

Belize

Government Programs and Policies to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Belize has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 2000.²⁸⁷ On November 11, 2000, the Government of Belize announced the launch of a Program to Eliminate Child Labor (PETI) in the Northern District of Corozal, which is the country's primary sugar cane area.²⁸⁸ The project was being implemented by the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse (NOPCA), and is co-sponsored by USAID and the International Service Foundation for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM), a regional organization promoting peace and democracy in Central America.²⁸⁹ PETI included measures to rehabilitate working children and return them to school, and to gather information on social conditions contributing to child labor.²⁹⁰ Before the program announcement, the government had established a National Committee for Families and Children, including a subcommittee to specifically address child labor.²⁹¹ The Government of Belize is completing a national child labor survey, funded by USDOL with technical assistance from ILO-IPEC's SIMPOC, to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the nature and extent of child labor in the country to support effective interventions against child labor.²⁹²

²⁸⁷ ILO-IPEC, *All about IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online] August 13, 2001 [cited October 7, 2002]; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t_country.htm.

²⁸⁸ PETI was a one-year pilot project that, according to Valdemar Castillo, Minister of Labor, Local Government and Sugar Industry, was intended to provide an information base from which all relevant organizations and individuals can work in order to adopt a coordinated approach to the elimination of child labor. PETI staff members interviewed and surveyed families in the Corozal District to collect information, and NOPCA released a report in January 2002. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*, January 2001. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 1245*, November 2000. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2001: Belize*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 2603-05, Section 6d [cited October 7, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/wha/8295.htm>.

²⁸⁹ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 1245*.

²⁹⁰ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 1245*.

²⁹¹ The Committee includes relevant government personnel and representatives from UNICEF, the Pan-American Health Organization, the Belize Family Life Association, and the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*.

²⁹² Through SIMPOC, data has been collected and will be consolidated into a database on child labor. SIMPOC staff has worked with the Belize Central Statistical Office through capacity-building training to enable government officials to independently produce and analyze data in the future. In addition, the data that has been collected will be analyzed to determine priority target groups for future child labor programs. See ILO-IPEC, *March Technical Progress Report: Child Labour Survey and Development of Database on Child Labour in Belize*, CAM/99/05P/051, Geneva, March 18, 2002, 1. See also ILO-IPEC, *June 2002 Status Report: Reporting on the State of the Nation's Working Children: A Statistical Program for Advocacy on the Elimination of Child Labour and the Protection of Working Children in Central America*, Geneva, June 1, 2002.

Since 1988, the government has had a National Apprenticeship Program, which provides young persons (between 14 and 18 years) who are no longer in school with work experience and a stipend.²⁹³ From 1990-2000, the World Bank and the Government of Great Britain supported the Government of Belize in its efforts to improve primary education under UNESCO's Education for All program. These efforts included the expansion of primary school facilities, improvement of teacher education, enhancement of education quality through curriculum development, establishment of a text book loan scheme, and strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Education.²⁹⁴

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 1.9 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Belize were working.²⁹⁵ In rural regions, children are found working on family plots and businesses after school, on weekends and during vacations²⁹⁶ and are involved in the citrus, banana, and sugar industries as field workers.²⁹⁷ In urban areas, children shine shoes, sell newspapers and other small items, and work in markets.²⁹⁸ Teenage girls, many of whom are migrants from neighboring Central American countries, are reported to work as domestic servants, bar maids and

²⁹³ Ramon Puck, "Belize Forced Child Labour" (paper presented at the Americas Regional Forced Child Labour Symposium, Panama, June 25-27, 2001).

²⁹⁴ UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessment: Country Reports- Belize*, prepared by Ministry of Education and Sports, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, 2000, [cited December 13, 2002]; available from http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/belize/rapport_1.htm. Additional education funding in Belize is currently under consideration by the World Bank. See World Bank, *Belize: Education Sector Improvement Project*, PID8661, Washington, D.C., April 26, 2001; available from <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/External/lac/lac.nsf/b4cc0aaec4449633852567d6006ac68c/5511ba2c785bf1c0852567dd005c0d1f?OpenDocument>.

²⁹⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

²⁹⁶ It is common for children to work on family plots or sell family produce after school or on the weekends. Different ethnic communities take varied approaches to child labor. The agrarian-based Mennonite community, for example, shifted its school year so that an extended school vacation would coincide with the harvest. Similarly, the Mayan community has attempted to balance agricultural work and school for its youth. Within the ethnic Chinese immigrant population, children routinely help in family shops and restaurants. According to Belizean labor union leaders, these are not examples of exploitation but rather acceptable aspects of child work tied to the family structure. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*, July 2000.

²⁹⁷ In the past few years, the northern Commercial Free Zone, which caters to cross-border Mexican trade, has developed a booming commercial sector, and children work in trading, transportation, micro-businesses and other sectors. Immigrant and migrant children are particularly susceptible to work in the informal sector and the banana industry. See Puck, "Belize Forced Child Labour". See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Belize*, CRC/C/15/Add.99, United Nations, Geneva, May 10, 1999, 7. The Corozal District is cited as a region with particularly high levels of child labor, with children working in cane farming and as shop assistants and gas attendants. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6d.

²⁹⁸ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

prostitutes.²⁹⁹ In 2000, there were rare reports of child trafficking for purposes of prostitution,³⁰⁰ but in 2001, there were no reports of such activity.³⁰¹

Education in Belize is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 14.³⁰² Education is free, but related expenses, such as uniforms, are a financial strain on poor families.³⁰³ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 113 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 99.4 percent.³⁰⁴ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Belize.³⁰⁵ While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.³⁰⁶

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Law sets the minimum age for employment at 12 years of age. Children between the ages of 12 to 14 years may only participate in light work that is not harmful to life, health or education. In addition, children between 12 and 14 years may work only after school hours on a school day, between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on any day, and for a total of two hours on a school day or a Sunday.³⁰⁷ The Labor Law applies to all employment in the formal sector, but not to self-employment or employment by family members.³⁰⁸ The minimum age for employment near hazardous machinery is 17 years.³⁰⁹ The Labor Law sets penalties for non-compliance with minimum age standards at USD 20 or two months imprisonment for the first offense, and in the case of subsequent offenses, at USD 50 or four months imprisonment.³¹⁰ The Ministry of Education investigates complaints of children not attending school and minor forms of child labor.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2000: Belize*, Washington, D.C., February 2001, Section 6f [cited December 26, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/wha/708.htm>.

³⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6f.

³⁰² *Belize Education Act*, Chapter 36, (April 24, 1991), [cited December 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.belizelaw.org>. After children finish their primary education, they may enter a secondary school, the government-run apprenticeship program, or a vocational institution. However, these programs have room for only about half of the children finishing primary school, and competition for spaces in secondary school is intense. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2601-03, Section 5.

³⁰³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2601-03, Section 5.

³⁰⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

³⁰⁵ According to the country's Central Statistics Office, in the 1990s, 46 percent of children did not complete primary school. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2601-03, Section 5.

³⁰⁶ For a more detailed description on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

³⁰⁷ Government of Belize, *Labour Act*, Chapter 297, (December 31, 2000), Section 169 [cited December 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.belizelaw.org/lawadmin/index2.html>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6d.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

³⁰⁹ Inspectors from the Departments of Labor and Education enforce this regulation. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6d.

³¹⁰ *Labour Act*, Section 172.

In addition, NOPCA receives complaints on the worst forms of child labor and refers them to the Department of Human Services and the Police. Cases are reported on a minimal basis, however.³¹¹

In 1998, Belize passed the Family and Children's Act, which consolidated previous legislation regarding the protection of children in the formal sector. According to the Act, children (defined as persons below 18 years of age) are prohibited from employment in activities that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development.³¹² Forced and bonded labor are prohibited in Belize.³¹³ In general, the government effectively enforces this prohibition.³¹⁴

Although trafficking in persons is not illegal according to national law, the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Civil Society, the police department, and the Ministry of National Security and Immigration investigate cases involving trafficking of children, and the Ministry of Immigration participates in investigations of cases involving migrant children.³¹⁵ The Criminal Code prohibits procuring a female for prostitution or operating a brothel.³¹⁶

The Government of Belize ratified both ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on March 6, 2000.³¹⁷

³¹¹ Wendel D.J. Parham, Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Sugar Industry of Belize, letter to USDOL official, September 9, 2002.

³¹² Government of Belize, *Families and Children Act, 1998*, (July 8, 1998), 91-173 [cited December 13, 2002]; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/natlexnewfaceE.htm>.

³¹³ *Constitution of Belize, 1981*, Article 8(2) [cited October 10, 2002]; available from <http://www.georgetown.edu/LatAmerPolitical/Constitutions/Belize/belize.html>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6d

³¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2001: Belize*, 2603-05, Section 6d.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2603-05, Section 6f.

³¹⁶ Government of Belize, *Criminal Code*, Articles 47-48 [cited December 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org/main1.htm>.

³¹⁷ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited December 13, 2002]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.