

In 2012, Belize made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government enacted a new Trafficking in Persons law, which increases the penalties for offenders to up to 12 years' imprisonment if the victim is a child. The Government also enacted the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Act, which provides all children under the age of 18 with protections from such criminal offenses. The Government, in collaboration with UNICEF, released the results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), quantifying, among other social indicators, the prevalence of child labor within the country. It continues to implement the National Child Labor Policy and programs such as Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST) that focus on poverty alleviation and promote education. Despite these advancements, Belize has not formally adopted a list of hazardous occupations, and labor inspectors still lack the resources to enforce child labor laws adequately. Children in Belize continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in dangerous activities within the agricultural sector and commercial sexual exploitation.



Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate		110.4

Sources:

Primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2013.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Some children in Belize are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in dangerous activities within the agricultural sector and commercial sexual exploitation.(3-7) Children work in agriculture after school, on weekends, and during vacations.(3, 8, 9) They harvest bananas, citrus, and sugar.(3, 4, 9) Children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads, and apply harmful pesticides.(6, 7)

Children in Belize are also victims of commercial sexual exploitation and forced prostitution.(3, 5, 10) Limited evidence suggests that some poor families, in an effort to cover schooling and basic living expenses, push their daughters to provide sexual favors in exchange for gifts and money.(5) Child sex tourism is also a problem in Belize. Children are trafficked into the country for sexual exploitation.(3, 5, 10-12)

The recent MICS 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.(13) The rates are 12.1 percent and 4.8 percent, respectively. Additionally, males were found to work at higher rates than females for both age groups.(13) Children who were involved in child labor are more likely to be found working in rural areas than in urban ones.(13) This data was not analyzed prior to the release of this report and is not included in the data table.

In urban areas, there are reports of children working on the streets, but specific information on hazards is unknown.(5)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Act of Belize sets the minimum age for work at 14, although children ages 12 to 13 may engage in light work.(14) The Act also prohibits employment of children under the age

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of 15 on a maritime vessel. The Families and Children Act prohibits engagement in hazardous work for those under the age of 18.(15) Although the 2009 National Child Labor Policy identified a list of hazardous occupations that young workers should not be engaged in, the Government of Belize has yet to formally adopt this list into law.(9, 16, 17)

International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

The Belizean Constitution prohibits forced labor.(18) Belizean law prohibits the voluntary or compulsory recruitment of children under age 18 into military service.(19)

This reporting period, 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. The new Trafficking Act prescribes punishments from one to eight 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.(20, 21) The Government also passed a Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibitions) Act that protects all children under the age of 18 from such exploitation, including prostitution.(22). These Acts, along with the Criminal Code, criminalize all forms of child sexual exploitation, including child pornography.(20, 22, 23) However, the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Act contains a clause that allows children ages 16 and 17 to engage in sexual activities in exchange for remuneration, gifts, goods, food, or other

benefits, leaving these children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.(22) Belizean legislation also does not provide a consistent definition of a “child.” The Labor Act defines a child as a person who is under the age of 14, while the Criminal Code includes varying ages, which has led to ambiguity when enforcing legislation.(14, 23, 24)

The Education Act of 2010 establishes free and compulsory education until the age of 15.(25) In practice, however, schools are allowed to charge fees and parents must pay for textbooks, uniforms, and meals. These expenses, coupled with the lack of transportation and few trained teachers, hinder access to education.(12, 25, 26) More than 50 percent of primary school educators do not have teaching qualifications.(26) To ensure that children of compulsory age stay in school, the Education and Training Act of 2010 authorizes school community liaison officers to visit homes and inquire about the attendance of children who are not consistently present.(4, 27) Truancy officers are also authorized to enforce the provisions within the Act and prosecute those in violation.(27)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) coordinates efforts to combat child labor, including the implementation of the National Child Labor Policy. It is led by the Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Rural Development (MOL) and is made up of 15 government and civil society members.(4, 9, 17) The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee is led by the Vice Minister of Human Development and Social Transformation and includes 12 other government agencies and civil society organizations.(4, 9, 24, 28)

The MOL conducts labor inspections and enforces labor legislation. It currently operates on a budget of \$800,000 and has 25 labor inspectors in 10 offices throughout the country.(9) All labor inspectors received child labor training this reporting period.(9) The MOL mandates that labor officers’ conduct a minimum of four inspections per week and approximately 2,000 inspections a year. However, the actual rate of inspections is lower than the mandate.(4) This is primarily due to resource constraints, including a lack of vehicles and engagement in other required duties, such as investigating violations in work permits and unfair dismissals.(4, 9) No information is available on the actual number of inspections conducted, the cases that involved child labor, or the number of children found working illegally.(4)

The Department of Human Services (DHS) of the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, the Belize Police Department, and other members of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee enforce legislation on human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. The Sexual Offense and Family Violence units of the Police Department conduct investigations of these crimes.(4, 9) The Government has continued to implement the CARE Model, an operational protocol established to coordinate protection, care, and monitoring of sexually exploited and trafficked children. The protocol outlines the role of the DHS and the police in receiving allegations of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, making referrals to other agencies for services, and protecting the children from future exploitation.(4, 28)

During the reporting period, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions convicted two individuals on human trafficking charges. These separate cases involved the commercial sexual exploitation of two female child victims.(29-31)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government continues to implement the National Child Labor Policy of 2009. Developed with the principal objective of establishing a rights-based framework to eradicate child labor, its priority areas include strengthening current child labor laws, as well as creating new legislation to address existing gaps and provide academic assistance to former and current child laborers.(9, 17) It also aims to train labor officers on how to identify and provide care to child laborers, raise awareness and increase advocacy efforts, and strengthen government institutions and social services to address and monitor child labor.(9, 17) The NCLC, responsible for the implementation of the National Child Labor Policy, drafted child labor legislation in 2011. The legislation remains in the Solicitor General's Office, awaiting legal review, and the NCLC is currently drafting a strategic plan that is under review by committee members.(4, 9, 17)

The Government also continued to implement the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004-2015). It prioritizes actions in the areas of education, health, and child protection.(9, 13, 32) Within this framework, addressing child labor, including the worst forms of child labor, is identified as a strategic objective. The plan calls for the revision of current child labor legislation, the development of protocols to improve interagency coordination, increasing institutional capacity

to enforce legislation, strengthening child labor prevention programs, and carrying out awareness-raising campaigns.(32)

In 2011, Belize developed a comprehensive strategy plan to promote economic growth and improve national well-being. Building upon the National Poverty Elimination Action Plan (2007-2011), the National Development Framework, Horizon 2030, recognizes education as a basic human right. It sets as a goal, among other national priorities, providing all children with access to quality education through secondary school.(33, 34) The Ministry of Education (MOE) established the Early Childhood Development Policy to promote the rights of children, from conception to age 8, and provide support to all primary caregivers.(35) The policy aims to develop innovative programs that target families of child laborers, particularly those engaged in the worst forms of child labor, and ensure those children stay in school.(35)

The MOE has also been working closely with the Caribbean Development Bank and several educational stakeholders to transform the education system. This collaboration has resulted in the MOE producing the Belizean Education Sector Strategy (2011-2016).(36) With an overarching goal of "improving the quality and accessibility of education," the Belizean Education Sector Strategy will focus on ensuring every child commences school ready to learn, increasing retention rates and years of actual attendance, and investing in comprehensive teacher training.(36) The impact of this strategy on the worst forms of child labor does not appear to have been studied.

During the reporting period, the Government of Belize worked closely with UNICEF to release a MICS. The study provides comprehensive information on a wide range of social indicators as they relate to the children and women in Belize, including the child labor rate.(13) The survey finds that of all children in Belize between the ages of 5 and 14, 10 percent are engaged in child labor. However, the survey did not specify the specific employment sector in which such engagement occurs, and the data was not available for formal analysis and thus it is excluded from the chart above.(13)

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Belize has maintained its previous efforts of raising awareness on the worst forms of child labor, assisting victims of child commercial sexual exploitation as well as supporting local NGOs that focus their work in these areas.(4, 9, 11, 28, 37)

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In December 2011, the country began participating in a 4-year global project to combat child labor. Funded by USDOL, the project will support child labor survey activities.(38) The Government also participated in a 2-year, \$250,000 USDOS-funded initiative to address human trafficking in 2011 and 2012. Since implementation of the project, more than 5,000 Belizean officials and local civilians have been trained on how to identify cases of human trafficking, provide protection to the victims, and help prosecute the traffickers.(39, 40) One of the initiatives within the project was the July 2012 launch of an educational media outreach campaign to be carried out by the IOM in partnership with Belize's Anti-Trafficking Committee. The goal is to raise awareness about human trafficking within the country.(40) Research has not identified any other government program or initiative designed to address the other worst forms of child labor, such as agriculture.

During the reporting period, the Government continued to implement the Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST) program, funded in part by the World Bank, to help combat national poverty. The initiative provides monetary incentives for families who comply with program requirements.(9, 41) Families must ensure that their children, ages 5 to 17, maintain an annual attendance record of at least 85 percent, and all immunizations must be administered for children ages 5 and under.(4, 9, 41, 42) To date, the program has reached about 6 percent of all Belizean poor households, and 97.3 percent of the participants attend

school.(42) In 2012, the Government of Belize expanded the BOOST program to provide higher payouts to boys in an effort to lower the rate of male dropouts.(9) While the program has a high rate of school attendance among beneficiaries, it has not reached many Belizeans in need.

The Government's Primary School Completers Program continued to be implemented in the Southern region of Belize. Launched in 2009, this initiative is meant to increase school enrollment by providing families with cash subsidies contingent upon the children completing their primary education.(9, 43) Despite these efforts, 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 people largely reside, these rates reach even higher levels.(41, 44, 45)

In 2012, the Government allocated more than 25 percent of the national budget to education, continuing its previous efforts of expanding national access to secondary schooling, improving teacher training, and providing comprehensive early childhood education. It continues to implement the training program for teachers in rural areas and the certification program for primary education teachers.(4, 9, 36, 46, 47) The \$1.2 million project, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank to comprehensively improve the Belizean teaching force, is also still operational.(48) Research was unable to uncover the impact these programs have had on child labor.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Belize:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Adopt the list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children.	2009, 2011, 2012
	Adopt draft legislation that provides a uniform definition of a child.	2011, 2012
Coordination and 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, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient time and resources to conduct labor inspections.	2009, 2011, 2012
Policies	Increase access to education by eliminating all fees as well as providing transportation and school materials.	2011, 2012
	Conduct research to determine the sectoral prevalence of the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2010, 2011, 2012

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Policies	Assess the impact that the Education Sector Strategy has had on the worst forms of child labor.	2012
Social Programs	Develop programs aimed at reducing the worst forms of child labor, including agriculture.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Expand current anti-poverty programs such as the BOOST program to meet the current need.	2011, 2012
	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

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