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U.S. Bureau of International Affairs
United States Department of Labor

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Foreign Labor Trends: Belize

Keywords

Federal, key workplace documents, Catherwood, ILR, foreign, labor, trends, Belize, indicators, workers, sector, law, unemployment, wage, reform, unions, employers, employed, unskilled

Comments

Foreign Labor Trends

Foreign Labor Trends

Belize



Prepared by U.S. Embassy, Belize City

2002

FLT 02-01

Released by U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of International Labor Affairs

Frequency: Annual
Supercedes: 93-48

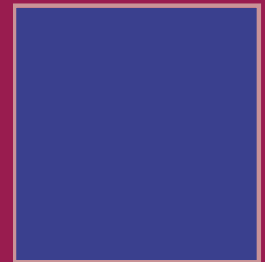
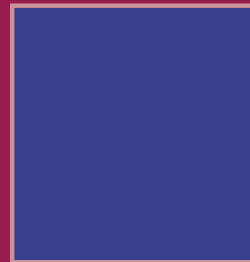
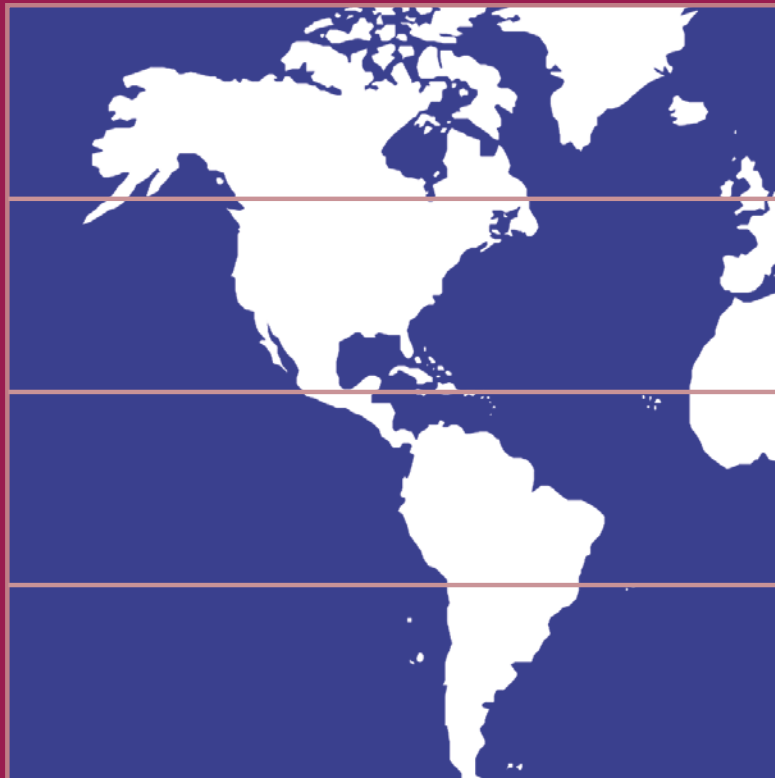


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KEY LABOR INDICATORS

Belize 2002

<u>INDICATOR</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>% CHANGE</u>
1. Per capita GDP current prices (US\$)	n/a	727.5	~
2. —, in Agriculture (%)	22	22	0.0
3. —, in Manufacturing (%)	22	22	0.0
4. —, in Services (%)	56	56	0.0
5. —, (BZD)	n/a	1,455.0	~
6. Population, total (000, July est.) ¹	235.8	249.8	5.9
7. —, major ethnic groups (%)			
Mestizo	46.4	46.4	0.0
Creole	27.7	27.7	0.0
Mayan	10	10	0.0
Garifuna	6.4	6.4	0.0
Other ²	9.5	9.5	0.0
8. —, in major urban areas (000)			
Belize City	n/a	54.1	~
Orange Walk Town	n/a	13.8	~
San Ignacio/Santa Elena	n/a	13.5	~
Corozal	n/a	8,075	~
9. Birth rate (per thousand population)	n/a	32.29	~
10. Life expectancy at birth, total ³	69.20	70.91	2.5
11. —, male	67.23	68.66	2.1
12. —, female	71.26	73.28	2.8
13. Adult literacy rate (%)	n/a	75.10	~
14. Labor force, civilian, total (000, April)	n/a	89.95	~
15. —, male (000)	n/a	60.48	~
16. —, female (000)	n/a	29.47	~
17. Employment, civilian, total (est. 000)	n/a	71	~
18. —, in industry (%)	n/a	17.8	~
19. —, in export processing zones	n/a	n/a	~
20. —, in agriculture (%)	n/a	27.2	~
21. —, in services (%)	n/a	50.8	~
22. Unemployment rate (%)	12.8	11.5	-10.2
23. Underemployment rate (est. %)	n/a	n/a	~
24. Labor productivity, manufacturing (% change)	n/a	n/a	~
25. Work-related accidents and illnesses	n/a	n/a	~
26. Days lost from industrial disputes (000)	n/a	n/a	~
27. Minimum wage rate (hourly BZD)	n/a	2.25	~
28. Minimum wage rate (hourly, US\$)	n/a	1.125	~

¹ *The World Factbook* 1999 and 2000.

² Significant Mennonite, Chinese, Arab and Indian minorities.

³ *The World Factbook* 1999 and 2000.

Belize 2002

<u>INDICATOR</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>% CHANGE</u>
29. Average daily earnings by major industry (US\$)	n/a	1.13	~
30. Hourly compensation costs for production workers in manufacturing (US\$)	n/a	n/a	~
31. —, (BZD)	n/a	n/a	~
32. Hourly Compensation costs for laborers (US\$)	n/a	1.71	~
33. —, clerical	n/a	1.13	~
34. —, mechanic	n/a	1.44	~
35. —, commercial assistant	n/a	1.13	~
36. Supplementary benefits as % of manufacturing earnings	n/a	n/a	~
37. Average hours worked per week ⁴	n/a	n/a	~
38. Unionization of labor (%)	n/a	10	~
39. Average personal income per year at current prices (US\$)	3,100	n/a	~
40. Average disposable income after taxes and withholding (US\$) ⁵	n/a	n/a	~
41. Percent of population beneath poverty level	n/a	30	~
42. Consumer price index (%)	n/a	0.6	~

n/a = not available

Exchange rate: US\$ 1=2 Belize Dollars (BZD) fixed rate

(Since 1976, Belizean Banks have bought U.S. Dollars at the rate of 2.0175 and sold them at 1.9825).

⁴ The nominal workweek is 40 hours.

⁵ Belizeans earning less than BZD 20,000 pay no income taxes. Earnings above BZD 20,000 per annum are flat taxed at 25 percent.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LABOR SECTOR

Belize has an estimated working age population of nearly 90,000. Of that number, the vast majority are employed as unskilled workers engaged in agriculture, specifically sugar, citrus, banana, and farmed shrimp. Another 3,000 Belizeans earn their income on the sea catching fish, lobster, and conch or conducting sport fishing adventure outings. A growing number are employed in the tourism and offshore business sectors.

Figures from early 2000 showed a labor force of 77,755 workers employed and 11,455 unemployed. The unemployment rate for both sexes at the time was 12.8 percent. Among men, 53,680 males were employed and 5,310 unemployed. Among women, 24,075 females were employed and 6,145 unemployed. Hard and fast figures for Belizeans are difficult to derive because many are employed in seasonal agricultural and tourism jobs.

Although only 10 percent of its workforce is unionized, Belize has 8 trade unions and an umbrella body, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize (NTUCB). The NTUCB is a member of the Caribbean Congress of Labor (CCL) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

With the active encouragement of USAID G/CAP PROALCA and FUNPRODEM officials, Belize has eagerly adopted the tripartite model of industrial relations and in the past two years has incorporated civil society in this endeavor. Belize has ratified 42 International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions since joining the organization in 1981, and it was the first Caribbean country to ratify all 8 fundamental ILO core conventions. The Government adopted ILO Conventions 138 on minimum age and 182 on the worst forms of child labor in March 2000. At that time the Ministry of Labor named Timothy Palacio as its "National Social Dialogue Advisor" in connection with SIECA's "Regional Program for the Modernization of the Labor Market." In addition, with the cooperation of Belize's National Organization against Child Abuse (NOPCA), the Government began an in-depth study of child work in Belize.

In October 2000, the Government enacted the "Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations (Registration, Recognition, and Status) Act," which requires employers to recognize and negotiate with trade unions where a majority of the workers so chose. In keeping with ILO Conventions 87, 98, and 154, the law assures that workers are given the right to organize for the purpose of improving their working conditions through collective bargaining.

Despite Labor Minister Valdemar Castillo's May Day 2001 plea that all social partners deal with each other in a spirit of dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation as opposed to "confrontation and conflict, which is a waste of time and valuable resources," the National Trade Union Congress of Belize and its affiliated unions have been at odds with the current government over its compensation packages for dock workers and its privatization program. Workers have fretted that when government assets are privatized or when a private company changes ownership they lose chunks of accrued leave, health coverage, retirement earnings, and other social benefits. In response, the Government has sought to incorporate provisions in the sales agreements of its assets, which stipulate that social benefits are carried over. The Belize Workers Union has demanded the ouster of the Harbor Master of the Belize Ports Authority for backsliding on pay raises for Longshoremen.

Some union leaders and grassroots activists remain bitter that the previous government sided with the Belize Banana Growers Association's successful campaign to undermine the formation of the United Banner Banana Workers Union (UBBWU) when the union staged a strike in June 1995. At that time, the police and military detained and attempted to deport the strikers, many of whom were migrant workers from Honduras. Despite its affiliation with the International Union of Foodworkers (IUP), the UBBWU is now a moribund organization.

The unions have also criticized the government for being too forthcoming in issuing workers' permits to Non-Belizeans. The vast majority of these foreigners are seasonal agricultural workers from Honduras and Guatemala. Union leaders complain these migrant workers depress wages and take away jobs. Union organizers also complain that the Citrus and Banana Growers like to hire foreigners because they are hesitant to organize, and much less engaged in work stoppages. Employers argue that few (unemployed) Belizeans today will consider taking these menial jobs, which often require them to relocate to isolated rural areas. They contend they are dependent on foreign labor.

Aside from these heartfelt differences, employer and worker organizations in Belize have joined together to improve working conditions, especially with respect to the safe use of heavy machinery and the application of Agro-Pesticides and Herbicides. In conjunction with Belize Labor Department Personnel and visiting USDOL/OSHA Officials, they have readily participated in the U.S. Government's Regional Health and Safety Initiative and its Labor Market Exchange Program for English-Speaking Caribbean and Suriname.

DIRECTORY OF LABOR SECTOR

LABOR UNIONS

National Trade Union Congress of Belize (NTUCB)

President: Ms. Dorene Quiros
Administrative Secretary: Randolph Johnson
Address: Belize City Centre
P.O. Box 2359
Belize City
Phone: 501-2-71596
Fax: 501-2-72864
Email: NTUCB@TL.NET.

The Association of Public Service Management (APSSM)

Represents the heads, chief executive officers, and permanent secretaries of government;

The Belize Communication Workers' Union (BCWU)

Represents workers at the privately owned Belize Telecommunications Limited (BTL);

The Belize Energy Workers Union (BEWU)

Represents workers at the privately owned Belize Electricity Limited (BTL);

The Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU)

Represents teachers at the pre-, primary, secondary, and university levels;

The Belize Workers Union (BWU)

Represents the workers at Belize Sugar Industries Limited (BSI employees enjoy co-determination status and ownership in Belize's one operating Sugar Mill, "Tower Hill," outside Orange Walk Town.) BWU also represents workers affiliated with the citrus industry and public works;

The Christian Workers Union (CWU)

Represents workers at the Central Bank of Belize, the Development Finance Corporation Del Oro Citrus Company, the Belmopan and Belize City Councils, the Belize Social Security Administration, and the Belize Port Authority;

The Public Service Union (PSU)

Represents workers throughout the government bureaucracy; and,

The Water and Sewerage Authority Workers Union (WASAWU)

Represents employees of the former Water and Sewerage Authority, which was privatized in 2001 and is now the Belize Water Service Limited.

GOVERNMENT

The Ministry of Sugar Industry, Local Government, and Labor

Belmopan, Belize

Minister: Valdemar Castillo (Member of Parliament)

Permanent Secretary: Dr. Wendel Parham.

Phone: 501-8-23990/23924

Fax: 501-8-233665

Email: MSILLG@BELIZE.GOV.BZ.

Address: Belize City, No. 5 West Albert Street
Belize

Phone: 501-2-74023/74027

Fax: 02-74031

Email: DOLBZE@BTL.NET

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