



**BROKEN  
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United  
Nations Human Rights Council 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle – 45<sup>th</sup> Session

## **Right to Education**

### **Country Review: Belize**

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**Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK**

**July 2023**

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**Broken Chalk** is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

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## Introduction

1. Broken Chalk is a non-profit NGO whose primary goal is to protect the human right to education worldwide. The organisation 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 educational 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 period was 0.668 points, with a maximum low of 0.613 points in 1990 and a maximum high of 0.722 points in 2016. The most recent value is 0.683 points from 2021. [1] The Index includes factors such as life expectancy, education, and income per capita, placing Belize in the high human development category, ranking 103 out of 189 countries and territories. [2]
3. Belize's population is estimated to be around 1400,000 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) comprise 11.3% of the population and are the majority group in the Toledo District. In contrast, Garifunas, East Indians, and Mennonites comprise 6.1%, 3.9%, and 3.6% of the overall population. [3]
5. Despite its diversity, Belize has maintained a stable parliamentary democracy without serious ethnic or religious conflict, and there have 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 recognises the right to primary education, 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 different. Because there is no analogous mechanism mandating kids to enrol in secondary school and allowing for free accessible education, net enrolment falls to 68% for 2020, showing a modest rise from 61% in 1990 and 65% in 2011. [5]

8. One explanation for this stagnation 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 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 mainly due to a shortage of competent teachers, primary essential provision and facility conditions. [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 the education sector come from the English system; at the same time, the US academic syllabuses have greatly influenced education, primarily through the influence of the Jesuits. Roman Catholic schools are reported to be the best quality ones. [6]
11. The Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent, the Methodists and Anglicans, administer most of Belize's finest public schools under Church-State cooperation that dates back to Belize's time as a British colony. Because nearly two-thirds of Belize's population are adolescents or younger, uniforms are widespread and commonly seen in public spaces. [6]
12. Consistent with broader demographic trends, the tertiary age group experienced the most significant increase in the 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 dramatic drop in total enrollment between 2019 and 2020. This loss significantly impacted 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 Covid-19 pandemic and added school closure from March 2020 to March 2021. [6]
14. Male enrollment in primary school is somewhat higher, while female enrollment in primary school is slightly higher. The gap is more significant at the secondary school level during the last years of education, as more males than females drop out. [6]
15. While overall participation in secondary education is low, there are worries regarding educational quality, mainly due to a shortage of competent teachers, essential resources, and facility conditions. [4]
16. Covid-19 impact is also huge for students to enrolment in 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 pandemic, Belize went under lockdown in March 2020, forcing education services to continue via remote learning for the academic year and well 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 due to the pandemic. The joint World Bank-UNICEF report 'The State of Global Learning Poverty 2022' exposes the destructive impact of school closures and learning loss across the area, delaying learning results by more than a decade. According to the report, Belize is one of the ten countries with highest school closure in the year ahead; significant investment will be required to scale up connectivity and digital transformation, curriculum reform appropriate to the twenty-first century, and teacher training. [7]
19. Although 45% of preschools and 40% of primary schools provided some online content, for most pupils, printed packages were the only available way of continuing education. Only 16% of preschools and 11% of elementary schools used Internet learning. The lack of accessibility to Internet learning influenced students negatively. [11]
20. Most of the students from rural areas needed more technological infrastructure to follow online classes. Therefore, drop-outs increased drastically during the pandemic times.

## Child Marriages, Violence and Child Labour

21. This 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 and victims of domestic violence and sexual disease. [5] This indicates 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 girls' and boys' physical, emotional, educational, health, and livelihood conditions, with girls bearing the burden. Girls who marry young 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 recognised this issue and attempted to mitigate harm through broad 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 injury rate becomes even higher, with 65% of children aged 0-14 reporting physical and psychological abuse from their parents or caregivers. Such a high involvement rate has consequences for 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. Gang violence also brings drastic consequences for the right to education. The average age of gang recruitment is 14.5, with the majority reporting some form of involvement between the ages of 13 and 16 and some reporting trouble with the Police 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 labour, specifically, the Labour Act of 2000 (Article 169(a)), which sets the legal threshold for child labour at 12 years old, highlighting the more significant issue of no clear legal definition of the child condition 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 anti-discrimination measures. The country lacked a dependable mechanism for identifying people with impairments needing 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 access housing. [2]

## Recommendations

31. Education costs creates a burden on children to continue education. The costs of books, other materials and school fees should be revised to facilitate children to continue at school.
32. The teacher and educator training should be given more importance. There must be more incentives for and investment in educators to get a quality education.
33. The budget allocation for education should meet the universal standard.
34. Given the enrolment rates, the government should make more campaigns to promote continuity, mainly to prevent boys from dropping out.
35. Children's rights should be respected. Convention No. 182 of ILO must be taken seriously, and children must be protected. In this way, children's physical and emotional damage may be prevented so they can peacefully continue their compulsory education in the country.
36. The minimum marriage age and free individual and informed consent are critical components of child marriage legislation. 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 to both girls and boys to obtain a proper education. Most girls are threatened by sexual abuse and domestic violence in child marriage.

37. The 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. The disabled children should be given more opportunities to access education.
39. In Belize, migrant children can access compulsory education up to 14. However, migrants are not provided shelter or protection, which makes children more likely to be absent from school. More protection is needed for migrant children. For such purposes, 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).
40. Also, for adaptation purposes and quality education provision to migrant children, access to English-language lessons and education should be supported.

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