

In 2013, Belize made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government enacted a new law and amended an existing law to increase protections against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition, the Government provided training on child labor issues to its labor inspectors and increased funding to a key social program to encourage school attendance. However, children in Belize continue to engage in child labor in agriculture and in the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation. Important gaps remain in the country's legal framework on the worst forms of child labor. In addition, the impact of many of the Government's development and education policies and programs on child labor remains unknown.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Belize are engaged in child labor in agriculture and in the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation.(1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Belize.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	8.3 (6,934)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	93.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	8.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		116.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014.(6)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4, 2011.(7)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Harvest bananas, citrus, and sugarcane (1-3, 8, 9)
Services	Street peddling (3)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 3, 9-12)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a) – (c) of ILO C. 182.




Agricultural work and street peddling are reported to often take place in the company of parents.(3, 9) It has also been reported that children working in the agricultural sector may be vulnerable to forced labor.(12) Limited evidence suggests that some poor families may, in an effort to cover school fees, push their children into commercial sexual exploitation, for example by providing sexual favors in exchange for gifts and money.(12, 15) Access to education is sometimes hindered when schools charge fees and where parents must pay for textbooks, uniforms, and meals.(11, 13, 14)

Reports indicate that in 2013 the Government collected data on child labor that it intends to publish in 2014.(9) The 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with the Government, found that children ages 5 to 11 work at higher rates than those ages 12 to 14, and that child labor was more prominent in rural areas.(8, 16)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Belize has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

	Convention	Ratification
	ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
	ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	UN CRC	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The Government has established relevant laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	12	Labour Act; Shops Act (17, 18)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Families and Children Act (19)
List of Hazardous Occupations Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Constitution; Labour Act (17, 20)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act (21)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act; Criminal Code (22, 23)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Defence Act (24)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Education and Training Act; Education Act (13, 25)
Free Public Education	Yes		Education Act (13)

* No conscription or no standing military.

In January 2013, the Government of Belize enacted a new Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, which prohibits the trafficking of all persons, including children, and replaces the Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.(8, 9) The new law prescribes punishments from 1 to 8 years imprisonment if the victim is an adult, up to 12 years if the victim is a child, and up to 25 years if the case involves sexual assault.(21, 26) Also in January 2013, the Government passed a Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act.(23) These new laws, along with the Criminal Code, which has been updated to make sexual assault legislation gender-neutral, criminalize all forms of child sexual exploitation, including child pornography.(9, 22, 23, 26) However, Article 3(2) of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act excepts consensual sex with a child ages 16 and 17, where a person gives or promises remuneration or other benefits. This provision leaves these children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.(12, 15, 23)

Article 169 of the Labour Act sets the general minimum age of employment at 12 years. Article 164 of the Labour Act sets the minimum age of employment for any public or private industrial undertaking at 14 years, and other legislation, for example the Shops Act, sets the minimum age at 14 for work in wholesale or retail trade or business.(17) The ILO's Committee of Experts has requested that the Government of Belize ensure that a minimum age of work applies to all sectors, and not only to industrial undertakings and shops.(18, 27)

Although the 2009 National Child Labor Policy identified a list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children, the Government of Belize has yet to formally adopt this list into law.(8, 28, 29) In addition, research could not determine whether there are laws that prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as drug trafficking.(28, 30) Although Article 45 of the Education Act makes primary and secondary education tuition-free in Belize, schools may charge fees with the approval of the Chief Education Officer.(13)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Rural Development (MOL)	Enforce laws related to child labor and hazardous child labor.(2, 8, 9)
Department of Human Services (DHS) of the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation	Receive referrals regarding child labor cases; train Immigration and Labor officers, as well as the Belize Police Department, in making referrals.(2, 9)
Belize Police Department (Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units)	Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.(2, 8, 9)

Law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2013, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) increased its number of labor inspectors from 25 to 26. These inspectors continue to operate in 10 offices throughout the country.(8, 9) The MOL's 2013 budget was not sufficient to ensure adequate inspections across the country, which are also hindered by road infrastructure and other constraints.(9) During the reporting period, all inspectors received training regarding child labor. While the number of inspections in 2013 is unknown, there were no reported child labor violations.(9)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2013, there were no investigations pursuant to criminal laws on child labor, and no reported violations of these laws.(9) The Government reportedly considered three trafficking cases during the reporting period, but it is not known whether these cases involved children.(9) It was reported that the MOL's 26 labor inspectors, who coordinate with the Police in criminal investigations, might receive training in 2014 on the new laws on trafficking in persons and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.(9) It is not yet known if this training has been provided.

IV. Coordination of Government Efforts on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Labor Committee (NCLC)	Coordinate efforts between Ministries to combat child labor and implement National Child Labor Policy.(27) Led by the Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Rural Development (MOL) and comprised of 15 government and civil society members.(2, 8, 29)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee (ATIP)	Train law enforcement officials and educate the public about the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Led by the Vice Minister of Human Development and Social Transformation and includes 12 other government agencies and civil society organizations.(2, 8, 31, 32)

In 2013, both the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Committee continued to operate and work on issues related to the worst forms of child labor.(9)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Belize has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 7).

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Child Labor Policy	Establishes a rights-based framework to eradicate child labor. Priority areas include strengthening current child labor laws, creating new legislation to address existing gaps, and providing educational assistance to former and current child laborers.(8, 27, 29) Promotes awareness and advocacy efforts, strengthening of government institutions and services, and training of labor officers to identify and provide care to child laborers.(8, 29)
CARE Model	Coordinates protection, care, and monitoring of sexually exploited and trafficked children. Outlines the role of the DHS and Police in receiving allegations of the commercial sexual exploitation of children; makes referrals to other agencies for services; and protects children from future exploitation.(2, 32)
National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004-2015)	Calls for the revision of current child labor legislation, develops protocols to improve interagency coordination, increases institutional capacity to enforce legislation, strengthens child labor prevention programs, and carries out awareness-raising campaigns. Prioritizes child labor issues, including the worst forms of child labor.(8, 9, 16, 33)
National Development Framework, Horizon 2030*	Promotes economic growth and improves national well-being. Recognizes education as a basic human right and ensures access to quality education through secondary school.(34, 35)
Ministry of Education's Early Childhood Development Policy	Promotes the rights of children, from conception to age 8, and provides support to all primary caregivers. Aims to develop innovative programs targeting families of child laborers, particularly those engaged in the worst forms of child labor, and ensures those children attend school.(36)
Ministry of Education's Belizean Education Sector Strategy (2011-2016)*	Aims to improve quality and accessibility of education by focusing on retention rates, years of attendance, and teacher training. Stems from collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Caribbean Development Bank, and other educational stakeholders.(37)

*The impact of this policy on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

In November 2013, the Government participated in the XVIII Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor to foster continued dialogue and cooperation on labor issues throughout the Americas. The joint declaration of the Conference promotes social dialogue to address child labor and reaffirms country participants' commitment to work with civil society organizations to advance efforts toward the eradication of child labor.(38)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

In 2013, the Government of Belize funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST) program*‡	Government poverty-reduction initiative, funded in part by the World Bank, that provides monetary incentives for families who comply with program requirements.(8, 39) Families must ensure that their children ages 5 to 17 maintain annual school attendance record of 85 percent.(2, 8, 39, 40). Program has been expanded for a second consecutive year.(9)
Primary School Completers Program*‡	Government education program that increases school enrollment by providing families with cash subsidies contingent upon children completing primary education.(8, 30)
Certification of Primary School Teachers Program*‡	Country-wide teacher training program that improves quality of instruction, school attendance, and completion rates.(8)
Enhancement of the Belize Teaching Force*	\$1.2 million project, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank, that trains teachers to improve instruction and increase school attendance and completion rates.(41)
Special Envoy for Women and Children Outreach Program‡	Special Envoy for Women and Children campaign that raises awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children; includes hosting conferences and producing public service messages.(9)
Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues Project	USDOL project implemented by the ILO in approximately 40 countries to support the priorities of the <i>Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor by 2016</i> established by the Hague Global Child Labor Conference in 2010. Aims to improve evidence base on child labor through data collection and research.(42)

*The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Belize.

Although the Government of Belize has a program to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs to assist children working specifically in agriculture. The Government continues to face budgetary constraints for social programs that address child labor, and poverty remains high.(9) More than 40 percent of the Belizean population continues to live below the poverty line, with more than 16 percent living in extreme poverty. In rural areas, where indigenous peoples largely reside, these rates reach even higher levels.(39, 43, 44)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Belize (Table 9).

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Laws	Amend the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act to penalize transactional sex with children ages 16 and 17.	2013
	Amend legislation to ensure the minimum age of work is 14 in all sectors.	2013
	Adopt a list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children.	2009 – 2013
	Verify whether laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as drug-trafficking.	2013
Enforcement	Make information publicly available on enforcement efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, including the number of complaints, investigations, convictions, and penalties.	2009 – 2013
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient resources to conduct labor inspections.	2009, 2011 – 2013
	Ensure that law enforcement officers receive training on the commercial sexual exploitation of children and on new trafficking in persons and commercial sexual exploitation laws.	2013
Government Policies	Assess the impact that education and development policies have on the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2013
Social Programs	Further increase access to education by eliminating all fees as well as providing transportation and school materials.	2011 – 2013
	Develop programs aimed at reducing the worst forms of child labor, including agriculture.	2009 – 2013
	Assess the impact that current government programs aimed at increasing access to secondary education, improving teacher training, and providing comprehensive early childhood education have on the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2013

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