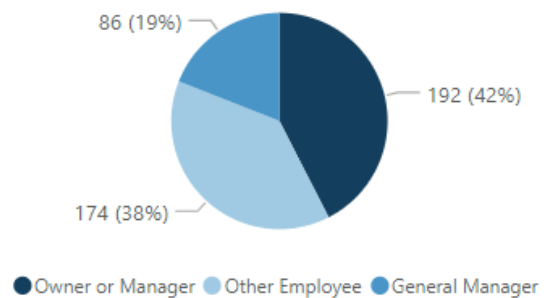
| | |
|---|--|
| National Insurance and Social Security Service (NISS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norma King-Brathwaite, Assistant Director, Benefits • Derek Lowe, Senior Manager, Short-term Benefits |
| Payce Digital (Cave Shepherd Card (Barbados) Inc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alison Browne-Ellis, Chief Executive Officer • Keri Mapp, Director, Operations |
| Small Business Association of Barbados (SBA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynette Holder |
| SurePay Online Inc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anthony Yearwood |
| The Barbados Bankers Association (TBBA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Thomas |
| Zeemoney (Barbados) Ltd. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felicity Jaforktuk |

Annex III: Digital Readiness Survey Results

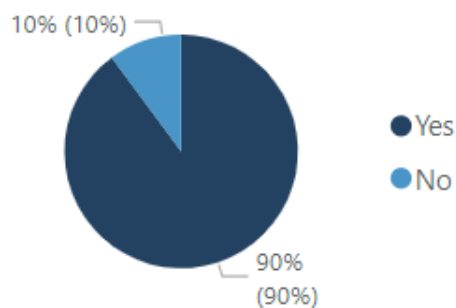
Type of Businesses Surveyed



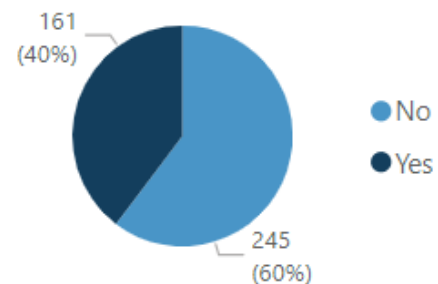
Survey Respondent role



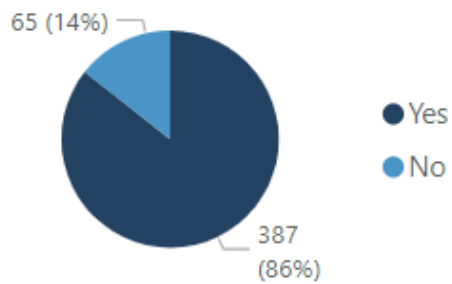
Internet connection



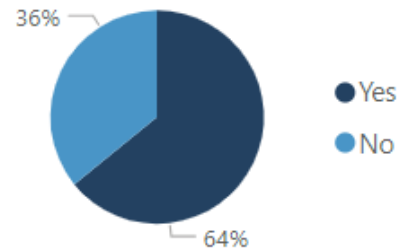
Wifi Availability to Customers



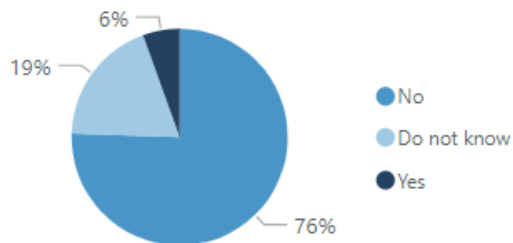
Business use of Bank or Credit Union Account



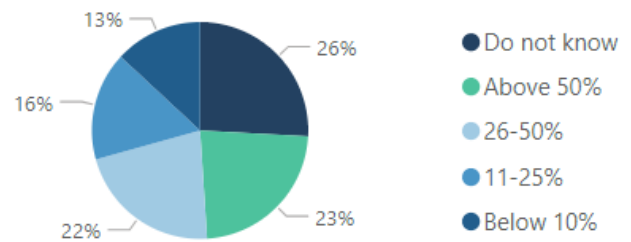
Accepts credit card/ debit card payment



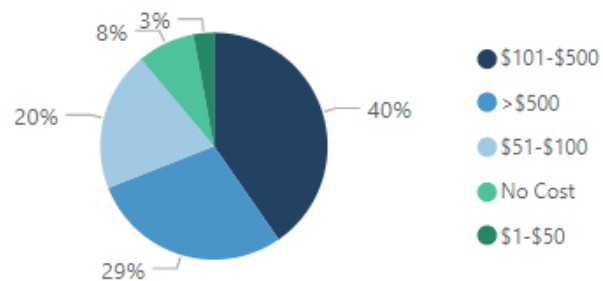
Cost for customers to use debit/credit cards when making purchases



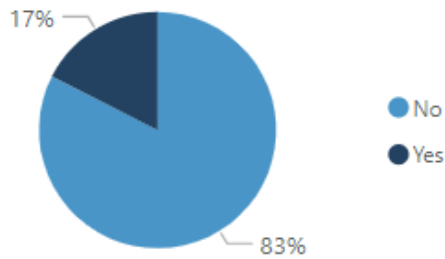
Percentage of payments received through debit/credit card payments



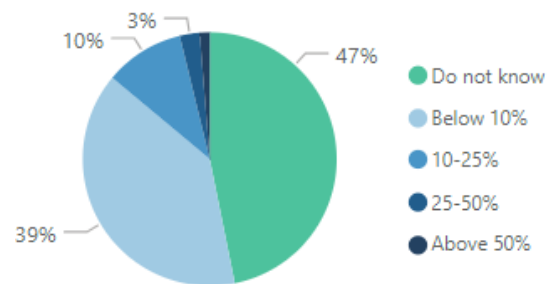
Estimated monthly costs to businesses to facilitate debit/credit card payments



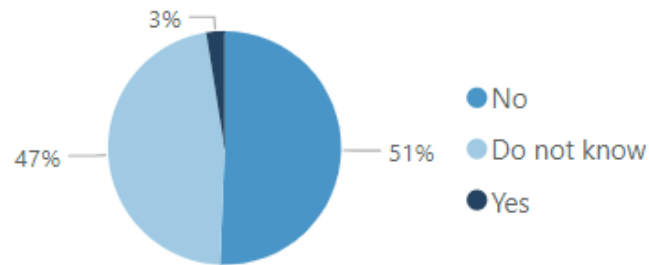
Business accepts mobile payments to pay for goods or services



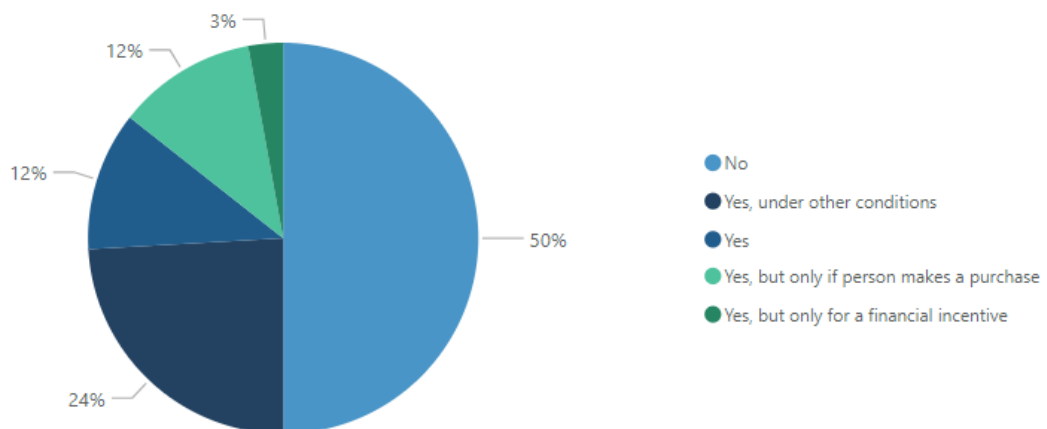
Percentage of payments by clients received through mobile payments (monthly)



Costs to customers to use mobile payments when making purchases



The business is interested in providing this service to clients of social assistance programmes



World Food Programme

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