



# BELIZE

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Belize made moderate advancement in its efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Belize joined the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor and became the 31st member state in the initiative, which has the goal of eradicating and preventing the worst forms of child labor. Belize also extended free high school education to 1,600 students from economically vulnerable communities located in the poorest and the most gang and crime-affected areas. In addition, the government assisted nearly 8,000 adults and children from underserved communities in obtaining their birth certificates, which are necessary for accessing education and social services. The government also conducted an outreach campaign to raise awareness and sensitivity to child labor, signing several memoranda of understanding with associations of sugarcane producers and citrus growers. However, despite these efforts, Belize does not meet international standards on the prohibition of hazardous work because children over age 14 are permitted to work in dangerous activities. In addition, Belize has not adequately prohibited the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.

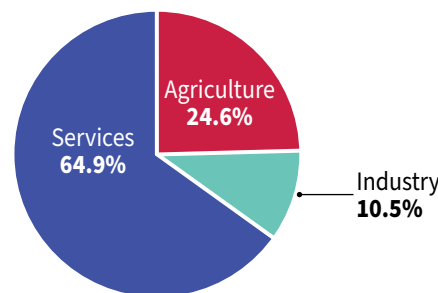


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	1.6% (1,405)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	94.5%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	1.2%

### Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Belize are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in illicit activities, such as the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and contraband goods. Children also engage in dangerous tasks in agriculture, construction, and the fishing industry.

### Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



#### Agriculture

Farming, including sowing, planting, weeding, maintaining farmland, harvesting, and clearing for bananas, citrus fruits, and sugarcane; fumigating with herbicides and insecticides; and operating machinery, including tractors, vehicles, and small planes. Butchering and raising livestock. Fishing, diving to clear snagged nets, and using sharp tools.



#### Industry

Construction, forestry, and lumber, including carrying heavy loads, carpentry, masonry, wood carving, and working in sawmills. Operating power tools without proper training and supervision, and working at dangerous heights without safety harnesses. Quarrying, including operating machinery. Building and repairing fishing vessels, utilizing dangerous chemicals and other substances.



#### Services

Street, wholesale, and retail vending. Yard work, including using lawnmowers, weed eaters, and machetes. Domestic work, including cleaning and providing childcare services. Food services, including cooking, using large mixers, and grilling. Working in the tourist sector, including in food and alcohol services and hospitality, and as tour guides, maintenance personnel, and security guards. Working in auto repair, including as workshop mechanics and repairing tires. Welding. Transportation, including working as bus attendants, collecting fares, carrying heavy loads, and pumping gas.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor<sup>‡</sup>

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in food services. Use in illicit activities, such as the trafficking of drugs, weapons, contraband goods, and engagement in theft, burglary, and assault.

<sup>‡</sup> Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor per se under Article 3(a)-(c) of ILO C. 182.



## SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Belize's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### Legal Framework

Ensure that the law's light work provisions specify the activities in which light work may be undertaken by children.

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.

Criminally prohibit giving or promising remuneration or other benefits to children aged 16 or 17 for the purpose of carrying out a sexual activity with that child, regardless of whether the person is in a relationship with the child.

Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.

Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.

### Enforcement

Publish complete information on enforcement efforts to address child labor, including labor inspectorate funding.

Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources, including vehicles, fuel, and inspectors to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations, including in rural areas and in close cooperation with the Anti-Trafficking Police Unit.

Ensure that inspections are conducted in all sectors most at risk for child labor, including mining, quarrying, and domestic work.

Conduct inspections and provide social welfare in at-risk communities, including Mennonite communities.

Ensure that courts have sufficient personnel, including judges, to hear and try human trafficking cases in a timely manner.

Prosecute and impose criminal penalties for the worst forms of child labor, including for government officials.

Improve transparency regarding the status of child labor complaints that are being investigated.

### Social Programs

Conduct a comprehensive national survey on children's work activities to determine whether children are engaged in or at risk of involvement in the worst forms of child labor, to inform policies and programs.

Plan and deliver awareness sessions to youth that LGBTQIA+ children are more vulnerable to trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation, highlighting how to report these events and search for help and support. Provide targeted social programs to help and support to LGBTQIA+ youth.

Increase access to education by eliminating fees, improving educational facilities, hiring additional qualified teachers, and providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals.

Plan and deliver educational and awareness-raising campaigns in Mennonite communities on the harm hazardous tasks cause to children, and reasons these tasks should not be fulfilled by children in the future.

Implement programs to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and programs to assist children working in agriculture, fisheries, and construction.

Provide special targeted support to undocumented migrant children and asylum-seekers to prevent child labor exploitation. Provide temporary work authorization documents for asylum-seekers until their case hearings.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

In Belize girls, migrant children from Central America, and LGBTQIA+ persons are most at risk for the worst forms of child labor. Girls and LGBTQIA+ youth are at risk of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Undocumented migrant children and asylum seekers are vulnerable to forced child labor as a result of not having identification documents and work authorizations. Mennonite children are involved in hazardous tasks, such as operating machinery, tractors and small planes, and fumigating with herbicides and insecticides. Minors, especially boys between the ages of 10 and 15, are engaged in illicit activities such as trafficking and selling drugs throughout the country, and weapons in the Belize City area. Gangs also coerce male minors into theft, burglary, assault, and the assassination of members from rival gangs.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Belize lacks an adequate number of qualified teachers, properly equipped facilities, and sufficient supplies. In particular, schools are not furnished with chalk boards, pens, paper, or internet access. Access to education in Belize is also hindered by the cost of school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and meals. Government subsidies toward educational expenses are used by 60 percent of high school students, but subsidies do not fully cover the mentioned fees. For children outside of Belize City, Toledo, and Stann Creek, access to subsidies is not automatic and is conditioned by an application process. As a result of local administrative interference, funds do not always reach all qualifying students. Access to education also may get delayed if children are lacking or missing identification documents.






## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Belize has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Belize’s laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for hazardous work and the identification of hazardous occupations or activities for children, prohibitions related to the use of children in illicit activities, and the prohibition of military recruitment by non-state armed groups.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>14 Years</b>		Articles 2, 54, 164, 169, and 172 of the Labor Act; Articles 2 and 3 of the Shops Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>14 Years</b>		Articles 2 and 7 of the Families and Children Act; Articles 2, 54, 169 and 172 of the Labor Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 8 of the Constitution; Articles 157–158 and 199 of the Labor Act; Articles 2 and 11 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 2–3 and 11 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act; Article 9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 2, 11, 13, and 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
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 16 of the Defense Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	<b>N/A*</b>	

**Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)**

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, <b>14 Years</b>		Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act
Free Public Education		Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act

\* Country has no conscription

While Belizean law sets the minimum legal age for work in wholesale and retail trade or business at age 14, the law is inconsistent with international standards on light work. There is no formal definition of such work, and types of light work permissible for children ages 12 to 14 have not yet been identified. Belizean law is also inconsistent with international standards on hazardous work as children over age 14 may work in industrial undertakings—including activities such as mining, manufacturing, and construction. In addition, although 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. A list of hazardous work prohibited for all children has not been adopted as law. 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 and pornographic performances. However, a person in a consensual relationship with a child over 16 is permitted to give or promise remuneration, goods, food, or other benefits in exchange for the sexual act. This provision leaves children vulnerable to use in prostitution. Belizean law does not contain a prohibition on the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs and firearms.



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient resources to conduct inspections hindered enforcement efforts.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labor, and Local Government:** Enforces child labor laws through its Department of Labor. Coordinates with other agencies on child labor reporting, monitoring, and enforcement activities. In 2023, the Department of Labor conducted a campaign to raise awareness of child labor throughout the country. This campaign reached students, local council members, teachers, farmers, and parents. The campaign was accompanied by a school poster competition on the theme of “Eliminating Child Labor in Belize.” The winner’s poster was produced and installed on a billboard on the George Price Highway. The Department continued conducting labor awareness trainings in 2023. In March, a training workshop gathered stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Development, the Belize Agricultural Health Authority, the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment, the Belize Tourism Industry Association, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council, the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, and ILO. Labor Department technical staff and enforcement officers from various agencies completed a special workplace child labor inspection training. In addition, 465 persons from the private sector attended 35 education workshops organized by the Department that were dedicated to child labor. The Department also signed a memorandum of understanding with associations of sugarcane producers and citrus growers, uniting the efforts in inspections, trainings and increasing sensitivity to the problem.

**Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous People’s Affairs:** Enforces criminal laws through its Department of Human Services and Department of Child Protection regarding forced child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and use of children in illicit activities. Has a case management system, using special software.

## Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	No
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	No

In 2023, 24 labor inspectors conducted 845 worksite inspections and found 0 violations. There were also 11 investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes with 0 prosecutions initiated and 0 perpetrators convicted.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

### Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Belize established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

**National Child Labor Committee (NCLC):** Coordinates efforts among ministries to prevent and eliminate child labor and implement the National Child Labor Policy. Led by the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labor, and Local Government and 14 government and civil society members. It includes the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate, which identifies, coordinates, and reports on all child labor activities. Held three meetings in 2023 to discuss the implementation of inspections and educational initiatives. NCLC also met several times to design National Child Labor Campaign activities in the public and private sectors. In 2023, the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate held a meeting with ILO on access to knowledge exchange and technical support through the ILO Brazil South-South Cooperation Project and met with the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration to discuss multilateral cooperation regarding child labor policies and programs.

### Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Belize established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.

**National Child Labor Policy and Strategy (2022–2025):** Aims to reduce incidence of child labor in Belize and take significant steps to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by 2025. Prioritizes addressing legislative and information gaps, increasing child labor law compliance, reducing barriers to education, and preventing child labor by ensuring adequate support. Includes feedback from 25 entities on the effectiveness of existing policies on child labor for potential improvements, and is funded by ILO, UNICEF, and the Government of Belize. Quarterly meetings on the status of policy implementation will be organized under the National Child Labor Committee, with detailed output and outcome-based reports to be issued at the end of each meeting. Recommends raising both the minimum age for work and the compulsory school age to age 16. In January 2023, a national validation workshop for feedback on the new policy was held, and the final version was published in July, but the report largely relies on data from a 2013 child labor survey, limiting its insights. While the policy contains a detailed list of hazardous work activities and conditions and a light work list, they are not legally enforceable.

**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 Belize Police Department in receiving allegations of commercial sexual exploitation of children and referring children to services. Began in 2020 and was active during the reporting period.

**Amnesty Program:** Offers a path to regularization of their legal status for qualifying undocumented migrants, including children. In February 2023, the government offered an extension to the program through March 31, 2023, for qualified applicants. Nearly 13,500 persons, including dependent children and at least 4 victims of human trafficking, have applied and are waiting for adjudication. Between January and March 2023, 1,803 applications were submitted.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

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

**Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)**

<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>Belize funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate because they do not address the full scope of the problem.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of Belize.</i></p>	<p><b>National Healthy Start Feeding Program:</b> The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology through its Student Welfare Unit funds and coordinates school feeding programs in under-resourced communities. In 2023, 40 primary schools and 9 high schools from across the country participated in the program, which benefited 4,713 primary school students and 2,920 high school students. The participating schools provided one meal daily 5 days per week. Schools received \$1.50 per child per meal to procure food supplies and compensate kitchen staff. The program was funded with assistance from the Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan).</p> <p><b>Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation:†</b> A co-responsibility cash subsidy program for the most vulnerable groups of people meeting several conditions. The conditions include a minimum yearly school attendance rate of 85 percent and immunization and pre-natal screenings for pregnant women. Qualifying applicants receive \$44 cash stipends. The program was suspended in 2020 and temporarily replaced with the ‘grocery-bag’ program. However, the government confirmed its commitment to reimplement the program with some revisions, starting in April 2024.</p>
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For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit [dol.gov/ILABprojects](https://dol.gov/ILABprojects)  
 For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)