

In 2018, Belize made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government drafted legislation to create a hazardous work list and light work framework and created a curriculum for labor inspectors to help identify child workers. The Labor Department appointed a Senior Labor Officer dedicated specifically to child labor and improving interagency coordination. In addition, the government expanded its secondary school subsidy program to serve all rural areas in the country. 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, fishing, and construction. Although Belize made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas during the reporting period, the country's minimum age for work is 12 and does not meet international standards. In addition, the country lacks prohibitions against the use of children in illicit activities. Also, 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, fishing, and construction. (1-3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Belize.

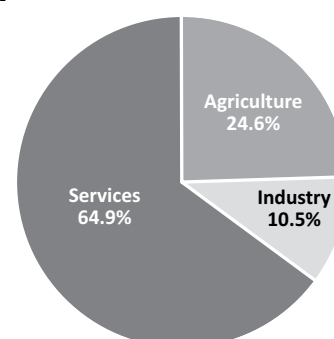
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

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 (%)		103.0

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (4)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from National Child Activity Survey, 2013. (5)

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 (3,6,7,8-11)
	Fishing, including for fish, lobster, and conch (3,6,7)
	Butchering or raising livestock, including poultry and cattle (6,7)
Industry	Construction, carpentry, masonry, wood carving, carrying heavy loads, and using power tools (3,6,7)
	Quarrying, including operating stone crushers (7,8)
Services	Street and retail vending (7)
	Yard work, including using lawnmowers, weed-eaters, and machetes (6,7,12)
	Sewing (7)
	Working and cooking in food service, including using large mixers and grills (3,6,7)

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Work in tourist sector, including in food and alcohol service and hospitality, and as tour guides, maintenance personnel, and security guards. (3)
	Auto repair (6,7)
	Welding (7)
	Pumping gas (6)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,3,8,10,13,14)
	Illicit activities, including trafficking of drugs and weapons (3,7,15)

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

Belize lacks a recent, comprehensive child labor study, which makes it difficult to clearly determine the sectors and activities in which working children are engaged. (3) However, reports suggest that children in rural areas work in the agriculture and fishing industries, and children in urban areas work in the construction and tourist industries. Children work on family-owned farms and accompany adults to employment sites to assist in planting and harvesting. (3)

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. (6,7,12) Non-Mennonite children are also engaged in child labor on Mennonite-owned land. (9) Children working on Mennonite land often use dangerous tools like machetes, tractors, and plows, and work long hours in the sun without proper hydration. (9,12) Limited reporting also indicates that boys working mainly in Mennonite communities may be involved in operating heavy machinery and flying small airplanes to spray crops. (3)

Children in Belize are also engaged in child labor in diving and fishing for fish, lobster, and conch. Many of these children cannot swim or may be involved in swimming at extreme depths, and have been injured working with dangerous tools such as anchors, fish traps, chipping hammers, and spears. (3,7)




Government officials indicate that Belize has a reputation as being a destination for child sexual exploitation, with reports of children being trafficked in areas frequented by tourists or seasonal workers, such as San Pedro, Punta Gorda, and Belize City. (3,14,16) Girls from impoverished communities and LGBTI children are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking in Belize. (14,15,17,16) In 2018, there were reports of girls in Punta Gorda being exploited by family members and made to engage in sexual relationships with American expats, who would reward the families financially. (3) Anecdotal reports also indicate that boys from Belize City and San Pedro were recruited to transport and sell drugs and firearms and commit murders as part of gang warfare. (3,7,12,15)

Primary and secondary education is tuition free in Belize up to age 14, but children’s access to education is sometimes hindered by the cost of school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and meals. (3,15,18-20) In 2018, the government expanded its secondary school subsidy program to serve all rural areas in the country and Punta Gorda, Dangriga, and Corozal, with anecdotal reports indicating that the expansion has resulted in more rural children having access to high school education. (3,21) Still, some Spanish-speaking children in northern districts face language barriers at schools that provide instruction only in English. (9) In addition, Belize lacks qualified teachers, basic supplies, and facilities to educate children. (3,7)

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	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 54 and 169 of the Labor Act (22,24)
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 (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)
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 Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes		Article 16 of the Defence Act (29)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act (18,30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act (18,30)

* No conscription (29)

In 2018, the Government of Belize cooperated with USDOL to launch the Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor II (CLEAR II) project, which was designed to review and amend legislation addressing child labor issues and improve monitoring and enforcement efforts. The project's Legislative Review Committee drafted a hazardous work and light work list and is proposing extending the compulsory education age to age 16, but these efforts are pending ministry- and cabinet-level review and approval. (3)

Belize

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Belizean law does not conform to international standards because it sets the minimum age for employment at age 12. (22) However, the minimum legal age for work in wholesale or retail trade or business is age 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) 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. (22,24) A list of hazardous work prohibited for all children has not been adopted as law. (31,32,33) Furthermore, Belizean law is inconsistent with international standards on light work, because the types of light work permissible for children have not yet been identified. (22,33)

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 children ages 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 children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (31,26) Research could not determine whether laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs. (34,35)

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 and other relevant ministries that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Rural Development	Identifies cases and enforces laws related to child labor and hazardous child labor through its Labor Department. (8,13)
Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, Department of Human Services	Receives referrals for child labor cases; trains immigration officials, labor inspectors, and the Belize Police Department (BPD) in making referrals; and handles human trafficking cases. (10,36) Provides victims with welfare services, including medical and social services and counseling assistance. (8,37)
BPD	Investigates cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units. (10)
Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture	Investigates truancy offenses in schools and issues fines for these violations. (38)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecution	Prosecutes criminal offenses, including cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. (39)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient inspections and penalties to deter child labor violations.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (7)	25 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (40)	Yes (3)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (7)	N/A (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown (7)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (7)	Yes (3)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	970 (3)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (7)	970 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (7)	25 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (7)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (7)	0 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (7)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

The government does not publish information regarding labor inspectorate funding. However, government officials indicate that the level of funding is insufficient and that the inspectorate has a need for more vehicles, fuel, and inspectors. (3) Although the Labor Department is required to visit every business at least once a year, it usually falls short of this goal due to a lack of resources. (3,7) Labor inspectors are able to assess penalties, but the current fine for child labor infractions is only \$13.50. Thus, inspections and penalties may be insufficient to deter child labor violations in Belize. (3,41) Although training is provided to new inspectors, funding is insufficient to address the inspectorate's full need for refresher training on existing laws throughout the year. (3)

In 2018, the labor inspectorate carried out 50 child labor-specific inspections in the Orange Walk and Corozal districts and identified 25 cases of child labor. However, these inspections were limited to the sugarcane industry and did not include other sectors in which children work, such as in tourism, construction, fishing, and commercial sexual exploitation. (3)

In 2018, 16 labor officers, 2 truancy officers, 2 Social Security Board inspectors, 1 immigration inspector, and 2 community police officers participated in a training of trainers workshop as part of the CLEAR II project; this training introduced participants to curriculum on identifying, addressing, and preventing child labor that could then be shared within participants' respective organizations. (3,42) The CLEAR II project also developed a curriculum in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor to guide labor inspectors on how to monitor and enforce child labor laws. (43)

Child labor complaints can be submitted to the Labor Department, the Belize Police Department (BPD), or the Department of Human Services. Limited reporting from local NGOs and the private sector indicates that it is difficult to follow up on the status of complaints made. (3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, criminal law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (7)	No (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (7)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (7)	No (3)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (7)	0 (3)

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	0 (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (7)	0 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	No (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

In 2018, Belize increased its efforts to combat human trafficking. The Ministry of Human Development signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a domestic violence shelter that will house trafficking victims, and the BPD signed an MOU with the Human Trafficking Institute to improve victim identification and support. (2) The government initiated investigations into at least two cases of child sexual exploitation that possibly involved human trafficking and referred five child trafficking victims to social services. (2) The government also provided specialized training to various government representatives on trafficking in persons, including sending various government representatives to the International Law Enforcement Academy's Executive Policy and Development Symposium on Human Trafficking and Model Law in New Mexico, which focused on responding to human trafficking and child exploitation. (2) Belize continued to implement a public awareness campaign on child sex tourism, which includes public service announcements and billboards at the international airport and border crossings. (2)

Despite these efforts, there have been no human trafficking convictions in Belize since 2005, and although the country's laws allow for the imprisonment of violators, trafficking cases are often dismissed by lower courts. (2,44) Belize lacks official statistics on child sex tourism, and 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. (2,12)

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 the efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Labor Committee	Coordinates efforts among 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. (45,46) In 2018, the committee held at least 10 regular meetings. (3)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council	Identifies and rescues human trafficking victims, trains law enforcement officials, and educates 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) In 2018, the Council provided human trafficking training to prison staff as well as immigration personnel. (2)
National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC)	Promotes, monitors, and evaluates Belize's compliance with its national and international commitments to children, including the UN CRC. (37) Implements the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents 2017–2030, also referred to as the Children's Agenda. (11,47,48) In 2018, the Ministry of Labor and NCFC collaborated with municipal governments and UNICEF to host a 2-day event to review provisions and mechanisms outlined in the Children's Agenda. Nine participating mayors signed a memorandum of understanding to express their commitment to implementing the Agenda's initiatives. (49)

In 2018, the Labor Department appointed a Senior Labor Officer dedicated specifically to child labor, who serves as the secretary of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). The appointment has resulted in improved communications from the Labor Department on child labor issues with stakeholders. (3,50)

Although the NCLC was re-activated in 2017 and the committee met regularly in 2018, there is no record of actions or recommendations produced by this committee in 2018. (3,51) Furthermore, limited reporting revealed government concerns that the committee was not functioning properly. (52)

In 2018, the Labor Department collaborated with the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer's Association to study child labor in the sugarcane industry, specifically in the northern Corozal and Orange Walk districts. (3) The study identified 25 cases of child labor, and the Department applied a new approach of education and awareness instead of imposing penalties, because the cases were not considered severe. (3,50) The results of the study were shared with the Ministry of Human Development in late 2018. (53)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including implementation.

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. (54,55) Aims to strengthen government institutions and services and to train labor officers. (45,55)
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. (56)
National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents (Children's Agenda) 2017–2030	Launched in June 2017. (11,47,48) Sets out the government's agenda and priorities to protect the rights of children and adolescents, including in 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) As part of this policy, government ministries received training from UNICEF Belize and private partners in 2018 on how to develop data dashboards that highlight outcomes of the Children's Agenda. (57)

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

Research was unable to identify actions taken during the reporting period under the National Child Labor Policy or the CARE Model.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, 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 the adequacy to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor II (CLEAR II)	\$7 million, USDOL-funded project, implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders in seven countries to build local and national capacity of governments to address child labor. (3) As part of the CLEAR II project, Belize collaborated with USDOL to create the inter-agency Legislative Review Committee, which met regularly in 2018 to review legislative amendments on child labor. The committee has provided an opportunity for greater inter-agency collaboration and cooperation between responsible agencies that previously did not frequently interact or share information. (3,50) 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. (10,13,58)

Research found no evidence of government programs to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children or assist children working in agriculture, fisheries, or construction.

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).

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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 – 2018
	Ensure that the minimum age for work is age 14 in all sectors.	2013 – 2018
	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 – 2018
	Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs.	2013 – 2018
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2018
Enforcement	Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations, especially in rural areas and in areas where children are more vulnerable.	2009 – 2018
	Provide initial and refresher training on the worst forms of child labor to criminal investigators, and ensure that funding is sufficient to implement adequate training systems.	2018
	Ensure that the level of inspections and penalties are sufficient to deter child labor law violations.	2018
	Conduct targeted inspections in sectors in which child labor is known to occur.	2018
	Improve complaint mechanisms so that the case status of labor complaints can be tracked.	2018
	Impose criminal penalties for the worst forms of child labor and ensure that courts hear and try human trafficking cases.	2017 – 2018
	Publish complete information on enforcement efforts to combat child labor, including labor inspectorate funding and the number of criminal investigations.	2015 – 2018
	Prosecute and penalize violations of the worst forms of child labor.	2018
Coordination	Ensure that the National Child Labor Committee is developing and implementing recommendations, and provide oversight to ensure that the committee functions as intended.	2015 – 2018
Government Policies	Ensure that regular actions are taken to implement the National Child Labor Policy and CARE Model.	2018
Social Programs	Conduct a comprehensive study of children's activities to determine whether they are engaged in or at risk for involvement in the worst forms of child labor, to inform policies and programs.	2018
	Increase access to education by eliminating fees, improving educational facilities, hiring additional qualified teachers, providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals, and addressing language barriers for Spanish-speaking students.	2011 – 2018
	Develop programs aimed at reducing child labor, including in agriculture, construction, and fisheries, and that address the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2009 – 2018

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