

In 2017, Belize made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government re-convened the National Child Labor Committee to coordinate efforts to address child labor and released the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents, which outlines the process to report complaints related to the mistreatment of children, including child labor. The government also partnered with the European Union to address child labor in the sugar industry, including by collecting statistical data and developing a list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children in agriculture. However, children in Belize engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Important gaps in the country's legal framework remain. The minimum age for work is 12, and the country lacks prohibitions against the use of children in illicit activities. In addition, the government does not appear to have programs that aim to reduce child labor in agriculture except in the sugar industry.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Belize engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1; 2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Belize.

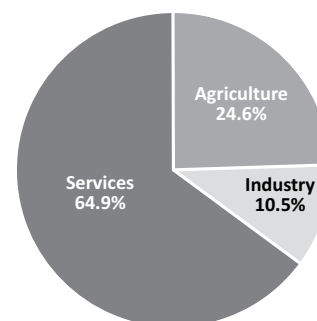
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	1.6 (1,405)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	1.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		105.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2016, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016. (3)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from National Child Activity Survey (SIMPOC), 2013. (4)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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	Production of beans, bananas, citrus fruits, cereals, corn, rice, sugarcane, papayas, and vegetables (5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12)
	Fishing, including for fish, lobster, and conch (8; 11)
	Butchering or raising livestock, including poultry and cattle (8; 11)
Industry	Construction,† carpentry, masonry, wood carving, carrying heavy loads, and using power tools (8; 11)
	Quarrying,† including operating stone crushers (9; 11)
Services	Street vending (11)
	Retail vending (8; 11)
	Yard work, including using lawnmowers, weed-eaters, and machetes (8; 13; 11)
	Sewing (8; 11)
	Working and cooking in food service, including using large mixers and grills (8; 11)

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Auto repair† (8; 11)
	Welding (11)
	Pumping gas (8)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 6; 7; 9; 14; 15)
	Illicit activities, including trafficking of drugs and weapons (16; 11)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

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

Among Belize’s ethnic groups, Mennonites had the highest percentage of child labor with approximately 9.5 percent of Mennonite children engaged in child labor. (8; 13; 11) Non-Mennonite children are also engaged in child labor on Mennonite-owned land. (10) Children working on Mennonite land often use dangerous tools like machetes, tractors, and ploughs, and work long hours in the sun without proper hydration. (13; 10)

Children in Belize are also engaged in child labor in diving and fishing for fish, lobster, and conch. (11) Many of these children cannot swim and have been injured working with dangerous tools such as anchors, fish traps, chipping hammers, and spears. (11)




Girls from impoverished communities and LGBTI children are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking in Belize. (17; 16; 15) Children are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in areas frequented by tourists or seasonal workers, including oil truckers and citrus workers. (2; 15) Anecdotal reports also indicate that teenage boys ages 12–17 from Belize City and San Pedro Town were recruited to transport and sell drugs. (13; 11; 16) Although several minors were charged for drug trafficking in 2017, there is no available data on the specific number of cases. (11)

Primary and secondary education is tuition-free in Belize, but children’s access to education is sometimes hindered by the cost of school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and meals. (18; 19; 20; 16) The government runs a secondary school subsidy program that operates only in the southern districts—once deemed to be the poorest in Belize. (10) However, the program overlooks districts in the north where child labor is concentrated and that struggle with extreme poverty. (16; 10) In February and March 2017, half the children in two schools in Corozal were absent from school to pick beans. (10) Some Spanish-speaking children in northern districts face language barriers at schools that provide instruction only in English. (10) Bullying is also becoming a barrier to attending school, making children more vulnerable to child labor. (11) Additionally, Belize lacks qualified teachers, basic supplies, and facilities to educate children. (11)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR 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 laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Belize’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work and hazardous work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	12	Articles 54, 164, and 169 of the Labor Act; Articles 2–3 of the Shops Act (21; 22)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	14	Articles 2 and 7 of the Families and Children Act; Articles 2 and 164 of the Labor Act (21; 23)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 8 of the Constitution; Articles 157–158 of the Labor Act (21; 24)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 11–14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act; Article 9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act; Articles 49–51 of the Criminal Code (25; 26; 27)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 2, 11, and 13–14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act; Articles 2–9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act; Articles 49–51 of the Criminal Code (25; 26; 27)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Article 16 of the Defence Act (28)
Non-state	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act (18; 29)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act (18; 29)

* No conscription

Belizean law does not conform to international standards because it sets the minimum age for employment at age 12. (21; 30) However, the minimum legal age for work in wholesale or retail trade or business is age 14. (22) Belizean law is also inconsistent with international standards on hazardous work. Children under age 14 are prohibited from working in industrial undertakings—including activities such as mining, manufacturing, and construction—but children over age 14 are explicitly permitted to work in those types of activities. (21) Though Belizean law indicates that children under age 18 are prohibited from being employed or engaged in any activity that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development, the law does not specify which employment activities are detrimental to children. (21; 23) A list of hazardous work prohibited for all children has not been adopted as law. (2; 31; 32) Furthermore, Belizean law is inconsistent with international standards on light work, as the types of light work permissible for children have not yet been identified. (32; 21)

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act and the Criminal Code prohibit all forms of child sexual exploitation, with the former explicitly prohibiting child pornography. (25; 26) However, consensual sex with 16 or 17 year-old children is permitted, including in cases in which a person gives or promises remuneration, goods, food, or other benefits in exchange for the sexual act. This provision leaves these children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (2; 25) Research could not determine whether laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs. (30; 33)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Rural Development	Identify cases and enforce laws related to child labor and hazardous child labor through its Labor Department. (7; 9)
Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, Department of Human Services	Receive referrals for child labor cases; train immigration officials, labor inspectors, and the Belize Police Department (BPD) in making referrals; and handle human trafficking cases. (34; 6; 35) Provide victims with welfare services, including medical and social services and counseling assistance. (9; 36)
Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture	Investigate truancy offenses in schools and issue fines for these violations. (37)
Belize Police Department (BPD)	Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units. (5; 6)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecution	Prosecute criminal offenses, including cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. (38)

Labor Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown* (39)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	25 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (40)	Yes (40)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (40)	Unknown* (11)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (13)	Unknown* (11)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (40)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown* (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number Conducted at Worksites	Unknown* (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	0 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	0 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (13)	Unknown* (11)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (13)	Unknown* (11)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (13)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (13)	Unknown* (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (13)	Yes (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (13)	Yes (11)

* The government does not publish this information.

The government does not publish information regarding labor law enforcement. Although the Labor Department is required to visit every business at least once a year, it usually falls short of this goal. (11)

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (13)	Unknown* (11)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (13)	Unknown* (11)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (40)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown* (11)
Number of Violations Found	0 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (13)	Unknown* (11)
Number of Convictions	2 (41; 17; 42)	Unknown* (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (40)	Yes (11)

* The government does not publish this information.

There were no human trafficking convictions in 2017 even though human trafficking—including the trafficking of children—occurs in Belize. (33; 41) Although Belize’s anti-trafficking legislation establishes penalties, including imprisonment, human trafficking cases are handled by lower courts and are often dismissed. (43) Criminal investigators and police officers lacked sufficient resources—such as vehicles, fuel, office supplies, and adequate training—to investigate violations of criminal law, including the worst forms of child labor. (13)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
National Child Labor Committee (NCLC)	Coordinate efforts between ministries to combat child labor and implement the National Child Labor Policy. Led by the Ministry of Labor and 14 government and civil society members, and chaired by a senior labor officer. (5; 44; 45) Re-activated in February 2017. (11) Met twice in 2017. (46)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council	Identify and rescue human trafficking victims, 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; includes 12 other government agencies and civil society organizations. (1; 5)
National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC)	Promote, monitor, and evaluate Belize’s compliance with its national and international commitments to children, including the UN CRC. (36) In 2017, developed the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents (NRFCA) 2017–2030, and a communications strategy that outlines the process of opening complaints related to the mistreatment of children, including child labor. (12; 47; 48)

Although the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) was re-activated in February, there is no record of actions or recommendations produced by this Committee in 2017. (11; 49) Additionally, the NCLC lacks a framework with objectives, goals, and time-bound activities, and has not determined responsibilities for its members, reporting requirements, or a regular meeting schedule. (45)

In the Orange Walk district, stakeholders from the police and the Ministries of Education, Labor, Human Development, and Social Services met monthly to address issues including child labor. (10) Research did not find evidence of coordination of efforts in other districts.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Child Labor Policy	Focuses on strengthening child labor laws, creating legislation to address existing gaps, and providing educational assistance to children who have been or who are currently engaged in child labor. (5; 50) Aims to strengthen government institutions and services and train labor officers. (5; 44; 50) In 2017, the government and civil society stakeholders collaborated on a project to address child labor in the sugarcane industry. (16)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor‡ (cont)

Policy	Description
CARE Model	Coordinates the protection, care, and monitoring of sexually exploited and trafficked children. Outlines the role of the Department of Human Services and the BPD in receiving allegations of commercial sexual exploitation of children and referring children to services. (51) In 2017, this model was still used even though raids and surveillance have diminished due to decreased funding. (16)
National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents (Children’s Agenda) 2017–2030†	Launched in June 2017. (48; 12) Sets out the government’s agenda and priorities to protect the rights of children and adolescents including education, health, economic security and opportunity, and protection from discrimination, abuse, and exploitation, including child labor. (47) Raises awareness of the role of families in promoting early childhood education. (48)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (17)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor‡

Program	Description
USDOL-Funded projects	Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues (GAP) (2011–2017), established by the Hague Global Child Labor Conference in 2010 and implemented by the ILO in approximately 40 countries to support the priorities of the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor by 2016; and Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor II (CLEAR II), \$7 million capacity-building project Implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders in seven countries to build local and national capacity of the government to address child labor. (52) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (5; 6; 7)

In 2017, the government collaborated with the EU to address child labor in the sugar industry, including by collecting statistical data and developing a list of hazardous occupations in agriculture prohibited for children. (16) Additionally, in Orange Walk, the government conducted a parent outreach program to create awareness about the detrimental effects of child labor, the importance of children’s education, and the existing subsidy program that may help children in some areas of Belize access secondary school. (10)

Research found no evidence of government programs to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children or assist children working in general agriculture and fisheries. (53)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Belize (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law prohibits all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children ages 16 and 17.	2013 – 2017
	Ensure that the minimum age for work is 14 in all sectors.	2013 – 2017
	Adopt a list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children and ensure that all children under age 18 are prohibited from engaging in hazardous work.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs.	2013 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2017
Enforcement	Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations, especially in rural areas.	2009, 2011 – 2017
	Ensure that courts hear and try human trafficking cases.	2017

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Publish information on enforcement efforts to combat child labor, including Labor Inspectorate funding, number of labor inspectors, training for labor inspectors, number and type of labor inspections conducted, and number of child labor violations found.	2015 – 2017
	Publish information on enforcement efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, including training for investigators, the number of criminal investigations, violations found, prosecutions initiated, and convictions secured.	2009 – 2017
Coordination	Conduct regular meetings of the National Child Labor Committee and develop a framework including objectives, goals, time-bound activities, responsibilities for its members, reporting requirements, and a regular meeting schedule.	2015 – 2017
Social Programs	Increase access to education by eliminating fees, improving educational facilities, hiring additional qualified teachers, and providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals; and expand the secondary school subsidy program to include districts in the north where child labor is concentrated.	2011 – 2017
	Develop programs aimed at reducing child labor, including in general agriculture and fisheries.	2009 – 2017

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