

# Belize

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

The Central Statistical Office estimated that 6.3 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were working in Belize in 2001.<sup>402</sup> The agricultural industry constitutes the largest employer of child workers, followed by work carried out within a child's community and home or personal services (such as domestic work), retail and repair services, construction, tourism services, and manufacturing. Factory managers have been found to uphold the 16 years minimum age of employment. As a result, children are rarely found in formal factories.<sup>403</sup> Seventy-nine percent of working children are found in rural regions,<sup>404</sup> where they work on family plots and in family businesses after school, on weekends and during vacations.<sup>405</sup> They also work in citrus, banana, and sugar fields.<sup>406</sup> In urban areas, children shine shoes, sell newspapers and other small items, and work in markets.<sup>407</sup> Teenage girls, many of whom have migrated from neighboring Central American countries, are reported to work as domestic servants, barmaids and prostitutes.<sup>408</sup> Belize is considered a transit and destination country for children trafficked for sexual exploitation. Girls are also trafficked internally for commercial exploitation and to work in pornography.<sup>409</sup> The practice of selling

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<sup>402</sup> Another 23.7 percent of children ages 15 to 17 years were also found working. The average age at which a child laborer began work was 8.7 years. See SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour and Education in Belize: A Situational Assessment and In-depth Analysis*, ILO, June 2003, 29 and 31; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_depth.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_depth.pdf). Although released in 2003, the survey was conducted in 2001.

<sup>403</sup> SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Statistical Report*, ILO, 2003, 32; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_natl.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_natl.pdf). See SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, ILO, February 2003, 10; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_qual.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_qual.pdf).

<sup>404</sup> SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Statistical Report*, xix. See also SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour and Education in Belize*, 30.

<sup>405</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*, July 2000. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 122*, January 2001.

<sup>406</sup> 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*, CRC/C/15/Add.99, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, May 10, 1999, 7; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/07bf8c332dbd408f8025677800384754?Opendocument>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Belize*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27886.htm>.

<sup>407</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6f. See also 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](http://www.belize.gov.bz/cabinet/d_balderamos_garcia/issue1/page6.htm).

<sup>409</sup> Girls are trafficked from Central America to work in brothels in Belize. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Belize*, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., June 14, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33198.htm>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6f. See also 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/ihrli/pdf/full\\_document.pdf](http://www.law.depaul.edu/institutes_centers/ihrli/pdf/full_document.pdf).

female children to older men for sexual purposes has been reported to occur throughout the country.<sup>410</sup> A child pornography ring was discovered in October 2003.<sup>411</sup>

Education in Belize is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 14 years.<sup>412</sup> Primary education is free, but related expenses, such as uniforms and books, are a financial strain on poor families.<sup>413</sup> The number of pre-schools available are insufficient to meet demand.<sup>414</sup> In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 117.6 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 96.2 percent.<sup>415</sup> Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Primary school attendance statistics are not available for Belize. In 2000, the primary school repetition rate was 9.8 percent. The transition rate in 2001 was estimated at 87.4 percent.<sup>416</sup> As of 1999, 81.5 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.<sup>417</sup> Results from the Child Activity Survey indicate that 15 percent of working children ages 5 to 14 years do not attend school.<sup>418</sup>

### **Child Labor Laws and Enforcement**

The Labor Act sets the minimum age for employment at 12 years. However, the Act is contradictory and conflicts with other minimum age requirements established by other laws.<sup>419</sup> According to the Act, children ages 12 to 14 years may only participate in light work that is not harmful to life, health, or education; only after school hours and for a total of 2 hours on a school day or Sunday; and only between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.<sup>420</sup> The Labor Act applies to all employment in the formal sector, but not to self-employment or employment by family members.<sup>421</sup> The minimum age for employment near hazardous machinery is 17

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<sup>410</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 5, 6f.

<sup>411</sup> ILO-IPEC, *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 (Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama)*, technical progress report, Geneva, March 2004, 2.

<sup>412</sup> *Education Act*, Chapter 36, (April 24, 1991), [cited August 13, 2003]; available from <http://www.belize.gov.bz/lawadmin/index2.html>.

<sup>413</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 5.

<sup>414</sup> UNICEF, *At a glance: Belize*, [on line] [cited May 6, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/belize.html>. See also SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, 28.

<sup>415</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004. For a detailed explanation of gross primary enrollment and/or attendance rates that are greater than 100 percent, please see the definitions of gross primary enrollment rate and gross primary attendance rate in the glossary of this report.

<sup>416</sup> UNICEF, *At a glance: Belize*.

<sup>417</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

<sup>418</sup> SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour and Education in Belize*, 30.

<sup>419</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6d. See also *Labour Act*, Chapter 297, (December 31, 2000); available from <http://www.belize.gov.bz/lawadmin/index2.html>. See also SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, 17-22.

<sup>420</sup> *Labour Act*. 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*, August 2003.

<sup>421</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 771*.

years.<sup>422</sup> The Labor Act 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, USD 50 or 4 month imprisonment.<sup>423</sup>

The Family and Children's Act prohibits children (defined as persons below 18 years of age) from employment in activities that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development.<sup>424</sup> Forced and bonded labor are prohibited in Belize under the Constitution.<sup>425</sup>

In 2003, Belize enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. Trafficking offenses are punishable by fines of up to USD 5,000 and imprisonment of up to 8 years. The Act provides limited victim assistance.<sup>426</sup> Traffickers can also be prosecuted under immigration laws. The Criminal Code prohibits procuring a female for sexual exploitation in or outside of Belize and provides for a 5-year sentence for the crime.<sup>427</sup> In recent years, several individuals have been arrested and charged for trafficking children.<sup>428</sup>

Inspectors from the Departments of Labor and Education enforce child labor regulations.<sup>429</sup> Despite the addition of seven new labor officers in 2001, senior officials indicate that they do not have enough staff to monitor all the farms and businesses in the country.<sup>430</sup> The Ministry of Education investigates complaints of truancy and minor forms of child labor. The National Organization for the Prevention of child Abuse (NOPCA) receives complaints on the worst forms of child labor and refers them to the Department of Human Services and the Police.<sup>431</sup> The police, immigration, and human services officials investigate trafficking cases involving children.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6d.

<sup>423</sup> *Labour Act*, Section 172.

<sup>424</sup> *Families and Children Act*, (July 8, 1998), 91-173; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/natlexnewfaceE.htm>.

<sup>425</sup> *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 2003: Belize*, Section 6d.

<sup>426</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 226598*, August 2003. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6f.

<sup>427</sup> See also 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 May 6, 2004]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.

<sup>428</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6f.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 6d.

<sup>430</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 773*.

<sup>431</sup> Wendel D.J. Parham, letter to USDOL official, September 9, 2002.

<sup>432</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 5 and 6f.

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

The Government of Belize has a National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), which works with the National Human Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004-2015). The National Plan includes objectives, strategies and activities intended to promote the development of children and adolescents in the areas of health, education, child protection, family, HIV/AIDS and culture.<sup>433</sup> The Ministry of Labor and Local Government heads a sub-committee under the NCFC that deals with issues of child labor.<sup>434</sup> With funding from the Canadian government, ILO-IPEC is working with the Government of Belize to implement two projects to combat the worst forms of child labor.<sup>435</sup> Belize is also participating in a USDOL-funded regional ILO-IPEC project to conduct research on child labor.<sup>436</sup> The Department of Human Services within the Ministry of Human Development, Labor and Local Government has launched a campaign to recruit families to provide temporary care for children in the Department's custody.<sup>437</sup> Belize recently established a National Task Force to combat trafficking and has carried out a small awareness raising campaign and trained public officials on trafficking concerns.<sup>438</sup>

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	3/6/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182	3/6/2000	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		✓
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		
ector Action Plan		

The government continues to offer tuition grants to primary and secondary school students and maintains a textbook lending program.<sup>439</sup> The Ministry of Education established a Pre-school Unit to support pre school education.<sup>440</sup>

<sup>433</sup> 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>. See also UNICEF, *Unity in Belize: parties endorse plan for kids*, [online] 2004 [cited January 4, 2004]; available from [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_23431.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23431.html).

<sup>434</sup> The multi-sectoral committee includes members from the Ministries of Labor, Human Development, Education, and Health, members from the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Immigration Department, the Police Department, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, the Association of General Managers of Primary Schools and the Central Statistical Office. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 718*, November 2004.

<sup>435</sup> ILO-IPEC official, email communication to USDOL official, May 12, 2004.

<sup>436</sup> The project is scheduled to close in June 2004. See ILO-IPEC, *Reporting on the State of the Nation's Working Children: A Statistical Program for the Advocacy on the Elimination of Child Labour and the Protections of Working Children in Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama.)*, technical progress report, ILO-IPEC, Geneva, March 31, 2004, 1.

<sup>437</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Reporting on the State of the Nation's Working Children, technical progress report, March 2004*, 2.

<sup>438</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *unclassified telegram no. 226598*. The task force has established a protocol for investigating and handling trafficking cases under the new Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports 2003: Belize*, Section 6f. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Belize*.

<sup>439</sup> SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, 28.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.* UNICEF is supporting government efforts to improve pre school education. See UNICEF, *At a glance: Belize*.