

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council

4th Cycle – 45th Session

Country Review: Belize

July 2023
by Müge Çınar

Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 and focused on raising awareness and minimizing human rights violations in the educational field.

Together with our international sponsors and partners, we encourage and support the following activities/projects: removing obstacles in education; contributing to the achievement of peace and tranquillity in society through adaptation studies in an environment of intercultural tolerance; preventing radicalism and polarization, and eliminating the opportunity gap in education for all. Our goal is to work with global partners to remove barriers to access to education and take concrete steps to ensure universal access to education.



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Kingsfordweg 151, 1043 GR
Amsterdam, Netherlands

+31685639758 | info@brokenchalk.org | www.brokenchalk.org

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Introduction

1. Broken Chalk is a non-profit NGO with one main goal to protect human rights in the world of education. The organization investigates and reports education rights violations worldwide while advocating and supporting human-rights-focused educational development. By submitting this report, Broken Chalk aims to contribute to the 45th Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Belize with a focus on the education sector, encouraging the country to continue its improvement efforts and providing further insight into how to overcome current challenges and deficiencies regarding human rights in education.
2. Belize's average Human Development Index value throughout that time period was 0.668 points, with a low of 0.613 points in 1990 and a high of 0.722 points in 2016. The most recent value is 0.683 points from 2021. [1] The Index, which includes factors such as life expectancy, education, and per capita income, placed Belize in the high human development category, with a ranking of 103 out of 189 countries and territories. [2]
3. Belize's population is projected to be around 1,400,000 people, with a slightly higher proportion of rural (55%) than urban (45%) residents and an equal proportion of males and females. The majority of the population, 65.8%, is between the ages of 15 and 64, with another 29.2% between the ages of 0 and 14, and those 65 and above accounting for the remaining 5%. [3]
4. Mestizos/Hispanics make up 47.9% of Belize's population and the majority of residents in the Corozal, Orange Walk, Cayo, and Stann Creek districts, according to the country's 2010 Census. Creoles are the second largest ethnic group, accounting for 25.9% of the population in the Belize District. The Maya (Ketchi, Mopan, and Yucatec) make up 11.3% of the population and are the majority group in the Toledo District, while Garifunas, East Indians, and Mennonites make up 6.1%, 3.9%, and 3.6% of the overall population, respectively. [3]
5. Despite its diversity, Belize has maintained a stable parliamentary democracy without serious ethnic or religious conflict and there has been numerous and peaceful transitions of power between the country's two major political parties since its independence from Great Britain in 1981. [3]

Current Educational Trends in Belize

6. The preamble of the Belize Constitution of 1981 recognizes the right to basic education, which is supported by compulsory education for children aged 6-14, with parents subject to fines if their children routinely refuse to attend school. Furthermore, all pupils under the age of 14 receive free schooling. As a result, from 1990 to 2020, primary school enrollment was extraordinarily high, with one estimate estimating that 94.5% of children aged 5 to 14 attend full-time. [4]
7. Secondary education is a different story. Because there is no analogous mechanism mandating kids to enroll in secondary school, net enrollment falls to 68% for 2020, a modest rise from 61% in 1990 and 65% in 2011. [5]

8. One explanation for this decline is the rising cost of education; secondary school is not free, and 60% of students get a minor subsidy of \$150 per year for expenditures like as uniforms and books. Students may also be discouraged since education is given in English, which may dissuade students from Spanish-speaking regions [4] On the other hand, while participation in secondary education is low, there are worries regarding educational quality, particularly due to a shortage of competent teachers, basic resources, and facility condition. [5]
9. Three sorts of institutions provide educational services. 1) government schools, which are owned, funded, and managed by the Belizean government; 2) government-aided schools, which receive public funds but are owned and managed by religious or community groups; and 3) private institutions, which are owned and managed by private individuals or entities and receive little or no public funding. 62% of all preschools, 65% of all primary schools, 48% of all high schools and 77% of all tertiary institutions are government-aided schools. [3]
10. Belize's roots in education sector comes from the English system, at the same time US academic syllabuss has a great influence in education primarily through the influence of the Jesuits. Roman Catholic schools are the the best. [6]
11. The Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodists and Anglicans, administer the majority of Belize's finest public schools under a Church-State cooperation that dates back to Belize's time as a British colony. Because nearly two-thirds of Belize's population is adolescents or younger, schoolchildren in uniform can be found throughout the country. [6]
12. Consistent with broader demographic trends, the tertiary age group experienced the greatest increase in school-age population, 17.5%; the secondary and pre-primary age groups increased slightly, by 4.5% and 2.9%, respectively, while the primary school age population declined by 2%. [11]

Enrolment Rates to School

13. Preliminary statistics for 2020 show a very dramatic drop in total enrollment between 2019 and 2020. This loss had the greatest impact on pre-primary, primary, and postsecondary education, which decreased by 33%, 4.7%, and 8.6%, respectively. This drop in enrollment is most likely due to the economic impact of the epidemic as well as the extended school closure from March 2020 to March 2021. [6]
14. Male enrollment in primary school is somewhat higher, whereas female enrollment in pre-primary and secondary school is slightly higher. At the secondary level, the discrepancy is bigger in the upper forms, as more males than females drop out. [6]

15. While participation in secondary education is low, there are worries regarding educational quality, particularly due to a shortage of competent teachers, basic resources, and facility condition. [4]
16. Covid-19 impact is also huge for students to enrol to the school. According to these predictions, 74.2% of 3-4 year olds were absent during the 2020-21 school year, compared to 49.5% in 2019-20. Over 3,600 youngsters, or 6% of 5-12 year olds, were also absent, compared to less than 2% the previous year. In contrast, the number and percentage of 13-16 year olds attending school climbed from 70.4% in 2019 to 80.3% in 2020. [4]

Covid-19 and Accessibility to the Technology

17. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, Belize went under lockdown in March 2020, forcing education services to continue via remote learning for the duration of that academic year and long into 2020/21. [7]
18. Face-to-face instruction in schools resumed in September 2022, necessitating immediate effort to make up for learning loss suffered by the pandemic. The joint World Bank-UNICEF report 'The State of Global Learning Poverty 2022' exposes the destructive impact of school closures on learning loss across the area, delaying learning results by more than a decade. Belize is one of the ten countries with the highest school closure index, according to the report. In the following year, significant investment will be required to scale up connection for digital transformation, curriculum reform appropriate to the twenty-first century, and associated teacher training. [7]
19. Although 45% of preschools and 40% of primary schools provided some online content, for the majority of pupils, printed packages were the only available way of continuing education. This was notably true for Toledo District children, where Mr. Bernaldino Pech and Mr. Ricardo Gideon from the PPRE Unit contributed significantly to this section of the analysis. Only 16% of preschools and 11% of elementary schools used internet learning. The lack of accessibility of internet learning influenced students negatively. [11]
20. Most of the students from rural areas suffered from lack of technological infrastructure to follow online classes. Therefore, drop-outs increased drastically during the isolation era.

Child Marriages, Violence and Child Labour

21. Belize is the Caribbean region's second highest level of child marriage and early unions, and data reveals that youngsters pushed into early marriages are more likely to be illiterate, as well as victims of domestic violence and sexual disease. [5] This is an indicator that child marriage is the most significant obstacle for children to continue their education.

22. In Belize, one in every five girls (20.8%) and one in every ten boys (10.7%) aged 15 to 19 are married or in a union (MICS 2015). This has far-reaching consequences for both girls and boys' physical, emotional, educational, health, and livelihood chances, with girls bearing the brunt of the burden. Girls who marry as youngsters are more likely to drop out of school, experience domestic violence, and get HIV/AIDS, which carries a higher morbidity and mortality risk due to problems during pregnancy and childbirth. [7]
23. Belize has recognized this issue and made attempts to mitigate harm through wide governmental involvement. Belize launched a five-year strategy to stop child marriage in 2020, ahead of the UN's 2030 development Goals.
24. According to UNICEF, 42% of babies aged 1 to 2 have been physically abused, rising to 59% of toddlers aged 3 to 6. This rate of injury becomes even higher, with 65% of children aged 0-14 reporting physical and psychological abuse from their parents or caregivers. Such a high rate of involvement has consequences across the spectrum of children's rights. [9]
25. The ministry reported that by midyear, it had registered 220 cases of sexual abuse and assaults on minors; for the entire year in 2020, there were 366 reported cases. [10]
26. There are also drastic consequences for the right to education. The average age of induction is 14.5, with the majority reporting some form of involvement between the ages of 13 and 16, and some also reporting trouble with the Police from as early as 12. Among children involved in gang violence, there is a very high rate of school suspension, and exclusion, with 76% reporting having dropped out, the most common year of dropout being Standard 6, the final year of primary education. [9]
27. Belize fails to meet international standards on child labor; specifically, the Labour Act of 2000 (Article 169(a)) sets the legal threshold for child labor at 12 years old, highlighting the larger issue of no clear legal definition of the child for policymaking purposes. [4]

Disabled and Migrant Children

28. In general, mental health provisions and protections are inadequate. Informal government-organized committees campaigning for disabled people were tasked with public education and advocating for anti-discrimination measures. The country lacked a dependable mechanism for identifying people with impairments in need of help. [10]
29. Migrants can get governmental help, such as food and schooling, through the Department of Women and Families. [2]
30. Education is compulsory in Belize for children aged six to fourteen, regardless of immigration status. Migrant children may face language, cultural, and social challenges. Belize does not have a systematic program to help migrants get access to housing. [2]

Recommendations

31. Education costs creates a burden on children continue to school. The costs of books, other materials and the school fees should be revised to facilitate children to continue the school.
32. The teacher and educator trainings should be seen important. There must be more incentive and more investment on educators in order to get a quality of education.
33. The budget allocation for the education should be the universal standard.
34. Because the enrolment rates to the school, more campaigns should be made by the government, especially for preventing boys to drop-out school.
35. Child rights should be respected. Convention No. 182 of ILO must be taken serious and children must be protected. In this way children's physical and emotional damage may be prevented and they can peacefully continue their compulsory education in the country.
36. The minimum marriage age, as well as free individual and informed consent, are key component legislation governing child marriage. The law should establish 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage and prohibit the marriage of both girls and boys under that age. The SADC Model Law on child marriage focuses exclusively on the age of consent to marriage, with no exceptions. [12] Child marriage is very harmful for both girls and boys in order for getting formal education. Mostly girls are under threat of sexual abuse and domestic violence in child marriage.
37. Government should revise the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act to prohibit child labour and sex trafficking of children between the ages of 16 and 17.
38. Child marriage also increase school drop-outs. Without getting formal education and fully developed to have a consent, children should be avoided marriage for protecting their physical and psychological health.
39. The disabled children should be given more opportunities to access education.
40. In Belize, migrant children are able to access compulsory education as nationals until the age 14. However, migrants are not provided shelters or protection which makes harder children to attend school. The more protection is needed for migrant children to get a better formal education and health services.
41. Creating standard operating procedures for managing new migration flows and making referrals of migrants with specific needs is also very important (e.g. health, education, or social services).
42. Also, for adaptation and getting quality education migrant children's access to English-language lessons and education should be supported.

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Kingsfordweg 151, 1043 GR

Amsterdam, Netherlands

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