

In 2014, Belize made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government provided training on child labor issues to law enforcement agencies, and developed a new program to train officials on its trafficking in persons and commercial sexual exploitation legislation, passed in 2013. However, children in Belize are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture, and 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. Belize does not set a minimum age of 14 for work for all sectors, and the country lacks a list of hazardous occupations that are prohibited for children. In addition, the Government does not appear to have programs that aim to reduce child labor in agriculture, a sector in which it remains prevalent.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Belize are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of trafficking.(1-4) The 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with the Government, found that child labor is more prominent in children ages 5 to 11 than in children ages 12 to 14, and that child labor was more prevalent in rural areas.(5, 6) 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, 2015.(7)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4, 2011.(8)

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	Harvesting bananas, citrus fruits, and sugarcane (2, 3, 6, 9-11)
Services	Street vending (10)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4, 11, 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 vending are reported to often take place in the company of parents.(3, 10, 11) Some reports indicate that some children working in the agricultural sector may be vulnerable to human trafficking or forced labor.(1, 4) Children's access to education is sometimes hindered when schools charge fees and where parents must pay for textbooks, uniforms, and meals.(12-14)




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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).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	12	Articles 54, 164, and 169 of the Labor Act; Articles 2-3 of the Shops Act (15, 16)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	14	Articles 2 and 7 of the Families and Children Act; Articles 2 and 164 of the Labor Act (15, 17)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 8 of the Constitution; Articles 157-158 of the Labor Act (15, 18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 11-14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2013; Article 9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act, 2013; Articles 49-51 of the Criminal Code (19-21)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 2, 11, and 13-14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2013; Articles 2-9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act, 2013; Articles 49-51 of the Criminal Code (19-21)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Article 16 of the Defence Act (22)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act (13, 23)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act (13, 23)

* No conscription (24)

Article 169 of the Labor Act sets the general minimum age of employment at 12 years, which does not conform to international standards.(15, 25) However, Article 3(1) of the Shops Act, sets the minimum age at 14 for work in wholesale or retail trade or business.(16)

Belizean law is not consistent with international standards regarding hazardous work. Under Article 164 of the Labor Act, children under the age of 14 are prohibited from working in industrial undertakings.(15) Article 2 of the Labor Act defines industrial undertakings to include activities such as mining, manufacturing, and construction.(15) While Article 7 of the Families and Children Act prohibits children under the age of 18 from being employed or engaged in any activity that may be detrimental to

the child's health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development, Belizean law is silent on which activities these might be and this Article is subject to the Labor Act which explicitly permits children over the age of 14 to work in industrial undertakings. (17) Research therefore determined that Belizean law lacks a list of comprehensive activities prohibited to all children under 18.

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act and the Criminal Code prohibit all forms of child sexual exploitation, including child pornography. (20, 21) However, Article 3(2) of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act permits consensual sex with a child ages 16 and 17, where a person gives or promises remuneration, gifts, goods, food, or other benefits. This provision leaves these children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (20, 26, 27)

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) Although Article 70 of the Education and Training Act and Article 45 of the Education Act make primary and secondary education tuition-free in Belize, schools may charge fees with the approval of the Chief Education Officer. (13, 23)

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 through its Labor Department. (9, 11)
Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation's Department of Human Services (DHS)	Receive referrals regarding child labor cases and train immigration officials, labor inspectors, and the Belize Police Department in making referrals. (3, 9) Provide welfare services for victims, including medical and social services. (29)
Belize Police Department (BPD)	Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through its Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units. (3, 6, 9)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecution	Prosecute criminal offenses, including cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. (30)

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

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Labor Department employed 26 labor inspectors, which was the same number of inspectors employed in 2013. These inspectors operated in 10 offices throughout the country. (3, 11) All of the inspectors received training on labor inspections, including on child labor issues, from the Labor Commissioner. (11) The budget allocation for the Labor Department for the reporting period was approximately \$765,000, although the exact amount dedicated to labor inspections was not publicly available. (29)

Labor inspectors conduct routine and complaint-driven labor inspections. Reports indicate that labor inspections in rural, agricultural areas were hampered by a lack of resources, including vehicles and fuel. (11) The Labor Department reported that approximately 1,800 labor inspections were conducted during the reporting period. However, information on the different sectors and geographic areas in which they were performed was not publicly available. (11, 31) The Labor Department did not report any child labor violations during the reporting period. As a result, it reported that there were no children removed from child labor, fines issued, or penalties assessed. (11)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Labor Department, including its 26 labor inspectors, enforced criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor in coordination with the Belize Police Department (BPD). (11) During the reporting period, the BPD increased the number of police officers it assigned to investigate human trafficking from one to three officers. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecution continued to employ nine criminal investigators, a number reported to be insufficient to effectively investigate all criminal offenses in the country, including the worst forms of child labor. (30)

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During the reporting period, training on human trafficking issues was provided to 258 government officials, which included labor inspectors, immigration officials, and social workers.(30) In late 2014, the Ministry of Human Development and the National Committee for Families and Children initiated a program to train labor inspectors and other government officials on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act and the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, both of which were passed in 2013. The training sessions, supported with funding from UNICEF, began in late 2014 and were scheduled to continue into 2015.(11, 29) Reports indicate that criminal investigators and police officers lacked sufficient resources, including a lack of vehicles, to effectively investigate for violations of criminal law, including the worst forms of child labor.(30)

During the reporting period, the Government reported that there were no investigations pursuant to criminal laws on child labor. The Government reported that there were five ongoing investigations into crimes of human trafficking, and one active prosecution; however, it is not known if any of these cases involved children.(11, 30)

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. Led by the MOL and comprised of 14 government and civil society members.(6, 9, 25)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council (ATIP)	Identify and rescue 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 and includes 12 other government agencies and civil society organizations.(4, 6, 9, 32)
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, which includes protections against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the use of children in illicit activities, such as drug trafficking.(29)

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 children who have been or who are currently engaged in child labor.(6, 33) Promotes awareness and advocacy efforts, strengthening of government institutions and services, and training of labor officers to identify and provide care to children engaged in child labor.(6, 25, 33)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Strategic Plan of Action (2013–2015)	Charts a human rights, victim-centered approach to human trafficking that focuses on prevention, protection, and prosecution. Developed in 2012 in cooperation with the IOM; defines the roles and responsibilities of the ATIP Council's constituent members.(4)
CARE Model	Coordinates protection, care, and monitoring of sexually exploited and trafficked children. Outlines the role of the DHS and the BPD in receiving allegations of commercial sexual exploitation of children, makes referrals to other agencies for services, and protects children from future exploitation.(9, 32)
National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004–2015)	Calls for the revision of child labor legislation and includes the following three aims: (1) establishing protocols to improve interagency coordination; (2) increasing institutional capacity to enforce legislation; and (3) strengthening child labor prevention programs, including the creation of awareness-raising campaigns. Prioritizes child labor issues, including the worst forms of child labor.(3-6, 34)
National Development Framework, Horizon 2030*	Promotes economic growth and national well-being. Recognizes education as a basic human right and ensures access to quality education through secondary school.(35, 36)
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 ensure those children attend school.(37)
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, the Caribbean Development Bank, and other educational stakeholders.(38)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

In September 2014, Belize participated in the First Meeting of the Working Groups of the XVIII Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor, to foster continued cooperation on labor issues throughout the Americas, including on the exchange of information on policies and programs that seek to formalize the informal sector. Specific discussions were held on strategies for the prevention and elimination of child labor.(39, 40)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Belize funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. The Government has other programs that may have an impact on 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 initiative to reduce poverty, funded in part by the World Bank, that provides monetary incentives for families who comply with program requirements.(6, 41) Families must ensure that children ages 5 to 17 maintain annual school attendance record of 85 percent.(6, 9, 41, 42) Program continued to expand in 2014.(11)
Primary School Completers Subsidy Program*‡	Government education program that increases school enrollment by providing families with cash subsidies contingent upon children completing primary education.(6, 11, 43)
Certification of Primary School Teachers Program*‡	Countrywide teacher training program that improves quality of instruction, school attendance, and completion rates.(6)
Enhancement of the Belize Teaching Force*	\$1.2 million project, financed by the IDB, that trains teachers to improve instruction and increase both school attendance and completion rates.(44)
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.(3, 11)
Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues Project	USDOL project 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, established by the Hague Global Child Labor Conference in 2010. Aims to improve evidence base on child labor through data collection and research.(45)
UNICEF Country Program (2013–2016)*	UNICEF program to advance the rights of children by building institutional capacity to reduce disparities and inequalities, promote early childhood development, and increase educational opportunities. Geographic areas of focus include southern Belize and the south side of Belize City.(46)
“Make Your Child Count” Birth Registration Campaign*	UNICEF project that encourages parents to register children at birth to facilitate their access to education and health benefits.(11)

* 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.(3)

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
Legal Framework	Ensure the law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation with children ages 16 and 17.	2013 – 2014
	Ensure the minimum age for work is 14 in all sectors.	2013 – 2014
	Adopt a list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children and ensure that all children under the age of 18 are prohibited from engaging in hazardous work.	2009 – 2014

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as drug trafficking.	2013 – 2014
Enforcement	Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations.	2009, 2011 – 2014
	Make information publicly available on enforcement efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, including the number of complaints, criminal investigations, convictions, and penalties.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure that law enforcement officers receive the scheduled training on the new laws on trafficking in persons and commercial sexual exploitation.	2013 – 2014
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into national education and development policies.	2012 – 2014
Social Programs	Increase access to education by eliminating all fees as well as providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals.	2011 – 2014
	Develop new programs aimed at reducing the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture.	2009 – 2014
	Assess the impact that current government programs that aim to increase access to secondary education, improve teacher training, and provide comprehensive early childhood education have on the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2014

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