

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

The Government of Belize has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 2000.³⁵⁷ The government has also established a National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC). The committee is responsible for monitoring the National Plan of Action for Children and includes a subcommittee on child labor.³⁵⁸ The 1998 Lima Accord has led to regional and national plans incorporating children's issues.³⁵⁹ Belize recently established a National Task Force to combat trafficking.³⁶⁰ In 2003, the government released the results of a national child labor survey, funded by USDOL with technical assistance from ILO-IPEC's SIMPOC.³⁶¹

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 textbook loan scheme, and strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Education.³⁶²

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2001, a Child Activity Survey conducted by government's Central Statistical Office estimated that 14 percent of children ages 5 to 17 are economically active in Belize.³⁶³ The agricultural industry constitutes the largest employer of child workers, followed by work in community, social, and personal services (such as domestic work), retail and repair, construction, tourism, and manufacturing.³⁶⁴ Seventy-five percent of economically active children are found in rural regions,³⁶⁵ where they work after school, on weekends and during vacations on family

³⁵⁷ ILO-IPEC, *All about IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online database] August 13, 2003 [cited August 14, 2003]; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t_country.htm.

³⁵⁸ Hon. Dolores Balderamos-Garcia, Minister of Human Development, Women and Children and Civil Society, Statement at the UN Special Session on Children, May 10, 2002; available from <http://www.un.org/ga/children/belizeE.htm>. The National Plan of Action for Children was incorporated into the National Plan of Action for Human development for Belize in 1996. The NCFC includes relevant government personnel, and representatives from local and international organizations. See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record*, CRC/C/SR.511, prepared by Government of Belize, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1999, Points 21 and 26; available from <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/ed3cd328722362598025675a00353633?Opendocument>. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 773*, August 2003.

³⁵⁹ UNICEF is assisting with the implementation of the national plan in Belize. See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record*, Point 27.

³⁶⁰ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 226598*, August 2003.

³⁶¹ SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Statistical Report*, ILO, 2003; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/simpoc/belize/report/be_natl.pdf.

³⁶² 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; available from http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/belize/rapport_1.htm.

³⁶³ SIMPOC and Belize, *Child Labour in Belize*, xviii. Although released in 2003, the survey was conducted in 2001.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Thirty percent of economically active children live in the Toledo district. See *Ibid.*

plots and businesses³⁶⁶ and are involved in the citrus, banana, and sugar industries as field workers.³⁶⁷ In urban areas, children shine shoes, sell newspapers and other small items, and work in markets.³⁶⁸ Teenage girls, many of whom have migrated from neighboring Central American countries, are reported to work as domestic servants, barmaids and prostitutes.³⁶⁹ No instances of forced child labor were reported in 2002,³⁷⁰ and there were few confirmed cases of trafficking in children for the purpose of prostitution.³⁷¹ However, the practice of selling female children to older men for sexual purposes has been noted to occur throughout the country.³⁷²

Education in Belize is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 15.³⁷³ Primary education is free, but related expenses, such as uniforms and books, are a financial strain on poor families.³⁷⁴ In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate was 128.1 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 100.1 percent.³⁷⁵ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Belize. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.³⁷⁶ Results from the Child Activity Survey indicate that 47 percent of economically active children do not attend school.³⁷⁷

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 and 14 may only participate in light work that is not harmful to life, health or education. In addition, children between

³⁶⁶ Different ethnic communities take varied approaches to child labor. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*, July 2000. 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*, January 2001.

³⁶⁷ Children work in trading, transportation, micro-businesses and other sectors in the northern Commercial Free Zone, which caters to cross-border Mexican trade. Immigrant and migrant children are particularly susceptible to work in the informal sector and the banana industry. See Ramon Puck, "Belize Forced Child Labour" (paper presented at the Americas Regional Forced Child Labour Symposium, Panama, June 25-27, 2001). See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, prepared by Government of Belize, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, May 10, 1999, 7. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Belize*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18320.htm>.

³⁶⁸ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. A study on sex trafficking commissioned in 2001 by the National Committee for Families and Children and UNICEF found that 35 percent of those working in the sex industry were under 18 years old, with the youngest being 13. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 6f. The study was conducted with assistance from Casa Alianza-Costa Rica and OAS, also based in Costa Rica. See National Committee for Families and Children, *Sexual Exploitation*, The Ministry of Human Development, Women and Civil Society, 2001; available from http://www.belize.gov.bz/cabinet/d_balderamos_garcia/issue1/page6.htm.

³⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 6c.

³⁷¹ Ibid., Section 6f. Belize is considered to be a destination country for trafficking for sexual exploitation. Despite the lack of prosecutions, government representatives, and consulates have confirmed cases of trafficking in women and children from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. See International Human Rights Law Institute, *In Modern Bondage: Sex Trafficking in the Americas*, DePaul University College of Law, Chicago, October 2002, 3; available from http://www.law.depaul.edu/institutes_centers/ihrl/pdf/full_document.pdf. Internal trafficking of girls also occurs. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Belize*, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., June 11, 2003; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21275.htm>.

³⁷² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 5, 6f.

³⁷³ Government of Belize, *Education Act*, Chapter 36, (April 24, 1991), [cited August 13, 2003]; available from <http://www.belize.gov.bz/lawadmin/index2.html>. Children may enter a secondary school, the government-run apprenticeship program, or a vocational institution after completing primary education. However, admission to these programs is highly competitive, as they only have space for about half of the children finishing primary school. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 5.

³⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 5.

³⁷⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

³⁷⁶ For a more detailed description on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

³⁷⁷ SIMPOC and Belize, *Child Labour in Belize*, xviii.

12 and 14 years may work only after school hours and for a total of 2 hours on a school day or Sunday; they may work between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on any day.³⁷⁸ The Labor Law applies to all employment in the formal sector, but not to self-employment or employment by family members.³⁷⁹ The minimum age for employment near hazardous machinery is 17 years.³⁸⁰ The Labor Law sets penalties for non-compliance with minimum age standards at USD 20 or 2 months imprisonment for the first offense, and in the case of subsequent offenses, at USD 50 or 4 months imprisonment.³⁸¹ Forced and bonded labor are prohibited in Belize.³⁸²

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.³⁸³

In 2003, Belize enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act.³⁸⁴ Traffickers can also be prosecuted under immigration laws, and the Criminal Code, which prohibits procuring a female for sexual exploitation in or outside of Belize.³⁸⁵

Inspectors from the Departments of Labor and Education enforce labor regulations.³⁸⁶ However, despite the addition of seven new labor officers in 2001, senior officials indicate that they do not have enough staff to monitor every farm and shop in the country.³⁸⁷ The Ministry of Education investigates complaints of truancy and minor forms of child labor. The NOPCA receives complaints on the worst forms of child labor and refers them to the Department of Human Services and the Police.³⁸⁸ The Family Services Division in the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Children, and Civil Society, the police and immigration officials investigate trafficking cases involving children.³⁸⁹

The Government of Belize ratified both ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on March 6, 2000.³⁹⁰

³⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*. See as Government of Belize, *Labour Act*, Chapter 297, (December 31, 2000), Section 160-69 [cited October 8, 2003]; available from <http://www.belizelaw.org/lawadmin/index2.html>. The Ministry of Labor is working to update its laws with assistance from the ILO's Caribbean Office. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 773*.

³⁷⁹ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

³⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 6d. However, children may engage in electrical work at the age of 14. See UNICEF, *Child Labour: At what age? in State of the World's Children*, UNICEF, Geneva, 1997.

³⁸¹ *Labour Act*, Section 172.

³⁸² *Constitution of Belize*, (1981), Article 8(2); available from <http://www.georgetown.edu/LatAmerPolitical/Constitutions/Belize/belize.html>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 6d.

³⁸³ Government of Belize, *Families and Children Act*, (July 8, 1998), 91-173; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/natlexnewfaceE.htm>.

³⁸⁴ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 226598*.

³⁸⁵ The government amended its Immigration Act to include penalties for trafficking in illegal immigrants. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Belize*. The Criminal Code proscribes a 5-year sentence for the crime of procuring a female for prostitution either inside or outside Belize. See Criminal Code, Chapter 101, Section 18(1), 49-50 as cited in International Human Rights Law Institute, *In Modern Bondage*, 155-66. See also ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited August 13, 2003]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.

³⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Section 6d.

³⁸⁷ U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 773*.

³⁸⁸ Chief Executive Officer Ministry of Labor, Local Government, and Sugar Industry, letter to USDOL official, September 9, 2002. However, Belize does not have legal tools to specially address laws and regulations against the worst forms of child labor. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 773*.

³⁸⁹ Immigration officials handled a majority of the suspected trafficking cases. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2002: Belize*, Sections 5 and 6d.

³⁹⁰ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*