

In 2016, Belize made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government secured its first trafficking conviction under the 2013 Anti-Trafficking Law and expanded a conditional cash transfer program to cover 400 vulnerable families. However, children in Belize perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. 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, a sector in which child labor remains prevalent.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

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

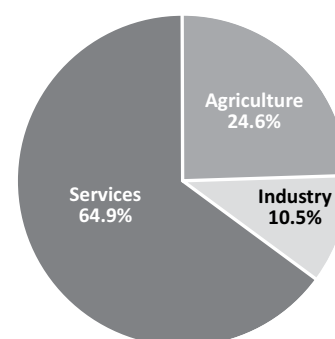
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

| 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 (%) | | 104.4 |

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, 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 (5-11) |
| | Fishing, including for fish, lobster, and conch (10) |
| | Butchering or livestock raising, including poultry and cattle (10) |
| Industry | Construction†, carpentry, masonry, wood carving (10) |
| | Quarrying†, including operating stone crushers (11) |
| Services | Street vending |
| | Retail vending (10) |
| | Yard work, including chopping, using lawnmowers and machetes (10, 12) |
| | Seamstressing (10) |
| | Working and cooking in food service, including wielding large mixers and grills (10) |
| | Auto repair† (10) |
| | Pumping gas (10) |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14) |

† 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.

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In Belize, approximately 9.5 percent of Mennonite children are engaged in child labor.(10, 12) The school system in Mennonite communities operates under a different cycle to allow children to work in family farms and businesses. (12) Mennonite children often use dangerous tools like machetes, tractors, and ploughs, and operate heavy-duty equipment at sawmills and stone crushers at quarries.(12) During March 2016, non-Mennonite children in northern Belize skipped school to work in Mennonite-owned bean fields to supplement their families' income.(12)




There were anecdotal reports of minors from neighboring countries being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation.(12, 15, 16) Girls from impoverished communities and LGBTI children are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking in Belize.(15, 16) Children in Belize are increasingly being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in areas frequented by tourists or seasonal workers, such as truckers and citrus workers.(17, 18) In 2016, there were no official reports of children being used for pornography; however, several videos depicting people appearing to be children surfaced on social media in Belize.(12) Anecdotal reports also indicate that teenage boys ages 12 through 17 were recruited to transport and sell drugs in Belize City.(12)

While primary and secondary education is tuition-free in Belize, children's access to education is sometimes hindered by the cost of school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and meals.(19-21)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR 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 laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Belize's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

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 (22, 23) |
| 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 (22, 24) |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | Yes | | Article 164 of the Labor Act.(22) |
| Prohibition of Forced Labor | Yes | | Article 8 of the Constitution; Articles 157–158 of the Labor Act (22, 25) |
| 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 (26-28) |

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

| Standard | Meets International Standards: Yes/No | Age | Legislation |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----|--|
| 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 (26-28) |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities | No | | |
| Minimum Age for Military Recruitment | | | |
| State Compulsory | N/A* | | |
| State Voluntary | Yes | 18 | Article 16 of the Defence Act (29) |
| Non-state Compulsory | No | | |
| Compulsory Education Age | Yes | 14 | Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act (19, 30) |
| Free Public Education | Yes | | Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act (19, 30) |

* No conscription (31)

Belizean law does not conform to international standards since it sets the minimum age for employment at 12 years old.(22, 32) However, the minimum legal age for work in wholesale or retail trade or business is 14.(23) 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.(22) 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.(22, 24) A list of hazardous work prohibited for all children has not been adopted as law.(18, 33)

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.(26, 27) However, consensual sex with a child age 16 or 17 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.(17, 18, 26) Research could not determine whether laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.(32)

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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

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.(5, 9, 11) |
| 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.(5, 8, 34) Provide victims with welfare services, including medical and social services and counseling assistance.(11, 35) |
| Belize Police Department (BPD) | Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units.(5, 6, 8) |
| Office of the Director of Public Prosecution | Prosecute criminal offenses, including cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.(36) |

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, labor law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

| Overview of Labor Law Enforcement | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Labor Inspectorate Funding | Unknown* (11) | Unknown* (37) |
| Number of Labor Inspectors | 24 (11) | 25 (12) |
| Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties | Unknown | Yes (38) |
| Training for Labor Inspectors | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | Unknown | Yes (38) |
| Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor | N/A (11) | N/A (12) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (11) | Yes (38) |
| Number of Labor Inspections | Unknown* (11) | Unknown* (12) |
| Number Conducted at Worksite | Unknown* (11) | Unknown* (12) |
| Number Conducted by Desk Reviews | Unknown* (11) | 0(12) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations Found | Unknown | 0 (12) |
| Number of Child Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed | Unknown | 0 (12) |
| Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected | Unknown | 0 (12) |
| Routine Inspections Conducted | Yes (9) | Yes (12) |
| Routine Inspections Targeted | Yes (9) | Yes (12) |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted | Yes (9) | Yes (12) |
| Unannounced Inspections Conducted | Unknown | Yes (12) |
| Complaint Mechanism Exists | Yes (9) | Yes (12) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services | Yes (11) | Yes (12) |

* The Government does not publish this information.

In 2016, the Labor Department employed 25 inspectors in 10 offices throughout the country.(11, 12) The budget allocated to the Labor Department for the reporting period was \$1,289,134, an increase from 2015.(11, 12) Reports indicate that labor inspections in rural and agricultural areas were hampered by a lack of resources, including vehicles and fuel.(9, 39) While the Labor Department is required to visit every business at least once a year, it usually falls short of this goal.(12) In 2016, due to a lack of staff and transportation, the Government was able to conduct less than 25 percent of its proposed inspections.(12)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, criminal law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

| Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Training for Investigators | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | Unknown (11) | Yes (12) |
| Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor | N/A (11) | N/A (12) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (11) | Yes (38) |
| Number of Investigations | Unknown (11) | Unknown |
| Number of Violations Found | Unknown | 0 (12) |
| Number of Prosecutions Initiated | 0 (34) | 0 (12) |
| Number of Convictions | 0 (34) | 2 (15, 16, 40) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services | Yes (11) | Yes (38) |

In 2016, the Belizean judiciary secured the first conviction of child sex trafficking under the 2013 Anti-Trafficking Law, but the judge did not impose jail time.(15) Criminal investigators and police officers lacked sufficient resources—such as vehicles, fuel, office supplies, and adequate training—to effectively investigate violations of criminal law, including the worst forms of child labor.(12, 36)

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 8).

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

| Coordinating Body | Role & Description |
|---|---|
| National Child Labor Committee | 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.(5, 6, 41) The Committee was dormant in 2016.(42) |
| 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.(2, 5, 6, 43) |
| 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.(35) Met quarterly in 2016, and worked on the National Framework for Children and Adolescents (2017–2030).(42) |

The National Child Labor Committee, the Government's lead agency responsible for implementing the National Child Labor Policy, did not convene in 2016.(12, 42) During the reporting period, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council partnered with two NGOs to train 422 teachers on identification of victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, and explain their legal responsibility to report these cases.(16)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (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.(6, 44) Aims to strengthen government institutions and services and train labor officers.(6, 41, 44) |
| 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.(5, 43) |

[‡] The Government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.(16, 45-47)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor[‡]

| Program | Description |
|---|--|
| Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation Program (BOOST) (2011–2016) [†] | Conditional cash transfer initiative to reduce poverty, funded in part by the World Bank. Provides monetary incentives for families that comply with program requirements.(6, 48) Qualifying families must ensure that children ages 5 to 17 maintain an annual school attendance record of 85 percent.(5, 6, 49) In 2016, expanded to include approximately 400 families.(12) |
| USDOL-funded projects | <u>Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues Project (2011–2017)</u> , 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 <u>Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor (CLEAR II)</u> , launched in 2014, a \$7 million dollar capacity-building program to reduce child labor, including its worst forms, and implemented by Winrock International in six countries.(50) Additional information is available on the USDOL Web site . |

[†] Program is funded by the Government of Belize.

[‡] The Government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms.(6, 8, 9, 51)

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Although the Government of Belize has a program to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, research found no evidence that the Government 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.(8)

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 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

| Area | Suggested Action | Year(s) Suggested |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|
| Legal Framework | Ensure the law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children ages 16 and 17. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | Ensure the minimum age for work is 14 in all sectors. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | 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 – 2016 |
| | Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 into non-state armed groups. | 2016 |
| Enforcement | Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations, especially in rural areas. | 2009, 2011 – 2016 |
| | Publish information on enforcement efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, including the number of criminal investigations. | 2009 – 2016 |
| | Publish information on the number of labor inspections conducted, including at work sites and by desk review. | 2015 – 2016 |
| Coordination | Conduct regular meetings of the National Child Labor Committee and develop concrete goals for the committee. | 2015 – 2016 |
| Social Programs | Increase access to education by eliminating fees and providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals. | 2011 – 2016 |
| | Develop programs aimed at reducing the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture. | 2009 – 2016 |

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