

## Belize



**Population:** 314,522 (July 2010 est.)  
**Population Growth Rate:** 2.102% (2010 est.)  
**Birth Rate:** 26.84 births/1,000 population (2010)  
**Life Expectancy:** *total population:* 68.2 years  
*male:* 66.54 years  
*female:* 70.05 years  
**Literacy Rate:** *definition:* age 15 and over who can read and write;  
*total population:* 76.9%;  
*male:* 76.7%;  
*female:* 77.1% (2000 Census)  
**Net Migration Rate:** NA (2009)  
**Unemployment Rate:** 8.1% (2001)  
**Gross Domestic Product per Capita:** \$8,300 (2009)  
**Religions:** Roman Catholic 49.6%, Protestant 27%, other 14%, none 9.4% (2000)  
**Languages:** Spanish 46%, Creole 32.9%, Mayan dialects 8.9%, English 3.9% (official), Garifuna 3.4% (Carib), German 3.3%, other 1.4%, unknown 0.2% (2000)  
**Ethnic Groups:** Mestizo 48.7%, Creole 24.9%, Maya 10.6%, Garifuna 6.1%, other 9.7% (2000)  
**Capital:** Belmopan<sup>1</sup>

### Trafficking Routes

Belize is a country of origin, destination and transit for the trafficking in persons, mainly in women and children, for forced labor and sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup> Victims from Belize are trafficked internally for forced sexual exploitation.<sup>3</sup> The most common form of internal trafficking is the forced prostitution of children.<sup>4</sup> Child sex tourism has also become an identified trend in Belize.<sup>5</sup>

Belize is a destination country for victims from all parts of Central and South America, including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.<sup>6</sup> Most of these victims migrate voluntarily to Belize in search of work, and end up becoming trapped in the human trafficking chain.<sup>7</sup> There have also been reports of victims from India and Nepal, as well as from China, Pakistan, and Ghana,<sup>8</sup> being subjected to forced labor in Belize.<sup>9</sup> These victims are often immigrants en route to the United States and Canada via Mexico and the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CIA, World Factbook-Belize, (2009), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bh.html>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Trafficking in Persons Report 2010-Belize*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country....BLZ..4c188408c.0.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES, *Trafficking of Persons Belize: Preliminary Report*, (2004), available at: <http://www.oas.org/atip/Belize/BELIZE-%20Petit.pdf>.

## Factors that contribute to human trafficking infrastructure

Belize is landlocked by neighboring countries Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala.<sup>11</sup> To its west, Belize is bordered by the Caribbean Sea.<sup>12</sup> Given its geological location and its proximity to neighboring countries and the Caribbean Sea, Belize has been used as a main trafficking hub for traffickers.<sup>13</sup> Crossing the borders towards Belize has been a key element because it brings together a number of factors that make it highly attractive.<sup>14</sup> Belize has a relatively high development level, job availability due to the scarcity of the population, its prime location on high land, and its natural resources endowment.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the borders of Belize are long and relatively open which make them particularly difficult to control and regulate.<sup>16</sup>

Central America has a widespread history with migration due to historical patterns of movement, poor socioeconomic statuses, tourism, and natural disasters.<sup>17</sup> Migration is a way of life in Central America, and due to Belize's proximity to Mexico, and ultimately the United States, migration flows put migrants at a great risk of becoming victims of trafficking en route.<sup>18</sup> Due to the country being relatively cut off from its neighbors, because of mountains and poor roads, Belize has been able to create a different kind of economy, with singular cultural and political processes, in comparison with its neighbors.<sup>19</sup> This feature, coupled with the fact that the country is sparsely populated with available land to grow make Belize a prime destination country.<sup>20</sup>

## Forms of trafficking

The majority of victims trafficked within Belize are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labor.<sup>21</sup> Women and children are mainly trafficked for the purpose of forced prostitution.<sup>22</sup> The trafficking of children for forced prostitution stems from situations where poor families push their young daughters to provide sexual favors to wealthy men in exchange for money, gifts, or school fees.<sup>23</sup> This type of exploitation has been termed as the "sugar daddy" phenomenon, which occurs particularly in Belize and other Caribbean countries.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES *supra* note 8.

<sup>11</sup> ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE NATIONS, *Belize*, available at: <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Belize.html>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR *supra* note 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES *supra* note 8 at 13.

<sup>18</sup> IOM, CARIBBEAN COUNTER-TRAFFICKING MODEL LEGISLATION AND EXPLANATORY GUIDELINES: A BOOKLET, (Dec. 2008), available at:

[http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published\\_docs/serial\\_publications/Booklet%20Caribbean%20Model%20Legislation%20and%20Explanatory%20Guidelines.pdf](http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/serial_publications/Booklet%20Caribbean%20Model%20Legislation%20and%20Explanatory%20Guidelines.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES *supra* note 8 at 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR *supra* note 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

However, this type of exploitation is often not recognized as a form of human trafficking among communities and local law enforcement.<sup>25</sup>

Victims trafficked into Belize, particularly from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico, fall victim to forced prostitution in bars or to forced labor.<sup>26</sup> Female victims are more vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination as well as to sexual exploitation.<sup>27</sup> Boys are increasingly being sexually exploited and falling victim to drug traffickers and forced labor.<sup>28</sup> These victims usually migrate from poor families through the enticement of working in upscale restaurants and hotels once they arrive in Belize.<sup>29</sup> Once in the country, their passports and paperwork are usually taken away until they can repay what it cost to bring them to Belize.<sup>30</sup> According to an investigator at the Immigration Department, women and girls do not only work as prostitutes in brothels and clubs, but they have also been known to work on plantations as field workers.<sup>31</sup>

## Government Responses

Actors in the government of Belize have made efforts to eliminate human trafficking.<sup>32</sup> The government targeted issues related to human trafficking at several levels: national legislation, law enforcement, national budget, and public awareness.<sup>33</sup> In 2003, Belize enacted its Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.<sup>34</sup> This Act prohibits all forms of human trafficking and prescribes a punishment of 1 to 5 years and a fine of \$5,000.<sup>35</sup> The government also revised its standard operating procedures for those officials dealing with human trafficking cases in an effort to improve victim identification, through conducting training sessions on these new procedures.<sup>36</sup> In March 2010, the Belizean government sponsored training on human trafficking recognition and procedures for immigration officials, labor officials, social workers, and health care workers.<sup>37</sup>

In 2004, Belize implemented the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents.<sup>38</sup> This is a 12 year plan, 2004 to 2015, which seeks to amend current legislation pertaining to child labor issues.<sup>39</sup> It also seeks to develop and implement regulations on exploitive child labor, strengthen enforcement of key ministries, and increase public awareness of this issue.<sup>40</sup> The Plan

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<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM), *Exploratory Assessment of Trafficking of Persons in the Caribbean Region* (2005), available at: <http://www.oas.org/atip/Caribbean%20Research%202005.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES *supra* note 8 at 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> Angel Novelo, *Belize gets tough on sex slave trade*, THE REPORTER (BELIZE), Oct. 12, 2007, available at: <http://www.reporter.bz/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=2299&Itemid=2>.

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR *supra* note 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *2007 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor-Belize*, available at: [http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country\\_COI\\_USDOL,,BLZ,,48caa45e3c.0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country_COI_USDOL,,BLZ,,48caa45e3c.0.html).

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

specifically seeks to protect children from trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and forms of child labor.<sup>41</sup>

In 2006, Belize's National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NOPCAN) held a workshop at the University of the West Indies for over one hundred law enforcement officers and members of the social services sector and trained the officials on how best to deal with the special requirements held by human trafficking cases.<sup>42</sup> To further assist victims of human trafficking, the government operates two shelters for adult trafficking victims.<sup>43</sup> These shelters provide access to medical, counseling, and reintegration services.<sup>44</sup> Child victims of trafficking are placed in government institutions for children or are referred to local NGO's, which are given limited funds by the Belizean government.<sup>45</sup> The government also assists foreign trafficking victims by providing temporary residency while participating in court cases.<sup>46</sup>

The government has also made efforts to raise public awareness of human trafficking by airing service announcement, in several languages, and by distributing posters and anti-trafficking publications.<sup>47</sup> In 2009, in cooperation with international organizations and NGO's, the government of Belize hosted a workshop to raise awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the growing child sex tourism.<sup>48</sup>

### **Nongovernment and International Organization responses**

End Child Prostitution, Pornography, and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT)-USA announced the kickoff of the Protect Children in Tourism Project (PCT) in Belize City, Belize, on August 3 2006.<sup>49</sup> This Project aims to promote the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.<sup>50</sup> The Code of Conduct, which seeks to establish an ethical policy on child exploitation, offers training of personnel in the country of origin, introduces a clause in contracts with suppliers, and provides both travelers and "key persons" at the destination with information.<sup>51</sup> The Project also calls for annual reporting, recording the Project's progress.<sup>52</sup> More than 270 companies worldwide have signed the Code, including Carlson Companies, parent company of the Radisson Hotel and many other hotel brands.<sup>53</sup> More than twenty hotels, tour operators, and other travel

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<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI), *Seminars in Belize on Trafficking in Persons* (2006), available at: [http://www.oas.org/dsp/atip\\_Detail.asp](http://www.oas.org/dsp/atip_Detail.asp).

<sup>43</sup> UNHCR *supra* note 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> EPCAT-USA, *ECPAT-USA's Protect Children in Tourism Project Supports Communities in Breaking the Silence* (2008), available at:

[http://www.ecpatusa.org/EcpatUSA\\_PDF/FINAL%20PCT%20Brochure%20oct%202009%20mexico.pdf](http://www.ecpatusa.org/EcpatUSA_PDF/FINAL%20PCT%20Brochure%20oct%202009%20mexico.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

industry representatives signed the Code of Conduct at this kickoff event including the Belize Tourism Industry Association, an umbrella organization of more than 500 companies.<sup>54</sup>

### **Multilateral Initiatives**

On April 26 2006, Belize became a member country of the Latin American Network.<sup>55</sup> This Network is a regional cooperation of States in Latin America working together in efforts to combat human trafficking, locate missing persons, especially children, and reunite victims with their families.<sup>56</sup> The initiative is a project funded by Save the Children Sweden and endorsed by the Organization of American States.<sup>57</sup>

On October 18, 2007, the Ministry of Human Development received aid from the Office of the US Embassy, for the amount of \$40,000, to assist in the Belizean efforts to combat human trafficking.<sup>58</sup> The grant was used to carry out a three-year program that assisted in the protection of human trafficking victims, in the prevention of this occurrence and the prosecution of persons involved in the trafficking of persons.<sup>59</sup> The money also assisted in the broadcast of radio ads, community workshops, and also in the refurbishing of a shelter for victims of human trafficking.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> BELIZE TOURISM INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, *BTIA & ECPAT-USA Launches Protect Children Tourism Project* (2006), available at:

<http://www.mail-archive.com/green-travel@yahoo.com/msg03551.html>.

<sup>55</sup> NEWS FIVE, *Belize joins anti-human trafficking network* (2006), available at:

<http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/9445>.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Human Development Government of Belize, *Ambassador Presents Grant to Combat Human Trafficking* (2007), available at: [http://belize.usembassy.gov/july\\_to\\_december\\_2007new.html](http://belize.usembassy.gov/july_to_december_2007new.html).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*