



UNITED  
NATIONS  
BELIZE



# Common Country Analysis

October 2024

# Table of Contents

Foreword.....	10
Executive Summary .....	12
<b>1) Introduction.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2) Socio-Economic Context.....</b>	<b>17</b>
Macro-Economic Performance.....	17
Social Strides with Challenge.....	19
Labour Market Challenge and Recovery .....	23
Tourism Sector Recovery Post-Covid19 (2020-2023).....	27
Economic Diversification.....	29
Economic Transformation.....	31
<b>3) Progress Towards the 2030 Agenda.....</b>	<b>33</b>
People SDGs.....	34
SDG 1: No Poverty.....	37
SDG 2: Zero Hunger .....	38
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being .....	39
SDG 4: Quality Education.....	40
SDG 5: Gender Equality.....	41
Prosperity SDGs .....	43
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy .....	44
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth .....	46
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure .....	47
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.....	48
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.....	49
Planet SDGs.....	50
SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation .....	52
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.....	53
SDG 13: Climate Action .....	54
SDG 14: Life Below Water.....	55
SDG 15: Life on Land .....	57
Peace SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.....	59
Partnership SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals .....	62

<b>4) Human Rights Assessment</b> .....	66
Civil and Political Rights .....	66
Commitment to International Conventions.....	67
Engagement with UN Human Rights Mechanisms .....	69
Anti-Discrimination .....	70
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.....	71
Right to Education .....	73
Right to Health.....	74
Mental Health .....	74
Children’s Health – Malnutrition.....	75
Elder Care and Health .....	76
Challenges to Advancing Human Rights.....	76
Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (S& RH).....	76
Child Marriage and Early Unions.....	77
Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence.....	78
Climate Vulnerability .....	79
Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations .....	79
<b>5) Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Delivery on the SDGs</b> .....	83
The Transitions.....	84
1). Food Systems .....	87
2). Energy Access and Affordability .....	88
3). Digital Connectivity.....	88
4). Quality Education.....	90
5). Jobs and Social Protection.....	90
6). Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution.....	903
Enabling Actions (formerly Engine Room Actions).....	94
Key Pillars for SDG Acceleration.....	94
Cross-Cutting Issues .....	95
<b>6) Public Sector SDG Financing</b> .....	96
Social Sector Financing.....	102
Climate Financing .....	104
<b>References</b> .....	<b>106</b>

# List of tables

Table 1. Macro-Economic Environment .....	18
Table 2. Gaps on Child Labour Conventions.....	22
Table 3. Labour Force Market .....	25
Table 4. Trade Data.....	29
Table 5. Foreign Exchange Inflows.....	30
Table 6. People SDGs Assessment .....	35
Table 7. Food Insecurity .....	38
Table 8. Undernourishment.....	38
Table 9. Prosperity SDGs Assessment.....	43
Table 10. Gross Domestic Product/ Capita .....	46
Table 11. Planet SDGs Assessment .....	51
Table 12. Access to Drinking Water & Sanitation Facilities .....	52
Table 13. Access to Wastewater System.....	53
Table 14. Sustainable Fish Stock Harvesting .....	56
Table 15. Sustainable Forest .....	57
Table 16. Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions Assessment.....	60
Table 17. Partnership for the Goals Assessment.....	63
Table 18. Child marriage and early unions by the age of 15 in Belize, 2015-2016 .....	77
Table 19. Women and men aged 15-49 married before the age of 15 (%), 2015-2016.....	77
Table 20. Six Strategic SDG Transitions Assessment.....	85
Table 21. Plan Belize Digital Initiatives 2022-2026 .....	89
Table 22. Social Protection Policy Instrument.....	91
Table 23. Climate Financing Landscape .....	93
Table 24. Public Sector Performance.....	96
Table 25. Public Sector Performance.....	97
Table 26. Public Sector Investment Projects Update/Ministry of Economic Development.....	102
Table 27. Social Security Coverage .....	102
Table 28. Public Sector Budgetary Allocation on Social Services .....	103
Table 29. Public Sector Budgetary Investment on Social Services.....	104

# List of figures

Figure 1. Tourism Arrival 1st Quarter of year.....	18
Figure 2. Working Age Population Education Level .....	26
Figure 3. Tourist Arrivals 2019-2023 .....	28
Figure 4. Multi-Dimensional Poverty Deprivations .....	37
Figure 5. Inflation .....	39
Figure 6. Ministry of Health Budgetary Allocation/Distribution .....	40
Figure 7. Ministry of Education Budgetary Allocation and Distribution.....	41
Figure 8. Women in Managerial Position in the Labour Force .....	42
Figure 9. Population with Access to Electricity .....	45
Figure 10. Energy Indicators .....	46
Figure 11. Manufacturing GDP Contribution.....	47
Figure 12. Ministry of Infrastructure Budgetary Allocation/ Distribution .....	48
Figure 13. Ministry of Human Development Budgetary Allocation/ Distribution.....	49
Figure 14. Installed Renewable Energy Capacity.....	54
Figure 15. Major Crimes by Category.....	59
Figure 16. The Universal Periodic Review Process, OHCHR.....	69
Figure 17. Amnesty Applicants Supported by IOM .....	80
Figure 18. Amnesty Applicants by Sex Supported by IOM .....	80
Figure 19. UNDCO Transitional Approach for SDG Acceleration.....	84
Figure 20. Belize AFPs Survey on the Transitions .....	84
Figure 21. Social Protection Coverage.....	92
Figure 22. Government of Belize Recurrent Budget by Ministries for 2023 & 2024 Fiscal Years	98
Figure 23. Government of Belize Capital II Budget Distribution by Ministry for FYs 2024 & 2025	99
.....	99
Figure 24. Government of Belize Budgetary Distribution by Ministry for FYs 2023 & 2024.....	100
Figure 25. Government of Belize Budget Structure .....	101
Figure 26. Sources of Climate Investment.....	105
Figure 27. Methods for Climate Investment .....	105



# Acronyms

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>BOOST</b>	Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation
<b>CABEI</b>	Central American Bank for Economic Integration
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community and Common Market
<b>CBB</b>	Central Bank of Belize
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CCCCC</b>	Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre
<b>CCPR-OP2-DP</b>	Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>CDB</b>	Caribbean Development Bank
<b>CEACR</b>	Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CESCR-OP</b>	Optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>CPA</b>	Country Poverty Assessment
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CRC-OP-IC</b>	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CRPD-OP</b>	Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
<b>DCO</b>	UN Development Cooperation Office
<b>DESA</b>	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)
<b>ECLAC</b>	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>EOB</b>	Equal Opportunities Bill
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
<b>GAP</b>	Government Accountability Project
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gas
<b>GOB</b>	Government of Belize
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HRC</b>	Human Rights Council
<b>HRCB</b>	Human Rights Commission of Belize
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IDB</b>	Inter-American Development Bank
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IDA/WB</b>	International Development Association (World Bank Concessional Window Financing)
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>LNOB</b>	Leave No One behind
<b>LPG</b>	Liquified Petroleum Gas
<b>KOICA</b>	Korea International Cooperation Agency
<b>MCC</b>	Millennium Challenge Corporation
<b>MEA</b>	Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements
<b>MF</b>	Mutual Fund

<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>MPI</b>	Multi-dimensional Poverty Index
<b>MPTF</b>	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
<b>MSDCF</b>	Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>NAC</b>	National AIDS Commission
<b>NHI</b>	National Health Insurance
<b>NBSAP</b>	National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan
<b>NCCPSAP</b>	National Climate Change Policy, Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2020
<b>NCFC</b>	National Committee for Families and Children
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>NEMO</b>	National Emergency Management Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institution
<b>NWC</b>	National Women's Commission
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OPHI</b>	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
<b>PAHO/WHO</b>	Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization
<b>PC</b>	Protected Characteristic
<b>PET</b>	Polyethylene terephthalate
<b>POC</b>	Persons of Concern
<b>SCP</b>	Sustainable Production & Consumption
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SERP</b>	United Nations Covid-19 Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Plan
<b>SIB</b>	Statistical Institute of Belize
<b>SMART</b>	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
<b>SOC</b>	Soil Organic Carbon
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Program on HIV and AIDS
<b>UN-HABITAT</b>	United Nations Human Settlement Program
<b>UNCAC</b>	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
<b>UNCCD</b>	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Program
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNIBAM</b>	United Belize Advocacy Movement
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review
<b>VNR</b>	Volunteer National Review (High Political Forum on Sustainable Development)
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WINS</b>	Wash in Schools
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WTTC</b>	World Travel & Tourism Council

# United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Belize

<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PAHO/WHO</b>	Pan American Health Organization/ World Health Organization
<b>UN WOMEN</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UN AIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Education, Scientific & Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime
<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office for Project Services
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme



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# Foreword



## Raul Salazar

Resident Coordinator United Nations in Belize



The United Nations remains a steadfast partner in Belize's journey towards achieving sustainable development, grounded in the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2024 Update is an important reflection of the United Nations shared commitment to supporting Belize in its pursuit of sustainable development. The United Nations system, recognizes the challenges and opportunities that have shaped Belize's recent trajectory, including the country's remarkable resilience in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and social inequities. This CCA builds upon comprehensive data and consultations with national stakeholders, ensuring that the UN's strategic support remains aligned with Belize's national priorities, international commitment and the 2030 Agenda for the 5 Ps: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.

The CCA Update provides an in-depth analysis of Belize's socio-economic landscape, its progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the ongoing efforts to strengthen human rights, governance, human development, and climate resilience. The CCA update also

emphasizes the importance of addressing key development challenges - such as sustainable food systems, energy access, digital transformation, education, social protection and decent jobs, and climate action - which are essential for accelerating progress across multiple goals and recover progress lost on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. By focusing on the latter six transitions and investment pathways, this CCA update charts a path forward for accelerating progress on the SDGs, particularly reducing poverty by 50%, and reinforcing Belize's underlying commitment to Leaving No One Behind.

As the UN Resident Coordinator for Belize, I am proud to present this updated analysis, which will inform our continued efforts to support the Government of Belize in building a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future for all. Through the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNMSDCF) and other collaborative initiatives, the United Nations System remains steadfast in our partnership with Belize to address the most pressing development challenges, reduce inequalities, and ensure that no one is left behind. Furthermore, the CCA update serves as a critical tool for guiding the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable

Development Cooperation Framework (UNMSDCF) 2022-2026 and informs the UN's programming and strategic interventions.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of the UN Country Team, government counterparts, civil society, and development partners in contributing to this process. Together, we can build on Belize's achievements and ensure that our collective actions create lasting, positive impacts for the people of Belize in fostering a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future for all Belizeans.

As we release the United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2024 Update, the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to supporting Belize and all stakeholders in the pursuit of inclusive and resilient growth.

# Executive Summary

**Introduction:** The 2024 Common Country Analysis (CCA) update, led by the UN Country Team (UNCT) and facilitated by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), provides a comprehensive review of secondary research, key national reports, and data from various stakeholders, including UN agencies, development partners, and the Government of Belize. This update ensures alignment with national priorities, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and international norms, with the findings validated by the Programme Management Team (PMT). The insights will guide UN system programming and inform the National Country Implementation Plan (CIP).

**Socio-Economic Context:** Between 2020 and 2023, Belize demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and global geopolitical shocks. The government's strategic interventions, including fiscal stimulus, support for MSMEs, and strengthened healthcare infrastructure, facilitated a robust economic recovery, with GDP returning to pre-pandemic levels by 2021 and continuing to grow. However, despite significant achievements such as, by 2022, tourism earnings exceeding 2019 earnings by 13.6% and progress in economic diversification, challenges remain. These challenges include persistent disparities, a 26.4% multidimensional poverty rate, and vulnerabilities to global economic fluctuations and climate change. Addressing social inequities and ensuring inclusive growth are critical as Belize continues its development journey.

**SDG Progress:** Belize has made notable progress in several SDGs, particularly in poverty reduction, health, education, and gender equality. Targeted investments and social protection measures have reduced the multidimensional poverty index, though challenges like urban-rural disparities and income inequality persist. Health outcomes have improved, with better maternal and child health and a malaria-free status, but non-communicable diseases and mental health require further attention. Education achievements include high primary school completion rates, yet vocational training and rural education gaps remain. Efforts under SDG 5 (Gender Equality) have increased women's participation in decision-making and led to a revised national gender policy, though issues such as violence against women continue to challenge progress.

Belize has also advanced in sustainable energy, economic growth, infrastructure, and reducing deprivations. Renewable energy adoption has increased, and post-pandemic economic recovery continues. Infrastructure improvements have strengthened economic resilience, and efforts to further reduce deprivations are ongoing, though income disparities remain high. Despite progress in areas like affordable housing and disaster resilience, challenges such as skill gaps, low productivity, and an undiversified economic base require continued strategic action and international collaboration.

Belize's achievements in planet-related SDGs highlight both successes and challenges. Groundwater management has ensured access to quality drinking water, though sanitation gaps persist. Climate action progress includes the Belize Low Emissions Development Strategy, and Belize's commitments under Life Below Water with the Blue Bond agreement. However,

challenges like deforestation and underreporting of emissions remain, affecting Belize's global environmental performance. Progress in Peace and Justice includes reductions in crime, but significant issues like gender-based violence and child abuse require ongoing legal reforms and strengthened social protection.

**Human Rights Assessment:** Belize continues to make incremental progress to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights at national and local levels. In this update to the CCA, the improvements in treaty body reporting by the State as well as the joint efforts by the state institutions, the UN and other partners in implementing the recommendations of the UN treaty bodies and mechanisms are documented. In this update there is also a particular focus on the related commitments enshrined in the Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), as the last of the core conventions that Belize ratified. The progress in education, health, social protection and employment is reflected yet highlighting those populations whose experience in fulfilling these rights remain marginal.

**Six Transitions:** Belize's approach to accelerating SDG progress focuses on six key transitions: sustainable food systems, energy access, digital transformation, education, social protection and decent jobs, and addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These transitions serve as strategic entry points for collaboration with the government and stakeholders, promoting synergies across multiple goals while managing trade-offs. The approach emphasizes localization, engaging local stakeholders, and leveraging community knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of SDG initiatives.

**Financial Landscape:** Belize's financial landscape is shaped by public sector funding, with economic growth between 2021 and 2023 improving fiscal conditions. However, slower GDP growth projected for 2024 could constrain capital investment expansion with an increasing fiscal deficit. The 2024/2025 recurrent budget will rise by 5%, with significant allocations to education, health, and citizen security. Social sector financing faces sustainability challenges, notably in the Non-Contributory Pension and Social Security Fund, prompting the need for tax base expansion and new financing mechanisms. Belize also faces difficulties in climate finance utilization due to capacity gaps and high transaction costs, highlighting the need for continued international support in Belize meeting its 2030 climate goals.





## 1) Introduction

The United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) is the UN's independent, impartial and collective United Nations Systems assessment and analysis to determine the development situation and needs of Belize. A CCA is prepared every 5 years since it serves as a baseline document that informs the 5-year United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNMSDCF), outlining the UN's strategic support and partnership with Belize. The CCA encompasses a thorough analysis of the country's development achievements, challenges, opportunities and progress, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It includes an examination of economic, social, environmental, and political factors that impact Belize's development trajectory.

A CCA update is prepared annually by the United Nations Country Team. The United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2024 update process is an initiative aimed at revisiting and refining the comprehensive assessment of Belize's sustainable development landscape. The update ensures that the CCA remains relevant and aligned with Belize's development priorities and challenges. As such it allows the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNMSDCF) 2022-2026 to be adaptive and responsive to emerging issues, ensuring the UN's support remains effective throughout the implementation period.

Led by the UNCT, the 2024 CCA update involved robust review of secondary research and analysis of relevant documents and data from various UN agencies, development partners, national



partners, stakeholders, youth and Government of Belize counterparts in support of sustainable development. Furthermore, to ensure that the MSDCF is aligned with National priorities, the Sustainable Development Goals, and international norms and standards, the following country reports and processes, supported by the UNS, were used as inputs in preparing several chapters including those on SDG progress and the human rights assessment:

- ***The Belize Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2024*** – Belize reported on progress covering the 17 SDGs since 2017 as the reference year when the first Belize VNR was conducted. This report is voluntary and was country-led, aiming to share experiences, including successes, challenges, and lessons learned, in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2017 VNR covered SDGs 1 (poverty), 3 (Health), 5 (Gender) and 14 (Life Below Water).
- ***The Universal Periodic Review (UPR 2023)*** – this national report provides a review of the human rights record for Belize. This review outlined actions taken by Belize to improve human rights conditions and fulfil its obligation under human rights commitment. The UPR consultation included national reports, independent human rights experts, and information from non-governmental organizations and the United Nations in Belize.
- ***The Convention on the Elimination of the All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 2024*** – reports on measures taken by Belize to comply with CEDAW commitments. This report covered legislative, judicial, administrative, and other actions to eliminate discrimination and ensure gender equality, highlighting progress, challenges, and plans to improve women's status.
- ***The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 2024 Report*** – This report covered measures undertaken to address the longstanding recommendations from the CRC Committee to improve the quality of life for children and their families in Belize.
- ***Annual review of Belize's application of ILO Conventions, Protocols and Recommendations by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR)*** - reports on legal, administrative and practical measures taken by Belize to comply with ILO Conventions and Protocols ratified by Belize. These reports are submitted by the government and may be optionally supplemented by reports from workers' and employers' organizations. The CEACR is a body of independent legal experts and meets annually to review application by member States of ILO Conventions, Protocols, and Recommendations.
- ***National Report on the Implementation of Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development***

The Office of the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRCO) facilitated and coordinated the process of the CCA update, the Programme Management Team (PMT) validated using a guidance matrix for review and feedback together with bi-lateral meeting between the Agencies and the RCO/OHCHR, while the UN Country Team (UNCT) both led and approved the process. The updated analysis will inform UNS country programming and the National Country Implementation Plan (CIP).

For the CCA 2024 update, the report is structured as follows:

- **Socio-Economic Context:** Analysis of the country's economic performance, poverty levels, employment, and overall human development indicators.
- **SDG Progress:** Detailed analysis of the country's achievements and gaps in implementing the SDGs, identifying priority areas for intervention.
- **Human Rights and Governance:** Assessment of governance structures, rule of law, human rights, and inclusiveness of political and social systems.
- **Six Transitions:** Investment Pathways to Deliver on the SDGs
- **SDG Financing:** Public Sector Assessment

In summary, the 2024 CCA update is a crucial management tool in ensuring that the UN's efforts are effectively tailored to support the country's sustainable development journey, addressing both ongoing and new challenges with a robust and informed strategy, ensuring the UN's support is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the country's development context.



## 2) Socio-Economic Context

Despite facing several challenges, Belize showed **resilience and adaptability from 2020 to 2023**.<sup>1</sup> Measures were implemented to alleviate the economic impacts of the pandemic, including fiscal stimulus packages and support for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Efforts were also made to strengthen healthcare infrastructure in collaboration with the United Nations System and other development partners, uphold good governance, and adhere to sound fiscal policies. Successful debt negotiations and consolidation with commercial bond holders and with the Government of Venezuela led to substantial reduction in public debt, while the Business Process Outsourcing sector experienced exponential growth, and foreign direct investment increased. These initiatives helped safeguard livelihoods, stabilize economic activities, and lay the groundwork for sustained economic recovery throughout the three-year period from 2020 to 2023.

The period 2020-2023 also marked a period of accelerated economic expansion with preCovid-19 GDP being achieved by 2021, despite the impact of exogenous shocks be it natural or geopolitical shocks (Ukraine-Russian, Middle East). Henceforth, at the completion of 2023, the socio-economic environment showed commendable stride towards sustainable development, epitomized by nominal GDP per capita reaching US\$7,616 (CBB/SIB), reflecting growing economic stability and 10.6% downward adjustment to population based on the 2022 Housing and Population Census.<sup>2</sup> However, a multi-dimensional poverty rate of 26.4% (2023) serves as a reminder of the disparities that still exist within the country. As Belize marches forward on its path towards sustainable development, addressing these issues with targeted policies and investments will be crucial to ensure inclusive growth and prosperity for all its citizens.

### Macro-Economic Performance

Following robust growth of 15.2% in 2021 and 8.7% in 2022, **GDP continued its strong trajectory** with an estimated growth rate of 4.7% in 2023 (IMF); consequently, real GDP in 2021 reached pre-pandemic levels. This growth was primarily driven by expansion in tourism, construction, retail and wholesale trade, transport, and the business process outsourcing sectors. Additionally, the unemployment rate dropped significantly from 13.7% in 2020 to 3.4% in 2023.<sup>3</sup> The fiscal position also improved notably, with public debt decreasing from 103% of GDP in 2020 to 66.2% in 2023 (IMF). This improvement was supported by robust nominal GDP growth, a substantial enhancement in the primary fiscal balance on account of GDP growth and concomitant growth in

<sup>1</sup> Covid-19 health measures included closing the airport to commercial airlines for 7 months (March 23 – September 2020), closing all land borders to tourist for 23 months (March 22, 2020, to February 6, 2022), closing Sea ports for Cruise-ships for 15 months (April 2020 – June 2021), and closing the Corozal Free Zone bordering Mexico for 10 months (March 21, 2020, to January 2021).

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank defines an Upper Middle-Income country as having a GDP/Capita of US\$4,466 - \$13,845. Pre-census population estimate of 444,800 for 2022 was adjusted to the 2022 population census estimate of 397,483 and with it earlier and later years.

<sup>3</sup> Unemployment rate for 2023 reflects the average of the April (2.8%) and September (4.0%) surveys reflecting an economy approaching full employment with the under-employment rate being 5.5% during September 2023.

imports and trade, reduced tax leakage, a debt-for-marine-protection swap with The Nature Conservancy (Blue Bond), and a negotiated discount on Belize's Petrocaribe debt with Venezuela.

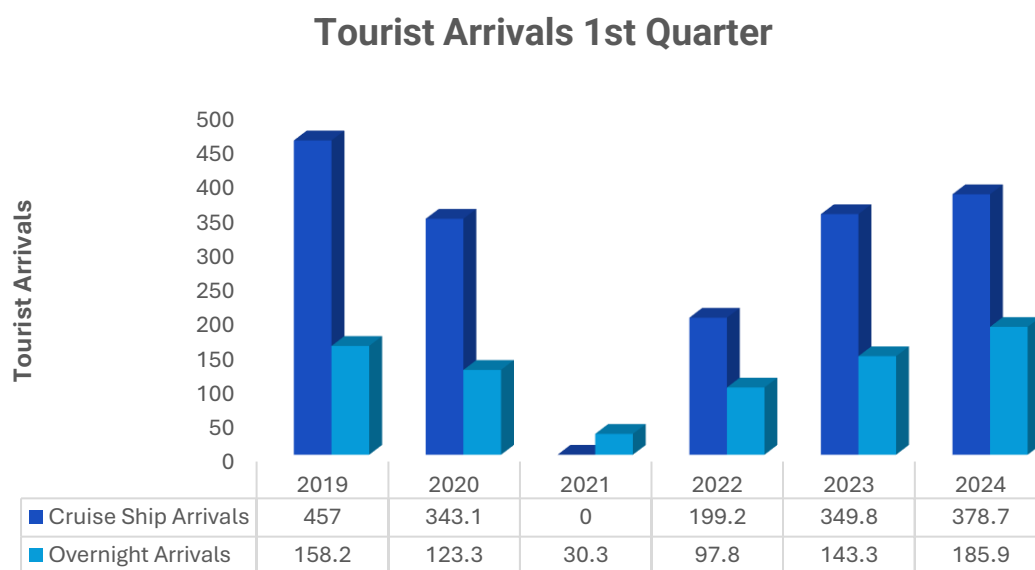
**Table 1. Macro-Economic Environment**

Macro-Economic Environment	2020	2021	2022	2023
GDP Growth	-13.40%	17.90%	8.70%	4.70%
Inflation	0.10%	3.20%	6.30%	4.40%
Primary Fiscal Surplus/GDP	-8.30%	0.00%	1.60%	1.20%
Overall Fiscal Deficit/GDP	-9.90%	-1.30%	-0.10%	-1.00%
Public Debt/GDP	103.00%	82.30%	67.10%	66.20%
Unemployment	13.7%	9.2%	5.0%	4.0%
Under-employment	23.80%	18.40%	6.70%	5.50%
Gross International Reserves (months)	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.4
Multi-Dimensional Poverty		36.50%		26.40%

Source: LFS and MPI, SIB; IMF Article IV Consultation 2024

**First Quarter 2024:** Estimates of real GDP, by the Statistical Institute of Belize showed that, for the first quarter of January to March 2024, the total value of goods and services produced within the country was US \$0.745 billion. This represents a 10% or US \$68.1 million increase, from US \$0.68 billion produced during the first quarter of 2023.

**Figure 1. Tourism Arrival 1st Quarter of year**



Source: Belize Tourism Board

Economic growth during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2024 was mainly driven by strong performances in the tertiary sector which expanded by 13.8%, with overnight tourist arrivals expanding by 29.7% relative to 2023, with the pre-covid-19 first quarter of 2019 being surpassed by 17.5%, cruise-ship arrival increasing by 8.2%, accommodation & food industries linked to tourism expanding by 43.2%. The secondary sector also expanded by 3.5% ; mainly driven by growth of 31% in electricity generation and growth of 5.9% in construction. In contrast, output within the primary sector recorded an overall decrease of 9.1%, due to decreased citrus production coupled with a considerable drop in marine exports. Taxes on Products were up by 14.5% during the period, from US \$86.5 million in the first quarter of 2023 to US \$99 million in the first quarter of 2024 (SIB).

With respect to inflation year-to-date inflation rate for the first five months of 2024, when compared to the same period in 2023, stood at 3.9%. The Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages category rose by 6.3%, while the prices of restaurant and accommodation services went up by 11%, health inflation went up by 5.9% and insurance and financial services went up by 4.6% reflecting the cost-of-living crisis facing the population at the lower end of the wage income scale.

During the post Covid-19 period, Belize exhibited prudent fiscal management, evidenced by an overall fiscal deficit within the range of 0.1% to 1.3%. This indicates that the government's expenditure was lower than its revenue, showcasing fiscal discipline and responsible budgetary practices. Additionally, with 3.4 months of foreign exchange reserves held by the Central Bank of Belize, the country maintains a buffer against external shocks, ensuring stability in international trade and finance. These indicators collectively underscore Belize's commitment to fostering a resilient and sustainable trajectory, poised for continued growth and development.

Belize concluded 2023 with robust economic performance, marked by an estimated growth rate of 4.7%. This growth signifies the country's resilience and ability to navigate global economic fluctuations, bolstered by strategic policies and investment initiatives. However, alongside this growth, Belize faced a moderate inflation rate of 4.4%, reflecting imported inflation on account of external shocks in Europe and the middle east, high crude oil prices globally and its linkage along the productive chain with cost-of-living ramifications.

## Social Strides with Challenge

With an average life expectancy of 73.7 years with females at 76.7 years and males at 71.1 years (PAHO/WHO, 2022), Belize has made significant strides in healthcare, ensuring Belizeans access to primary/ preventative medical services through gradual roll out of the National Health Insurance Scheme.<sup>4</sup> Belize's middle-tier Human Development Index of 0.70 globally underscores (Human Development summary Report 2022, UNDP) commitment to fostering well-being and opportunity for Belizeans through progress in living standard, education and health.<sup>5</sup> Despite these achievement, challenges persist, as reflected in an under 5 mortality rate of 19/ 1000 live

<sup>4</sup> The National Health Insurance now covers all the districts (75% of the population) except for the Cayo district and larger cayes of San Pedro and Caulker that is expected to be covered in fiscal year 2025/2026.

<sup>5</sup> This index ranking puts Belize at 118 out of 193 countries worldwide indicating that 117 countries are doing better in terms of life expectancy, education and standard of living indicators.



births with 17.6 for females and 20.31 for males for 2023 (SIB), reflecting significant challenge in the health care system, maternal and child health and the need for continued investment in healthcare infrastructure and child welfare programs.

An alarming 60% of its children aged 0-14 years are living below the threshold of income poverty as of 2018-2019. In 2021 approximately 36.5% of the population was living in multidimensional poverty, with the highest incidence of poverty among those aged 0–14 years (43.9%). For the 2023 Multi-dimensional poverty survey, the incidence of poverty declined to 26.4% of the population while the intensity reduced slightly from 39.2% to 38.4% and for those age 0-14 years the incidence of poverty decreased from 43.9% to 33.7% for the period 2021-2023. Despite the high levels of monetary and multidimensional poverty, the social protection coverage remains low, with only 3 percent of vulnerable people are in receipt of social assistance compared to a Latin America and Caribbean average of 39 percent, and there is no legal framework underpinning social assistance schemes.

Although total public expenditure for education in Belize is high relative to LAC and has been in an upward trend<sup>6</sup>, the percentage of test-takers averaging 'inadequate' across core subjects increased in recent years. The structure and governance of Belize's education system present complexities with challenges in ensuring accountability due to the influence of powerful players such as Belize National Teachers Union. Most schools are church-managed, with significant costs borne by households, which further complicates the accountability landscape.

Quality gaps limit effective health care coverage and health human resources remain scarce although Belize's total health expenditure as a share of total government expenditures is among the highest in the Caribbean (4.98% of GDP in 2021). The country faces an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases, communicable diseases, and climate-sensitive vector-borne diseases, as well as high mortality rates among male adults due to homicides and road accidents. Non-communicable diseases are on the rise due to unhealthy diets linked to rising poverty due to loss of livelihoods (pandemic, droughts and floods), deteriorating food security and insufficient physical activity. Adolescent's mental health remains a major concern. Between 2008 and 2017, 56 adolescents aged 10–14 years and 276 adolescents aged 15–19 years attempted suicide, which together represented 36% of attempted suicides in all age groups during the period. Mental health issues and obesity are the leading causes of non-communicable diseases among adolescent boys and girls.

There was significant progress in routine immunization and vaccine coverage ranged from 82% to 93% in 2023 and 2 out of 12 (17%) vaccines in the schedule achieved coverage of 90% or more. The maternal mortality ratio has spiked from 56.6 per 100,000 live births in 2022 to 79.8 per 100,000 in 2023 (PAHO/WHO) mainly amongst teenagers. The under-five mortality rate was 19

<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://mof.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/APPROVED-ESTIMATES-OF-REVENUE-AND-EXPENDITURE-FOR-FISCAL-YEAR-2024-25.pdf>



deaths per 1000 births in 2023 and the infant mortality rate was 15.1 per 1,000 live births in in 2023.

Child protection is an area with multiple issues requiring from UNICEF significant support. Girls and boys in Belize experience frequent and multiple forms of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, and are exposed to high levels of violence. In 2021, 109 major crimes were committed against children of which 65 percent were sexual related crimes. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the victims of crimes were between the age 13-17 years old and 15% between the age of 5-12 years. Child marriage and early unions are prevalent with one in five girls and one in 10 boys aged 15-19 being in child marriage or in early union. Reporting on GBV against women and children remains poor and fragmented, government responsiveness continues to experience constraints and barriers especially for rural, indigenous, and migrant populations.

Children are unable to access fair and equitable justice due to the lack of legal support of child protection actors, lack of adequate information and lack of coordinated and standardized services. Hence, children and families do not come forward to give statements as witnesses nor do they seek justice if they are victims. At present there is no specific unit within the Police Department that deals exclusively with children (both as victims and alleged offenders). As highlighted in the 2024 Child Protection Evaluation, while there is a national protocol for responding to Child Protection Issues and Sexual Violence, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the security force; however, these procedures are not adhered to.

Belize became a member of the Regional Initiative – Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour in May 2023. This was a signal of Belize’s commitment to operationalizing its national policy and strategy on Child Labour which was developed in 2022 with ILO support. An analysis of comments received from ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) up to 2023, presented below, offers insight into current gaps in national implementation of the two fundamental conventions pertaining to Child Labour: [Minimum Age Convention, 1973 \(C138\)](#) and [Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 \(C182\)](#).

**Table 2. Gaps on Child Labour Conventions**

C138	C182
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum age legislation must apply to all types of employment and work.</li> <li>• It does not have a list of light jobs by type of activity or by legal conditions, nor is it specific to voluntary or unpaid activities.</li> <li>• Need to improve the registration system and update the fines established in the labour law to guarantee its deterrent effect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of consistency in the legal definition of “child” in the legislation to avoid ambiguities and difficulties in the application of international human rights conventions and standards.</li> <li>• Re: dangerous jobs, need to reinforce sanctions against crimes related to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) of people under 18 years of age, drug production and trafficking, and other illicit activities.</li> <li>• Lack of tripartite integration of the Human Trafficking Council</li> <li>• Information on CSE violations, investigations and prosecutions, convictions and sanctions following the new legislation.</li> </ul>

The country is extremely vulnerable to climate change and climate-related hazards, which is a significant threat to child-wellbeing and the fulfilment of their rights, having considerable impact on children’s wellbeing and interrupted delivery of basic social services. Access to safe drinking water is challenging in many parts of Belize, particularly in rural areas. There was a significant decrease in the percentage of schools reporting access to an adequate water supply (58.3%) in the last WASH in Schools Assessment (2023) as opposed to those in 2009 (64%). However, a higher reliability of water was reported in 2023 than in 2009. In 2023, schools also reported an increase in water access points, from 2009 (i.e. 75.0% as opposed to 61.0% previously). Recent administrative data demonstrates increased concern over water quality.

Belize is a country of origin, destination, transit and return where management of immigration is extraordinarily complex, and integration and social cohesion are challenging. Ministry of Immigration estimated that the number of irregular migrants in Belize in 2021 would be approximately 40,000-60,000 persons. Irregular migration is criminalized in Belize, often leading to the detention of children and women. Care options for unaccompanied migrant children are inadequate. The country lacks a comprehensive migration and development policy that encompasses various aspects of migration governance and effectively integrates migration into national development planning. Irregular migration breeds illegality and abuse. Many migrants find themselves victims of human trafficking. Because of their vulnerability, irregular migrants are often employed at very low wages, and work in dreadful conditions. The impact on children is especially pronounced as registering the children in school exposes the parents, and there is a



tendency not to enrol them. Due to unregistered migrants, the already stretched health services are overburdened jeopardizing the quality of health service delivery.

In a 2022 Report the US Department of Labour, Bureau of International considered Belize to have made moderate advances towards the elimination of child labour. However, the economic exploitation of minors- children and adolescents- in key agricultural sectors (banana, citrus and sugarcane), and their exposure to hazardous and worst forms of child labour continues to be an area for attention, within the wider child protection framework. In addition to technical assistance for targeted interventions within the framework of the National Child Labour Policy and Strategy which aims to achieve SDG Target 8.7<sup>7</sup>, the work and contributions of the ILO that sustainably address structural causes (and consequences) of child labour continue through an integrated Decent Work Country Programme developed and formally agreed among national tripartite actors (Ministry of Labour, Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the National Trade Union Congress of Belize).

Although the unemployment rates in 2023 have fallen below the pre-pandemic levels, the labour force participation rates have remained low. As of April 2023, total unemployment stood at an estimated 2.8% (approximately 5,500 people), continuing a post-COVID-19 pandemic downward trend (2021-2023).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, labour force participation rates have fallen from between 63 and 64 per cent during the pre-pandemic period (2014-2019) to just 58.5 per cent in 2023. The fall in labour force participation can be attributed both to a rapid increase in the working-age population (from just under 238,000 in 2015 to 326,500 in 2022) and implementation of revised definition of who is considered employed and unemployed as of September 2020 by SIB.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> A combination of low unemployment but high levels of economic inactivity (at least in the formal economy) suggests that many Belizeans have opted not to join the labour force for reasons that need to be investigated such as low wages relative to opportunity cost of joining, particularly for the female population.

## Labour Market Challenge and Recovery

Overall, the Belizean labour market exhibits several challenges characterised by labour underutilisation, poor quality of work, and persistence disparities which are likely to impede the

<sup>7</sup> This target is part of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and emphasizes protecting vulnerable populations, ensuring human dignity, and creating fair work opportunities for all. Ending child labor by 2025 is a key milestone under this target.

<sup>8</sup> Changes to the way that the SIB calculated unemployment rates may account for some of this reduction. Labour force comparison pre-2020 with 2020 and post 2020 are not comparable given revised definition to employed and unemployed implemented as of 2020. Statistical Institute of Belize, Labor Force Survey Release for April 2023; Statistical Institute of Belize, Labor Force Survey, n.d.

<sup>9</sup> Data from SIB LFS. Despite the decline in labour force participation rate, the size of the labour force has grown steadily in recent years, from just over 156,000 in 2015, to 178,000 in 2019, to 195,000 in 2023. ILO, 2020 Labour Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> For example, under the new definition “persons who produce goods, mainly or exclusively for family consumption, volunteer workers and unpaid trainees and interns are no longer considered as employed. Likewise, unemployed are those without work, available for work and be looking for work; with the previous nomenclature, the person was not required “to be looking for work” to be considered unemployed. The effect of the new definition was that Labor force participation and the Unemployment rate in September 2020 was 55.1% and 13.7% as opposed to 71.1% and 29.6% as would have been had the definition not been modified.

realization of decent work for many workers. The potential labour force—comprising individuals of working age who are not economically active or actively seeking employment but remain willing and available for work— is estimated at 10,000 people. Various barriers to employment exist, including childcare responsibilities, resource limitations, local labour market constraints, and discouragement resulting from previous unsuccessful job searches. Underemployment is also a concern, affecting 4.5% of the total employment with the gender gap being closed by September 2023. These people engage in part-time work while remain available and willing to work additional hours. For many workers, this type of time-related underemployment leads to insufficient income, exacerbating working poverty rates and undermining the overall productivity of the workers.

Overall, these trends suggest challenges not only in accessing decent employment for those outside the formal labour force, but also in ensuring the quality of employment for those already active in the workforce and addressing decent work deficits in the labour market. For example, low and declining unemployment rates in the context of wider labour market challenges (low participation rates, high incidence of poverty, uneven coverage of social protection) may also indicate that an increasing number of workers, to meet basic needs, have resorted to low quality work as a survival strategy. In many cases, this may include work in the informal economy, which is estimated to account for more than a third of all employment, including a large share of self-employment. Almost by definition, decent work deficits are more pronounced in the informal economy, including the denial of rights at work, the absence of sufficient opportunities for quality employment, inadequate social protection, and the absence of social dialogue.

The profile of informal employment in Belize highlights several decent work deficits. Informal employment is concentrated in agriculture and retail sector activities, which together accounts for 44.5% of all informal employment. A third of informal workers (32.6%) are engaged in elementary occupations such as basic agricultural work, street vending, domestic work, or yard cleaning. Informal workers in private firms, MSMEs, accounted for almost half (45.6%) of total informal employment, with the remainder (54.4%) comprised of self-employed own-account workers. On average, workers in informal employment worked 32 hours per week and earned US\$420 monthly, about 60% of the mean monthly earnings of those in formal employment (LFS Sept. 2021). There are notably more men than women in informal employment, although as a share of total male and female employment, informality rates are comparable (33.8% for women, 36.2% for men). The prevalence of informal employment has declined slightly since the government began collecting relevant data in 2020, when approximately 43% of all employment was informal.<sup>11</sup>

There are challenges facing women, youth, rural communities, indigenous peoples, and migrant workers. Consistently inferior labour market outcomes— lower rates of labour force participation, higher rates of unemployment, and persistent pay gaps – means that these groups risk being left behind in the process of national development.

<sup>11</sup> In the national statistical data, informal employment includes both own-account workers not registered in the Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry or the Social Security Board, and persons in the formal sector but working in informal jobs (i.e. they or their employer did not contribute to social security). Statistical Institute of Belize, Labor Force Survey Report, 2021.

The input/output linkages of an economy operating at close to full employment is reflected in unemployment reaching 2.8% and 4.0% during the months of April and September 2023.<sup>12</sup> For 2023, signs of full employment are also reflected in under-employment approaching a historic level of 4.5% and again the gap between males and females closing for both unemployment and under-employment. Given that for 2024, the IMF is forecasting GDP to grow by 3.5%, it is imperative that policies be put in place to increase labour force participation, particularly for women, to mitigate crowding-in the labour market with consequential impact on inflation. Otherwise, migrant labour may need to be imported to address the productive sector's needs for labour demand. For 2023, the labour force participation is low for women at 44.5% reflecting a gap of 26.9% points lower than that of men.

**Table 3. Labour Force Market**

(Sept./Oct)	2020	2020	2022	2023
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	13.8%	9.2%	5.0%	4.0%
Males	11.6%	6.7%	4.0%	3.6%
Females	17.0%	13.0%	6.8%	4.5%
<b>Underemployment R.</b>	23.8%	18.4%	6.7%	4.5%
Males	23.8%	18.4%	6.4%	4.5%
Females	23.3%	19.8%	7.2%	4.6%
<b>LF Participation Rate</b>	55.1%	61.9%	58.7%	57.7%
Males	68.7%	76.1%	73.4%	71.4%
Females	42.4%	48.2%	44.4%	44.5%

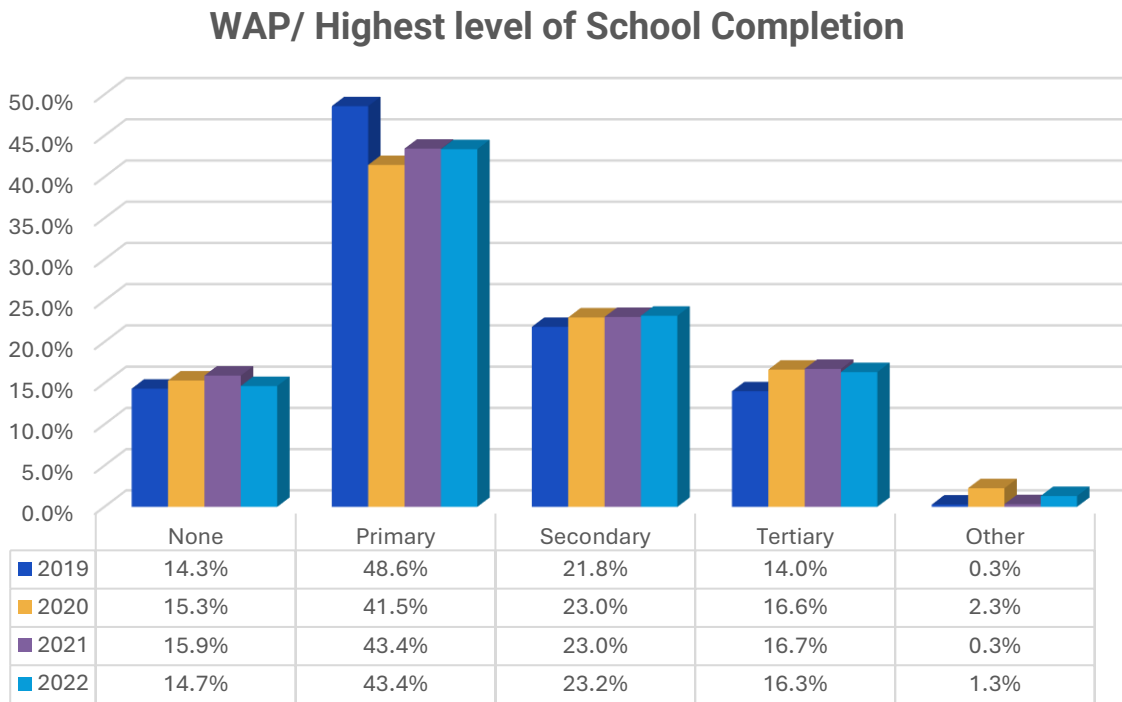
Source: LFS, SIB

LFS September 2022, Belize's WAP was largely low skilled with 58.1% of that population possessing only a primary school education or less; nevertheless, relative to 2019 Belize has seen improvement when 62.9% had primary school or less. With respect to the labour force while still

<sup>12</sup> An economy operating at full employment means that virtually all individuals who are willing and able to work at prevailing wage rates have jobs.

being largely low skilled, compares better relative to WAP; for 2019, 58% of the LF had primary school education or less while for 2022 it moved to 48.6% reflecting a 10% improvement, some of which may be linked to the impact of Government policy (Education Upliftment Project) of providing targeted financial support to high school students residing in high-risk areas.<sup>13</sup> The pronounced gender gap has shown little change in recent years, indicative of entrenched structural barriers to women’s economic participation. LFS analysis (2022) suggested that unpaid domestic and care work is a principal cause of economic inactivity among women.

**Figure 2. Working Age Population Education Level**



Source: Labor Force Survey, SIB

**Preliminary Results Labour Force Survey April 2024:** Preliminary results from the Statistical Institute of Belize's Labour Force Survey for April 2024 indicate a slight rise in the unemployment rate to 3% from 2.8% in April 2023. This marginal increase is mainly due to a decrease of nearly 3,000 employed individuals and more people exiting the labour force. The labour force in April 2024 was estimated at 170,853 persons, with males constituting almost 60 percent. The labour force participation rate declined slightly to 57.4% from 58.1% in April 2023. Gender disparities persist, with women's participation significantly lower at 44.8% compared to men's 71%, largely

<sup>13</sup> This program of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology which is gradually being extended to cover public high schools focus on providing tuition, books, uniform, and a meal to students living in vulnerable and/or high-risk areas with the objective being to keep students in school and decrease criminal activity inter alia. As of 2023 a total of 3,174 high school students were being reached with an additional 6,000 to be incorporated for fiscal year 2024/2025 (Prime Minister Briceno Budget Speech for fiscal year 2024/2025).



due to domestic duties or family care. Youth participation in the labour force stood at 42.3%, with notable gender differences: 34.3% of young females versus 50.3% of young males.

Employment distribution showed 165,808 employed persons in April 2024. Persons ages 25 to 44 made up 50.2% of employed persons, and employment status was predominantly employees (71.5%), followed by self-employed individuals (25.3%). Average monthly income rose to US \$713.50 (5.6%) coinciding with 5.6% increase in working hours from 41.5 to 43.9. This means that workers experienced reduced real wages on account of an inflation rate of 3.9%, with inflation on food being 6.3% reflecting high cost of living during the first quarter of 2024. Informal employment comprised 33.9% of the workforce, predominantly in “Agriculture and Related Activities” and “Wholesale and Retail Trade”.

Unemployment in April 2024 was estimated at 5,046 persons, with higher rates among females (3.9% compared to males (2.5%). Youth unemployment (ages 14 to 24) decreased slightly from 6.7% to 6.5%. Cayo district had the highest unemployment rate at 3.7% , while Corozal had the lowest at 1.6%. Persons with secondary education experienced the highest unemployment rate at 4.3%, while those with tertiary education had the lowest at 1.9%. Approximately 42.5% of the working-age population, or 126,946 persons, were outside the labour force, with females representing over 60% of this group. Many cited personal or family responsibilities (38.8% with 95.3% being females), and schooling (25.1%), as reasons for not seeking employment.

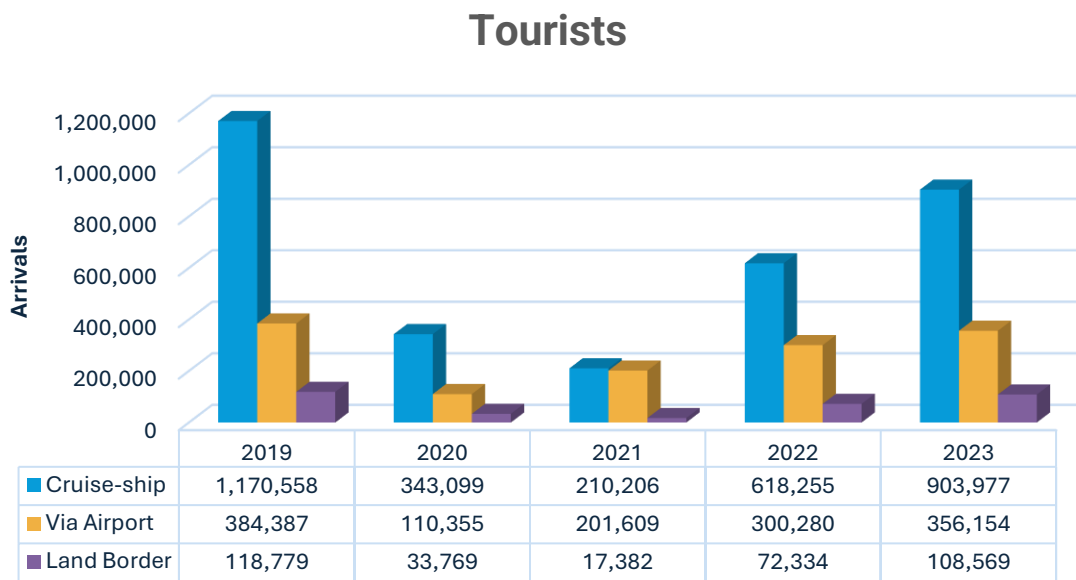
In addition to gaps in labour market data (especially concerning skills), poor coordination among key labour market stakeholders, and the limited reach of public employment services, a fragmented policy landscape, including the absence of a national employment policy, compounds the challenge of addressing decent work in Belize. Sustained creation of quality employment requires coordinated and coherent actions across different policy areas – including skills and training, sustainable enterprise development, sectoral development policies and a conducive macroeconomic environment. Institutions and mechanisms for coherence and coordination, including national employment policies and tripartite labour market institutions, are critical to achieving these objectives.

## Tourism Sector Recovery Post-Covid19 (2020-2023)

By 2022 the tourism sector, a cornerstone of Belize's economy, had surpassed earnings of 2019 exceeding it by US\$72 (13.6% increase); in spite, of 2019 tourist's visitor numbers not expected to be reached until 2024. However, average spending per tourist increased on account of inflation for the hospitality sector, tourists staying longer and targeted Belize Tourist Board (BTB) marketing focusing on higher value markets and post pandemic recovery effect. During 2020 on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, due to travel restrictions and safety concerns, the sector experienced a complete shutdown. However, as global vaccination efforts advanced and travel resumed, Belize saw a remarkable resurgence in tourism with airport arrivals growing on average by 50% on an annual basis during the period 2021 – 2023. Growth trend in tourism is slowing down as it returns to pre-covid19 levels with the first quarter of 2024 reflecting a growth of 8%. The country's natural wonders, such as its famous barrier reef, archaeological sites, and eco-

tourism destinations, along with a strategically executed marketing campaign, played a crucial role in enticing airlines to return and adding new airlines and routes, thus boosting demand from tourists eager to visit Belize.

**Figure 3. Tourist Arrivals 2019-2023**



Source: Belize Tourism Board

The revival of the tourism industry was particularly notable in cruise tourism, with a staggering surge from 343,099 (2020) to 903,977 (2023) visitors, reflecting a remarkable rebound in traveller confidence and cruise operators' renewed interest in the country's offerings. Moreover, airport arrivals witnessed a substantial increase, soaring from 110,355 (2020) to 356,154 (2023) visitors, underscoring Belize's allure as a preferred destination for international travellers seeking diverse experiences, from pristine beaches to vibrant cultural heritage

Land border arrivals also experienced a notable upswing, climbing from 33,769 (2020) to 108,569 (2023) tourists, signalling the effectiveness of Belize's strategy in promoting cross-border travel and enhancing accessibility. This robust recovery in tourism not only revitalized the country's economy but also underscored Belize's resilience and adaptability in navigating unprecedented challenges. Moving forward, sustaining this positive momentum will necessitate continued investment in tourism infrastructure, as well as innovative marketing campaigns to maintain Belize's position as a premier destination for discerning travellers worldwide.

## Economic Diversification

Belize's economy demonstrated some progress on diversification across various pivotal sectors, supporting resilience and stability. The Food Sector notably stands out, encompassing commodities such as corn, rice, beans, poultry, cattle rearing, sugar, citrus fruits, bananas, fisheries and some agro-processing (animal feed, cooking oil, UHT milk, corn flour, and juices). Agriculture holds substantial importance for rural livelihoods and export revenues, contributing towards food security and lowering Belize's "Live and Food Animal Imports" portion of the country's import bill from 14% in 2019 to 8.4% in 2023.

For the period 2020-2023, Belize's trade exports continue to be largely undiversified with 91.7% of all domestic exports being classified as "Live and Food Animals," with sugar, banana, citrus and marine products making up 74% of all domestic exports. However, during the period 2020-2023 some diversification did take place in terms of enlarging exports to the Mexican and Central America markets by 109% and 45% respectively on an annual average basis. With respect to the traditional exports, Belize's dependence on sugar increased from 33% (2020) to 42% of exported goods in 2023. However, progress was made in terms of growth of pepper sauce and animal feed exports growing by 12.8% and 43.1% annually during the period 2020-2023.

**Table 4. Trade Data**

(\$ Millions US)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Domestic Imports	\$ 821.0	\$ 678.2	\$ 909.5	\$ 1,180.8	\$ 1,220.3
Domestic Exports	\$ 207.0	\$ 183.7	\$ 218.5	\$ 243.6	\$ 204.3
Trade Deficit	\$ 614.0	\$ 494.6	\$ 691.0	\$ 937.2	\$ 1,016.0

Source: SIB

Between 2020 to 2023, Belize continued to reflect characteristics of an open economy with imports growing (22% annual growth) at a much faster rate than exports (5% annual growth) and thus the trade deficit expanded at an annual rate of 28% reaching US\$1 billion in 2023. The agriculture sector has experienced major challenges for more than a decade as there continue to be diseases such as the Early Mortality Syndrome affecting shrimp farms and Citrus Greening affecting the citrus industry. These two diseases continue to cause havoc and reduce output in these two sectors that not long ago were comparable to the sugar industry in terms of export earnings exceeding US\$50 million each. The shrimp industry seems to have reached its bottom in 2021 and may be on the recovery with an annual average growth rate of 8.7% for the period 2021-2023. For the citrus industry, it is uncertain if it will still continue to decline before it starts to experience recovery. Citrus concentrate had an annual average growth rate of -22% during the period 2021-2023 and reached an output of US\$10 million in 2023. The banana sector which

represents the other major agricultural export also experienced an annual negative growth of 9% during the latter period.

During the period 2020-2023, the trade deficit was financed with the continued growth in the services sector, particularly, tourism earnings (56% annual growth rate) and the BPO sector, supported with FDI (40% annual growth rate) and continued growth in remittances (9% annual growth rate) from Belizeans in the diaspora.

**Table 5. Foreign Exchange Inflows**

<b>\$ Millions US)</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Tourism Earnings	\$ 526.7	\$ 246.9	\$ 374.1	\$ 598.9
Remittances	\$ 94.5	\$ 118.3	\$ 133.0	\$ 140.1
Net Service Trade	\$ 442.5	\$ 255.2	\$ 327.5	\$ 499.8
FDI Inflows	\$ 91.8	\$ 71.8	\$ 123.0	\$ 139.7

*Source: Central Bank of Belize*

The expansion of the tourism industry has prompted investments in infrastructure, lodging facilities, and leisure pursuits, thereby fostering employment opportunities and fostering economic expansion. Expansion of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry also contributed to Foreign Direct Investment expanding on an annual average by 40% during the period 2020 to 2022. The BPO sector has spread to all districts of the country, except for Toledo, contributing to low unemployment and exerting wage pressure for high school graduates. Estimates for September 2023 put employment by the BPO sector at 11,614 persons which would represent roughly 6.3% of the employed labour force (Source: SIB).

Belize has also made significant progress in diversifying its energy sector, investing in renewable sources like hydro-power, biomass, and solar farms resulting in 52% of Belize's electricity energy source being renewable for 2022.<sup>14</sup> This transition to clean energy not only diminishes reliance on fossil fuels but also establishes Belize as a frontrunner in sustainable development across the Caribbean region. Additionally, the services sector, which encompasses financial services, telecommunications, and business process outsourcing, plays a crucial role in driving economic activity and generating employment opportunities, underscoring the economy's ability to adapt to

<sup>14</sup> Government has also secured a loan of US\$77 through the Saudi Fund for Development for investing and increasing renewable energy by an additional 60 megawatt-hours which should increase the renewable energy supply to close to 90-100% of average demand.

contemporary global trends. In summary, Belize's diversified economy, spanning agriculture, tourism, renewable energy, and services, has re-enforced the foundation for sustained growth and resilience amidst global risks and evolving external shocks.

## Economic Transformation

A notable driving force is Belize's strategic geographical position both within the Caribbean/ Central American region, sharing a border with Mexico and Guatemala. Its English-speaking heritage, together with Spanish as de facto 2<sup>nd</sup> language, provides avenues for trade, investment, tourism, and the services outsourcing sector. Belize's participation in regional entities such as CARICOM fosters economic integration, preferential market access to the USA, Canada, UK and the European Union, and comparative advantages that foster cross-border trade and investment streams. This regional involvement, together with Belize's well developed and reliable internet infrastructure, elevates Belize's competitiveness and creates opportunities for expansion and diversification across different sectors; for example, agriculture exports at zero tariffs and establishment of BPOs.

Furthermore, Belize's dedication to sustainable development and environmental guardianship acts as a pivotal catalyst for economic evolution which also facilitated the purchasing of the US\$554 superbond at a discount of 45% through financing from The Nature Conservancy/ Credit Suisse allowing for Belize to reduce its debt to GDP by 10% in 2022. The nation's abundant biodiversity, natural wealth, and relatively untouched ecosystems, serve as valuable resources that underpin industries such as eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, agro-industry and renewable energy. Commitments to conservation, climate resilience, and an Industrial Strategy with Green/ Blue Policies, not only safeguard Belize's ecological heritage but also generate economic prospects, entice responsible investments, and promote innovation in environmentally sustainable practices.

Moreover, initiatives aimed at fortifying institutional structures, improving governance, and stimulating foreign direct investment is playing a pivotal role in driving economic advancement. Policies designed to foster entrepreneurship, support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), facilitate access to finance, and increase public sector budget allocation for the social sector are all contributing to creating an enabling business environment. Public-private collaborations, regulatory adjustments, and efforts to spread country-wide business process outsourcing are all serving as catalysts for innovation, job generation, and equitable economic expansion. Through the strategic utilization of these initiatives, as reflected in Plan Belize: Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS) 2022-2026, Belize endeavours to develop a more vibrant and diversified economic base that benefits all strata of society while bolstering global competitiveness.

Numerous obstacles impede Belize's economic transformation, potentially hindering its capacity to achieve lasting and inclusive development. A primary concern is the nation's susceptibility to external fluctuations in global commodity prices, the ramifications of climate change, and global events such as human/ agriculture pandemics, the Ukraine-Russia War, conflicts in the Middle East and, of course, climate change impact. These external dynamics have the potential to impact vital sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and trade, resulting in income fluctuations, diminished investment, and economic uncertainty.

Furthermore, Belize confronts structural hurdles, including the narrow scope of diversification beyond conventional sectors such as agriculture and tourism together with its characteristic of a Small Island Development State (SIDS). Dependence on limited industries and external markets renders the economy vulnerable to market volatilities and reduces scope for innovation and value enhancement. Low labour productivity, a largely low skilled labour force, with accompanying low wages, high poverty and inequality need to be addressed for sustainable long-term development. Dependence on Mexico (Comision Federal De Electricidad) for more than 40% of all electricity energy consumption poses significant risk for the productive sector and for a reliable and consistent energy supply nationally.<sup>15</sup> Tackling these factors demands strategic investments in emerging growth sectors, the adoption of technology, skill enhancement, investment in solar farms, and market expansion to bolster competitiveness and fortify resilience against external pressures.

Institutional limitations, encompassing good governance, regulatory processes, and capacity deficiencies, present obstacles to economic progress. Public administration implementation capacity, potential corruption, legal ambiguities, and disputes between Government and the private sector (for example, the sugar sector, the Natural Gas Company, price controls, nationalizations, etc.) have the potential to erode investor confidence, stifle business expansion, and hamper policy execution. Reinforcing institutions, fostering transparency, advocating for good governance principles, and simplifying regulatory structures are imperative for establishing a conducive atmosphere that nurtures enduring sustainable long-term development.

<sup>15</sup> For example in 2019, the Comision Federal de Electricidad (CFE) supplied 57% of BEL electricity generation.





## Progress Towards the 2030 Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. Since 2016, the Sustainable Development Report (SDR)<sup>16</sup> led by Jeffrey D Sachs has been providing data on tracking some of the 169 specific SDG target with 231 unique SDG indicators and ranking performance of UN member states on the SDGs. For 2024, the report highlighted the following:

- On average, only 16 percent of the SDG targets are on track to be met globally by 2030, with the remaining 84 percent showing limited progress or a reversal of progress.
- The pace of SDG progress varies significantly across country groups. Nordic countries continue to lead on SDG achievement, with the BRICS countries making significant progress while poor and vulnerable nations lag far behind
- Sustainable development remains a long-term investment challenge. Reforming the global financial architecture is more urgent than ever
- Global challenges require global cooperation. Barbados ranks the highest in its commitment to UN-based multilateralism; the United States ranks last.
- The SDG targets related to food and land systems are particularly off-track.

<sup>16</sup> Note that this is not an official UN document.

Belize has made noteworthy progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since their adoption in 2015. The country has focused on several key areas, including poverty reduction, education, and environmental sustainability. However, Belize faces several challenges in its journey towards achieving the SDGs. Economic vulnerability, exacerbated by natural disasters, external shocks, and climate action remains a significant hurdle. The SDR 2024 dashboard ranks Belize at 101 out of 167 countries which means that 100 countries are doing better. Secondly, Belize’s index is 65.5 while the regional average does better at 70.2.<sup>17</sup> The dashboard may be summarized in terms of yearly performance and long-term trend:

### SDGs Annual Performance:

- Annual Performance above or equal to 75%:
  - SDGs: 3, 6, 11, 12 and 13
- Annual Performance above or equal to 50% but below 75%:
  - SDGs: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17
- Annual Performance Below 50%: <sup>18</sup>
  - SDG 9 and 10<sup>19</sup>
- **SDGs Long-Term Trend Facing:**
  - Major Challenge:                   SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16
  - Significant Challenge:           SDGs 5, 6, 7, 9, 17
  - Challenge Remaining:           SDGs 11, 12, 13

## People SDGs

Belize has made notable progress across SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Under SDG 1, the country invested significantly in social protection through its Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), reducing the multidimensional poverty index and poverty incidence, despite ongoing urban-rural disparities and high-income inequality. For SDG 2, while significant progress has been made for the period 2021-2023, including improvements in unemployment, underemployment, food security, and the use of safer cooking fuels, challenges remain such as urban-rural disparities and high-income inequality, with a GINI coefficient of 0.49. Furthermore, while enhancements in social protection systems continue, there remains a need for better coverage for persons with disabilities, and disparities in accessing basic services like electricity and improved drinking water, especially in rural areas. In SDG 3, health funding increased, resulting in improved maternal and child health, decreased HIV and tuberculosis cases, and achieving malaria-free status, but non-communicable diseases and mental health issues need better services. The removal of user fees in primary and secondary level health facilities seeks to improve access to health, particularly

<sup>17</sup> The SDG Index score is presented on a scale of 0 to 100 and can be interpreted as a percentage towards optimal performance on the SDGs. Therefore, the difference between 100 and a country’s SDG Index score is the distance, in percentage points, that must be overcome to reach optimum SDG performance.

<sup>18</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Note that the SDG Report 2024 and previous report do not report on SDG 10: Reducing Inequality. However, based on national assessment of 0.49 Gini Coefficient for 2018/19, SDG 10 performance is regarded as below 50% and, likewise, the trend is facing major challenge.

for people living in conditions of vulnerability. SDG 4 saw high primary education completion rates and efforts to improve secondary and pre-primary education, though vocational training and rural-urban disparities remain. Lastly, SDG 5 initiatives promoted gender equality, with increased women's participation in decision-making roles, a revised national gender policy, and the development of Belize's Essential Services Package (ESP), yet challenges in addressing violence against women and effective gender mainstreaming persist.

**Table 6. People SDGs Assessment**

<b>Pillar/SDG</b>	<b>Belize UNCT</b>		
<b>People SDGs</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>1) No Poverty</b>	Multi-dimensional poverty decreased from 36.5% (2021) to 26.4% (2023)	Reducing rural-urban poverty disparities	High income inequality/ poverty with a Gini coefficient of 0.49 and income poverty of 52% (2018/2019)
	Social protection thru' the PSIP, aiming to reduce poverty & protect vulnerable pop.	Improving data collection/ coverage, esp. for persons with disabilities	Limited coverage for persons with disabilities under social protection
	Social Protection Floor/ Policy prepared	Phasing implementation of SP floor & implementation of SP policy	Fiscal Constraint
<b>2) Zero Hunger</b>	Decrease in undernourishment from 6% in 2017 to 4.7% in 2020	Enhancing food security measures and Social Protection, especially for vulnerable groups	Persistent moderate to severe food insecurity increased from 35.7% (2017) to 45.5% (2021) of the pop.
	Increased investments in agriculture & food security through PSIP & development of the National Agriculture & Food Policy 2015-2033	Addressing food insecurity fluctuations due to external factors like Climate Change	High inflation with rising food prices and high transport cost
<b>3) Good Health &amp; Well-Being</b>	High percent of births attended by skilled personnel	Expanding mental health services and address non-communicable diseases	Fluctuating maternal and child mortality rates

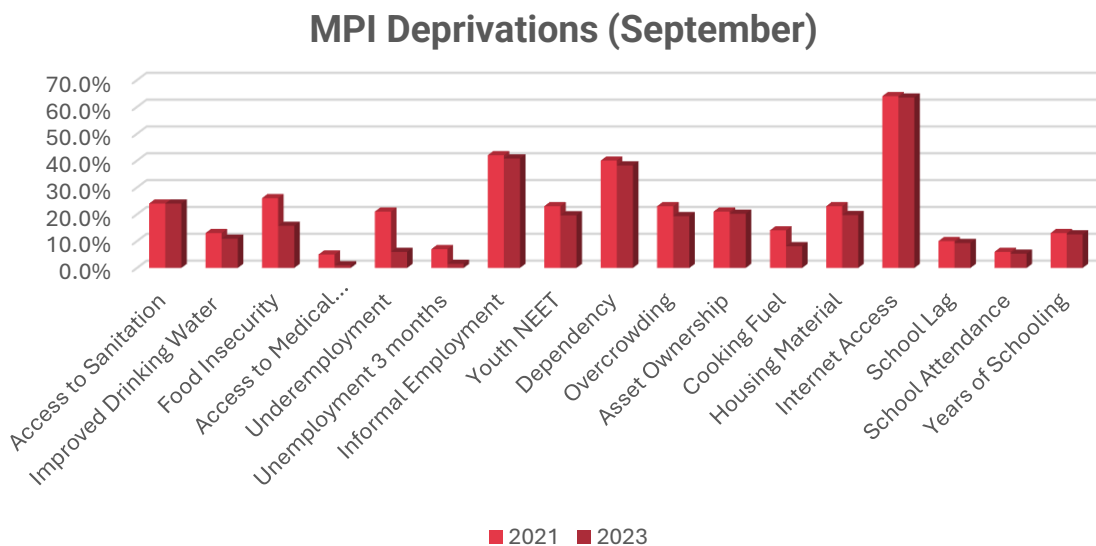
	Elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV & syphilis and WHO malaria certification elimination (2023)	Reduce road traffic fatalities, particularly among men	Persistent challenges in mental health service accessibility
<b>4) Quality Education</b>	High primary school completion rates and improving from 93.4% (2017) to 96.1% (2022)	Improving secondary school completion rates, esp. in rural areas	Disparities in educational access among rural & urban pop; Decline in organized learning one year before primary school entry age from 85.6% (2017) to 48.9% (2021) with covid-19 being a key factor
	Gender parity achieved in pre-primary & secondary education	Increasing participation in early childhood education	Ensuring quality education standards and teacher qualifications
<b>5) Gender Equality</b>	Increase in women's representation in managerial positions	Strengthening gender mainstreaming across all sectors	High rates of sexual violence against adolescent girls
	Establishment of the Women Parliamentarians Caucus	Addressing violence against women and girls, especially sexual violence	Need for increased capacity in gender mainstreaming efforts
	Legal framework for non-discrimination on the basis of sex established: Revised edition 2020 for Criminal Code 101; Protection against sexual harassment Act; Belize Married Women's Property Act;	For greater empower of females and for achieving gender equity in Belizean Society	Implementation of the Revised National Gender Policy 2024-2023



## SDG 1: No Poverty

Belize has shown a strong commitment to poverty reduction through its Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) with investment of USD \$134 million in social sector support. This contributed to a reduction in the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) from 0.143 in 2021 to 0.101 in 2023, with multi-dimensional poverty incidence dropping from 36.5% to 26.4%. Improvements were made across all 17 MPI indicators except for access to improved sanitation. The largest improvements occurred in access to internet, informal employment, dependency ratio and access to sanitation while the least deprivations include access to medical services, school attendance and unemployment. The latter results could be interpreted as National policies together with donor partnership being effective and starting to have structural impact on poverty reduction.<sup>20</sup> However, significant urban-rural disparities and high-income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 0.49, remain. Social protection systems strengthening through development of first-ever social protection policy and strategy is ongoing, including social protection floor for all. Amendments in 2024 standardized social security benefits were approved, promoting gender equality. Despite advancements, access to basic services like electricity and improved drinking water still shows disparities, especially in rural areas.

**Figure 4. Multi-Dimensional Poverty Deprivations**



Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

<sup>20</sup> "Structural impact on poverty reduction" refers to changes that address the underlying or systemic causes of poverty, rather than merely alleviating its symptoms.



## SDG 2: Zero Hunger

Belize faces food security challenges, with 4.0% of the population facing severe food insecurity and 40% of the population facing either moderate food insecurity in 2024 (Source: FAO/SIB). This compares to 2017 when 6.1% and 35.5% of the population were considered facing severe food insecurity and moderate or severe food insecurity.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 7. Food Insecurity**

Food Insecurity	Moderate or Severe	Severe
World	30.4%	11.9%
LAC Region	40.9%	14.2%
Belize	45.5%	5.9%

Source: FAO (World, Latin America & Caribbean Region), SIB for Belize (2021)

The report from MICS 2015/16) found 15% of children under five years were stunted and 7.3% of the children under five were overweight .<sup>22</sup>

**Table 8. Undernourishment**

Prevalence of:	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Undernourishment	6.0%	5.3%	4.8%	4.7%	4.9%

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize/Belize VNR 2024

Both the National Agriculture and Food Policy (2015-2030) and the Food System Transformation Pathway, supported by international collaboration inclusive of the UN System, aims to sustainably transform food systems. Strategic investments in agriculture through the PSIP accounted for 16-24% of the total PSIP budget, with a significant increase post-COVID-19. These investments focused on hunger eradication, food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. Despite these efforts, challenges in fully eradicating hunger and addressing food insecurity among vulnerable populations persist given both high multi-dimensional (26.4% in 2023) and income (52% in 2018) poverty together with high GINI income inequality index (0.49 in 2018)

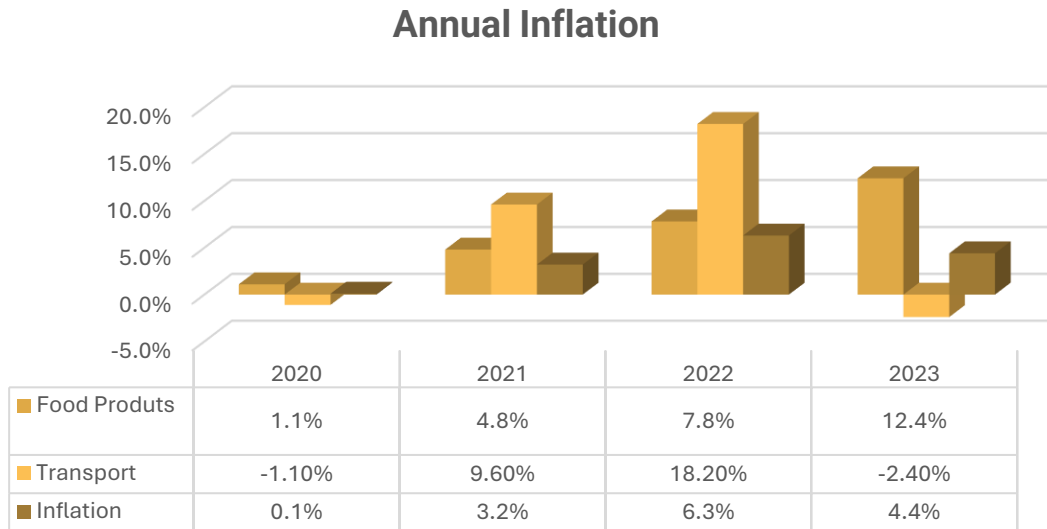
<sup>21</sup> Based on the WFP online Caribbean Food Security and Livelihood Survey Belize April 2024, Belize experienced 47% moderate or severe food insecurity with 4% of respondents experiencing severe food insecurity in 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Plans are under way to conduct a MICS 2024/2025.



facing Belize. Further compounding hunger during the period 2021-2023 has been the issue of high inflation, particularly, transport, and food prices (7.8% and 12.4% in 2022 and 2023) rising much higher than the annual inflation rate, together with wages not keeping with inflation.

**Figure 5. Inflation**



Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

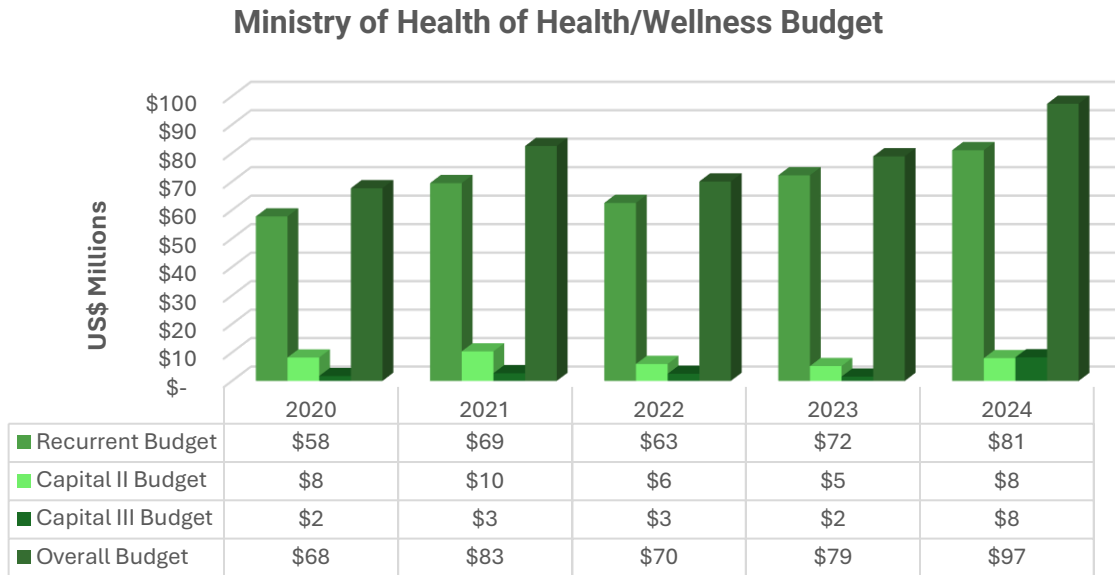


## SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

Belize prioritizes good health as vital for national development. The Ministry of Health and Wellness’ budget increased by 21.4% from (US\$65 million) 2017/18 to (US\$78.9 million) 2023/2024, with capital II (US\$5.2 million) and capital III (US\$1.5 million) projects representing 8.5% of Ministry of Health budgetary allocation in 2023/2024. Maternal mortality ratio fluctuated, peaking at 225.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, then dropping to 56.6 in 2022, and rising to 78.8 in 2023. Child mortality rates remained stable while infant mortality rate increased from 12.2 (2021) to 15.1 (2023) per 1,000 live births, indicating fluctuating survival of infants within their first year of life. Since 2010, Belize has made notable progress in reducing new HIV Infections (all ages), with an overall 23% decline by 2023, and a 35,6% decline in the 15-24 age group. Additionally, tuberculosis cases decreased, and the WHO declared Belize malaria-free in 2023. Furthermore, elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis was also achieved in 2023. Non-communicable diseases and mental health issues, particularly higher suicide rates among men, require better access to preventive services. Road traffic fatalities remain high, with a gender disparity in death rates. Reproductive health showed improvements,

with initiatives like comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education impacting decline in adolescent birth rates.

**Figure 6. Ministry of Health Budgetary Allocation/Distribution**



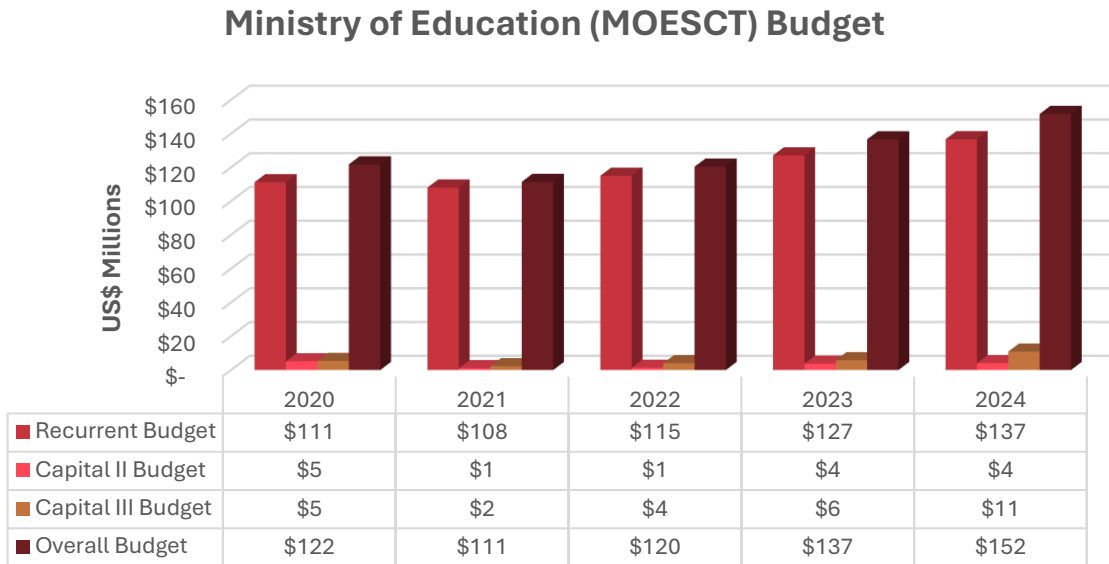
Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue & Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/25



## SDG 4: Quality Education

The Government’s budgetary allocations for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MOECST) increased by 23% from USD \$111 million (2017/18) to USD \$136.7 million (2023/24), with combined capital II (\$3.75 million) and capital III (\$5.8 million) projects representing 6.9% of Ministry of Education budget allocation for 2023/2024. For the period 2017-2022, primary education completion rates were high, increasing from 93.4% to 96.1% in 2022 but primary education enrolment decreased by 3.3% from 61,582 (2022) to 59,505 (2023) which need to be further looked at. For the period 2017-2022, Secondary completion rates decreased from 66.7% to 60.4% which again is something to be concerned, and root causes addressed. The Belize Education Upliftment Project (EUP) launched in 2023 aims to improve these rates. Participation in pre-primary education dropped sharply due to COVID-19, recovering slightly in 2021. Gender parity was achieved in pre-primary and secondary education, but disparities remain in vocational training, rural-urban secondary education, and tertiary education. There is a positive trend of increasing numbers of qualified teachers across all levels.

**Figure 7. Ministry of Education Budgetary Allocation and Distribution**



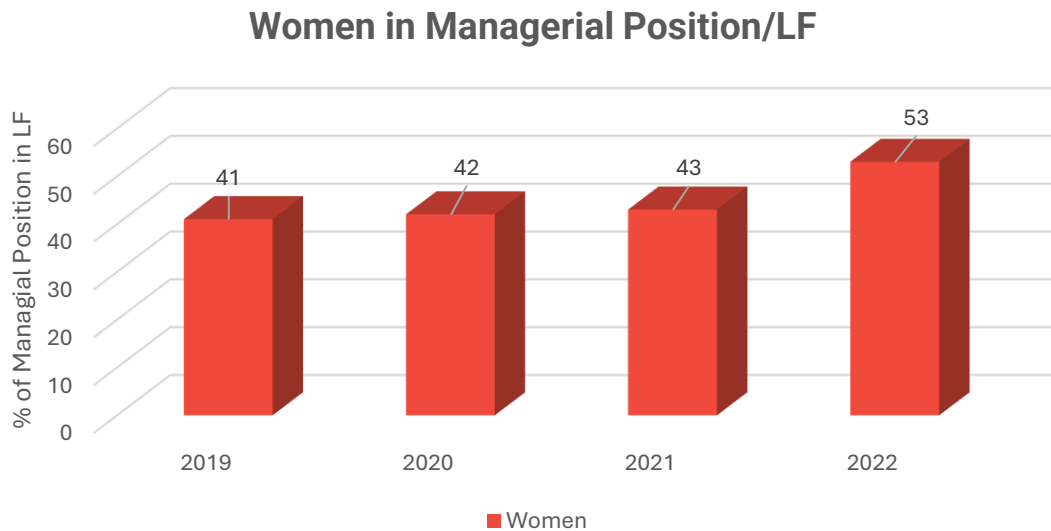
Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue & Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/25



## SDG 5: Gender Equality

Belize has promoted gender equality through international agreements and strategic initiatives. Despite the lack of a specific gender budget in the PSIP, gender considerations are integrated across various capital II and capital III PSIP projects. Advances in eliminating violence against women and girls are evident, although sexual violence cases increased from 65 reported cases (2022) to 94 in 2023. Women's participation in decision-making roles improved, with a rise in the percent of managerial positions in the labour force held by women. The Global Gender Report 2024 gives a rank of 95<sup>th</sup> among 146 countries which means that Belize lags 94 countries globally using four factors: of economic participation/opportunity, education attainment, health and political empowerment. The Belize Gender Gap ranking is the same as that obtained in 2022. Reasons for not making progress rests on gender gap for political empowerment and lag in economic participation/ opportunity with the gap in education and health having been eliminated.

**Figure 8. Women in Managerial Position in the Labour Force**



Source: *Statistical Institute of Belize*

The National Women's Commission (NWC) and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus were also established to enhance gender equality. The percentage of parliamentary seats held by females is still low at only 9.7% (2020 General Election). However, some improvement has been observed in terms of managerial positions held by females. The Revised National Gender Policy (2024-2030) focuses on six strategic areas: education; health; wealth & employment creation; violence producing conditions; power & decision-making; and organization system strengthening; to achieve gender equity. Despite progress, challenges remain in addressing violence against women and effective gender mainstreaming across all sectors. The data lag is also challenging. For example, data on the percentage of the population whose partner is using a contraceptive method is at 71.5% for 2015.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> MICS7 survey during 2024 will provide data for 2024.

## Prosperity SDGs

Belize has made strides toward SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 with targeted investments and strategic programs. For SDG 7, firms in the productive sector have been setting up solar plants to reduce dependence on the national grid. Additionally, household access to electricity and use of clean sources for cooking has also been on the increase. SDG 8 focuses on economic growth and employment, with a notable reduction in unemployment rates post-pandemic and an ambitious Decent Work Country Programme (2024-2029) to address labour market challenges and workplace issues. For SDG 9, robust infrastructural investments through the PSIP have supported air transport and manufacturing, with a focus on resilient infrastructure to mitigate natural hazards. Efforts under SDG 10 aim to reduce inequalities by enhancing financial market regulation and addressing income inequality, although challenges like non-performing loans persist. Lastly, SDG 11 emphasizes access to affordable housing, effective solid waste management, and the creation of safe public spaces, supported by disaster risk reduction plans to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters.

**Table 9. Prosperity SDGs Assessment**

Pillar/SDG	Belize UNCT		
Prosperity SDGs	Achievements	Opportunities	Challenge
<b>7). Affordable &amp; Clean Energy</b>	Investment in renewable energy sources (hydropower, solar, bagasse co-generation) & increased renewable energy share in total energy supply increased from 30.4% (2017) to 36% (2022); 95% of population with access to electricity	For further increasing renewable energy share in the energy mix and more private sector participation	Disparities in electricity access and use of clean cooking fuel across districts with Toledo being on the low end and Belize on the high end
	Development of the Belize National Sustainable Energy Policy 2012-2033 and Progress towards universal access to affordable & clean energy	Improving energy efficiency measures	Vulnerability to climate conditions affecting renewable energy supply
<b>8). Decent Work &amp; Economic Growth</b>	Decrease in unemployment rates, and reaching 2.8% (April) and 4.0% (Oct.) during 2023; minimum wage increased from US\$1.65 (2017) to US\$2.50 (2023); Real GDP/capita growth of 10.4% for the period 2021-2023	Increasing formalization of vulnerable labour groups	Low productivity and skill gap leading to low wages; Low labour participation of females working age population; CC & pest/ diseases affecting agriculture productivity (shrimp, citrus etc)
	Amnesty programme for more than 12,765 migrant population was submitted (March 2023) and being reviewed and processed;	Strengthening protections for migrant and vulnerable workers	High and increasing fatal and non-fatal occupation injuries by 100,000 workers for migrant population at 1,382 (2017) an 835 (2020) while for non-migrants stands at 367 (2017) and 214 (2020) per 100,000
<b>9). Industry, Innovation &amp; Infrastructure</b>	Government commitment to develop an Industrial Strategy with Green & Blue Policies. Development of the National e-governance agenda 2022-2025 and passing of the Belize Digital Governance Act	Fostering sustainable industrialization, innovation and greater internet access/ communication technology for the population	Economic Reliance on tourism and agriculture; Digital divide between rural/ urban areas and internet access/communication technology as the deprivation most contributing to MPI for both 2021 and 2023

	Investments in resilient infrastructure to mitigate natural hazards and climate change impact	Improving infrastructure resilience for climate change impact	Very limited industrial development with manufacturing at 7% of GDP
<b>10). Reduced Inequalities</b>	Greater market access to foreign markets (lower tariffs) thru' bi-lateral and regional trade agreements	Addressing income inequality and poverty disparities	High income inequality increasing from 0.38 (2009) to 0.49 (2018/19) with persistent income poverty issues increasing from 41% (2009) to 52% (2018/19)
	Improved financial market regulations; remittances cost as a proportion of amount remitted improved from 2.3% (2017) to 1.2% (2022)	Strengthening capital adequacy and financial stability measures	Non-performing loans worsened from 2.4% (2017) to 3.5% (2022); capital adequacy ratio also worsened from 24.2% (2017) to 15.1% (2022)
<b>11) Sustainable Cities &amp; Communities</b>	Establishment of affordable housing programs: 250 affordable homes built for poor women-headed households and the elderly (2021-2023)	Improving waste management and environmental sustainability	Limited access to affordable housing/ Poor housing condition for lower-income groups
	Development of disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans	Enhancing access to safe and inclusive public spaces; for operationalizing the DRR Plan	Fiscal constraint; high number of police registered cases of gender-based violence at 1250 (86.5% are women) of which 50 were for unlawful sexual intercourse and 34 for rape

**7** AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

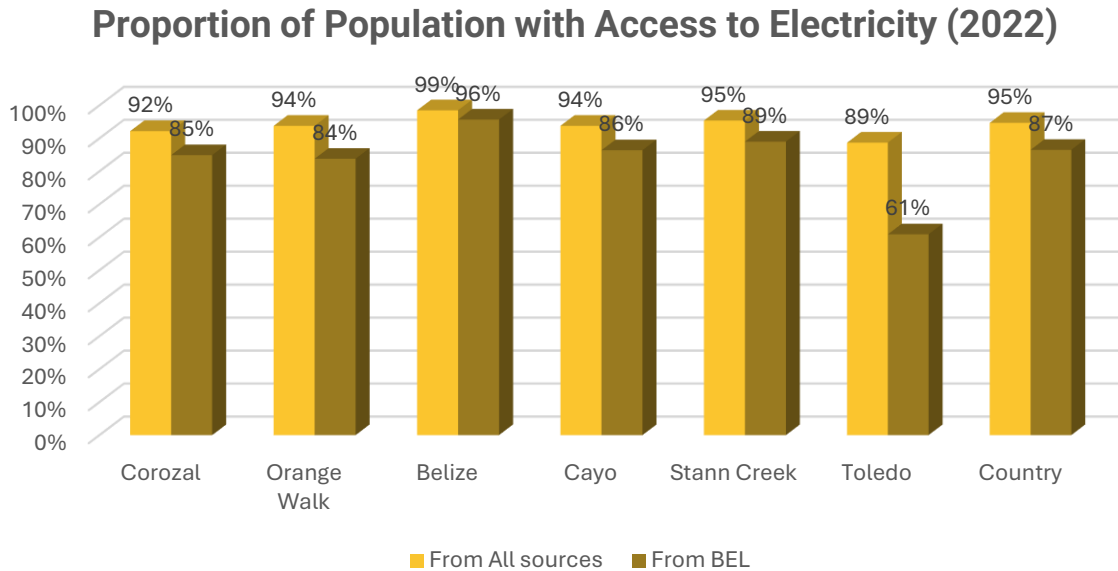


## SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Belize aims for universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services by 2030. Proposed Investment in renewable energy through the Multi-Year Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) reached a cumulative amount of US\$67.5 million (7.8% of proposed multi-year PSIP) by 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2023. The two biggest energy projects (US\$10 million regional project through the Caribbean Development Bank and US\$56.5 million project through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) in the PSIP are still in either concept stage or the programme being development. Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) is the largest primary provider, but access varies significantly across districts, with the Belize district having the highest access at 99% and Toledo the lowest at 89% of population. Progress in using clean cooking fuels is notable, especially in districts like Belize at 99.4%, although areas like Toledo lag at 64.61%. At the country level, 95% of the population has access to electricity with 87% of the population connected to BEL.



Figure 9. Population with Access to Electricity

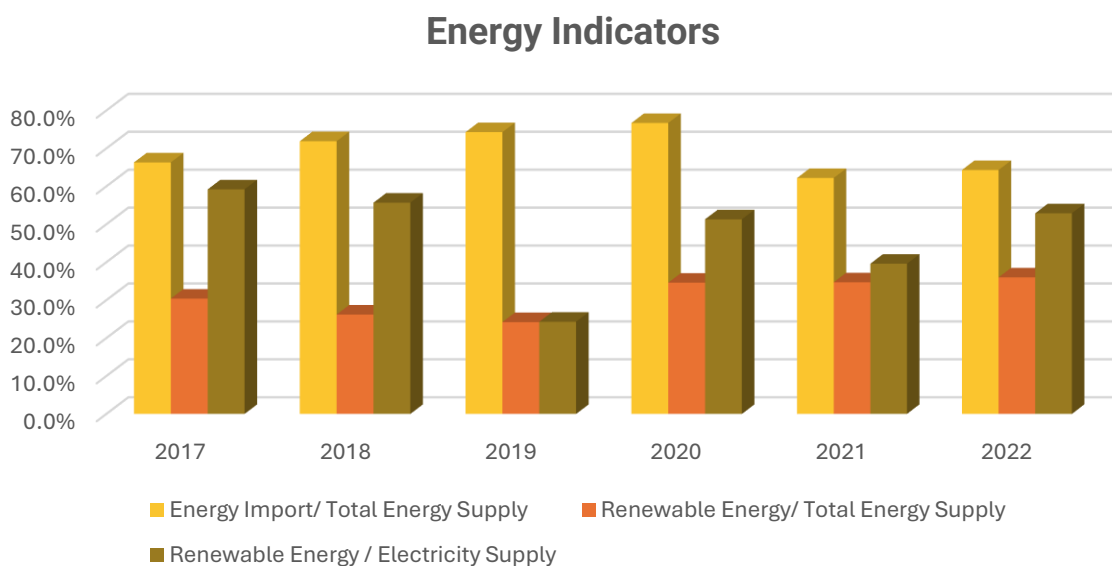


Source: Statistical Institute of Belize/Belize VNR 2024

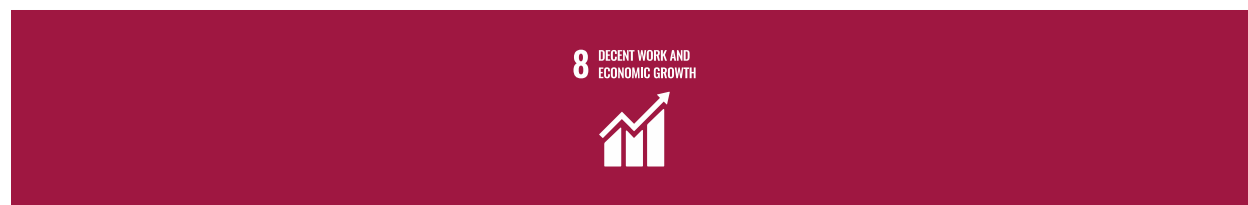
Renewable energy sources which contributed 24-36% of the final energy supply<sup>24</sup> from 2017 to 2022, is vulnerable to changing climatic conditions such as droughts and extreme heat. In 2022 with respect to electricity generation, the renewable energy share contributed 52.9%, equivalent to 90% of in-country production; utility-scale solar generation grew by 13.2%. These advancements align with Belize's Nationally Determined Contributions, aiming for 75% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2030. To achieve this target, significant investments estimated at US\$624 million is required up to 2030.<sup>25</sup> The remainder of Belize's electricity supply is, mostly, dependent on the *Comision Federal de Electricidad* (CFE public sector company) from Mexico. During 2022, Belize imported 323.3 GWh of electricity from Mexico underscoring Belize's vulnerability to supply disruption and price volatility. Energy efficiency improvements have been inconsistent, highlighting the need for sustained efforts; tons of oil equivalent (primary energy supply) per \$1,000 of GDP fluctuated between 0.157 and 0.188 during the period 2017 to 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Total energy supply includes all forms of energy (transportation, electricity, industrial processes etc) and not just electricity.  
<sup>25</sup> Belize Annual Energy Report 2022 Edition

Figure 10. Energy Indicators



Source: Belize Annual Energy Report 2022



## SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Belize supports economic growth and employment through the Multi-Year PSIP, reaching a cumulative amount of US \$820 million by 2023/24. Prior to covid-19, economic performance was below population growth contributing to a trend in reduced living standard, of course, the period 2020-2021 was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For post Covid-19, the recovery has been much greater than expected with an average real GDP/capita growth of 10.4% for the period 2021-2023, plus the revised census data that resulted in population being adjusted downward by more than 10% from 444,000 to just 397,484 for 2022 also contributed to GDP/capita growth being revised upward.

Table 10. Gross Domestic Product/ Capita

Growth	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Population	378,770	386,121	392,997	399,373	397,484	404,198
Nominal GDP/Capita (US\$)	\$ 6,053	\$ 6,181	\$ 5,211	\$ 6,071	\$ 7,121	\$ 7,616
Real GDP/ Capita Growth	1.0%	4.2%	-13.9%	17.9%	8.7%	4.7%

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

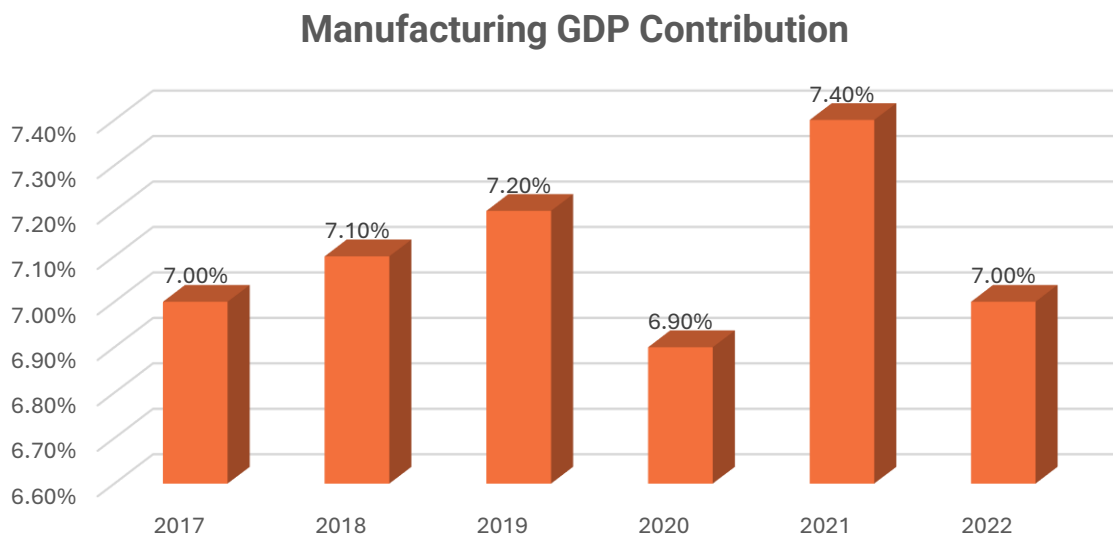
Unemployment rates decreased from 13.7% in 2020 to 4% in 2023, but challenges persist, especially for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The Government of Belize, in collaboration with the UN/ILO has developed a Decent Work Country Programme 2024-2029 with focus on: Rights & Governance; Inclusive Labour Markets; Productivity, Sustainable Enterprises & Local Economic Development; and has revised legislation to address workplace issues. Nevertheless, protection for migrant and vulnerable workers needs strengthening. Tourism, a vital economic sector, is recovering post-pandemic, with updated policies to enhance its benefits. Access to financial services has improved, with the proportion of the adult population owning a bank account increasing from 66% in 2019 to 80% in 2022 together with an increase in ATMs and financial institution branches supporting economic growth.



## SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Belize has made robust investments in infrastructure, with significant funding through the PSIP. Air transport of passengers and freight has been resilient, except during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the period 2017-2022, the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP has been stable but low ranging between 6.9% and 7.4%, indicating slow industrialization.

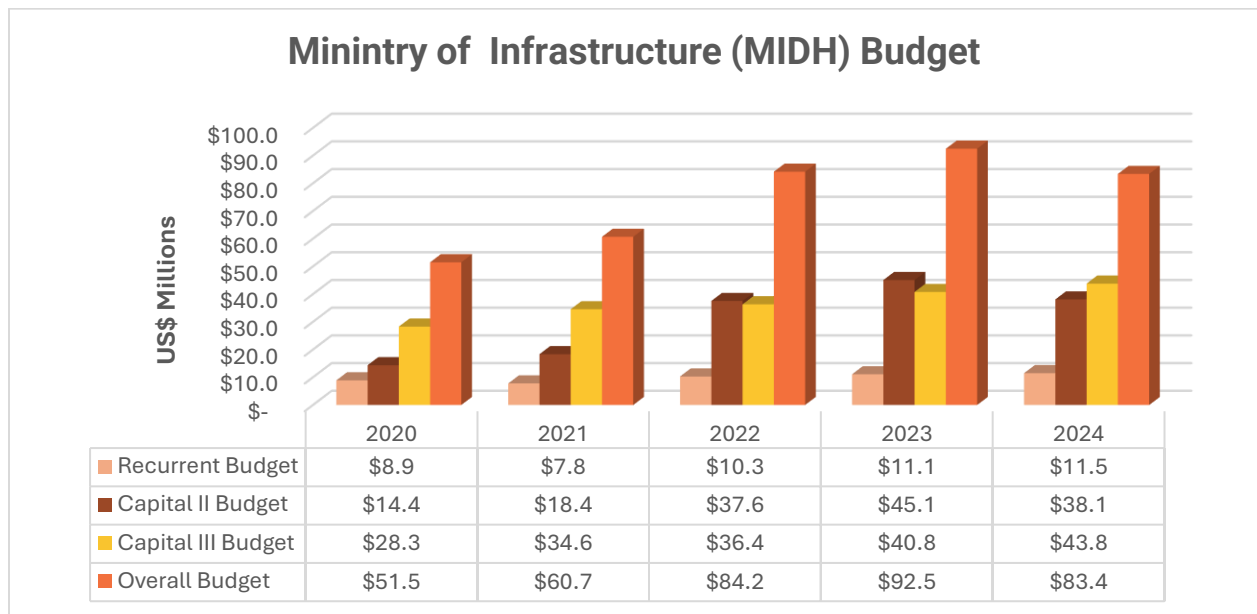
Figure 11. Manufacturing GDP Contribution



Source: Statistical Institute of Belize/Belize 2024 VNR

Strategic investments in resilient infrastructure are crucial due to Belize's vulnerability to natural hazards. Therefore, for the Multi-year PSIP 2017-2023, infrastructure has been the focus ranging between 50.64% and 56.3%. For the period 2020 to 2023, PSIP for capital II and capital III increased from US\$41.6 million (2020/21) to US\$85.9 million (2023/24) representing 93 % of Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing (MIDH) budgetary allocation for 2023. Recovery from Hurricane Lisa in 2022 required significant investment for recovery. Henceforth, Belize is focused on developing reliable and resilient infrastructure to support sustainable industrialization and stable economic growth.

**Figure 12. Ministry of Infrastructure Budgetary Allocation/ Distribution**



Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue & Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/25



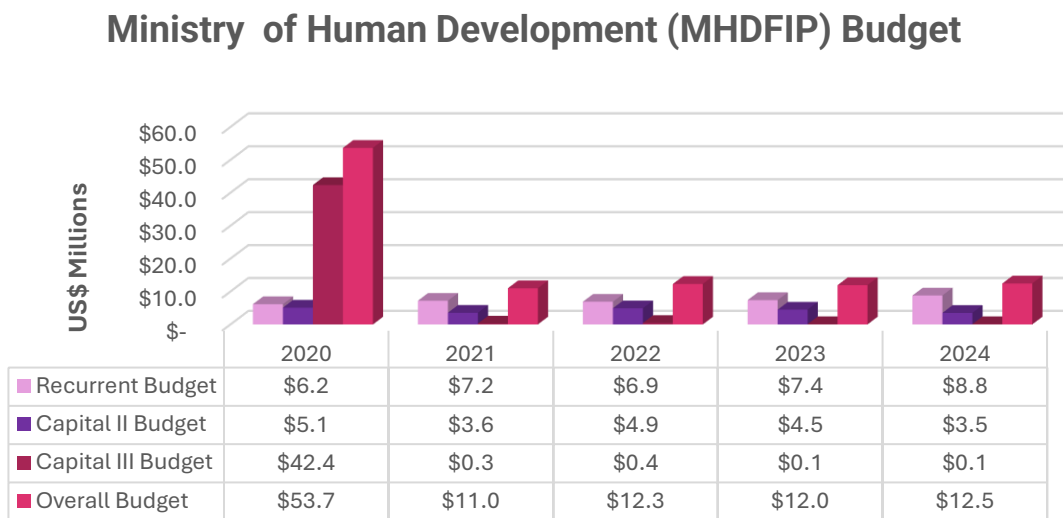
## SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

Belize aims to enhance financial market regulation and reduce inequalities through strategic interventions. Belize is facing high income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 0.49 in 2018. Efforts to reduce trade deficits and import tariffs have been ongoing, supported by duty-free market access through the Caricom Single Market & Economy (CSME) to North America and Europe except for arms, together with Belize bi-lateral partial scope trade agreements (Tai Wan, Guatemala) and CSME regional trade agreement (for example, Costa Rica and Cuba) which is contributing to a more level playing field in the global trade environment. However, non-

performing loans worsened from 2.4% (2017) to 3.5% (2022), and capital adequacy ratio also worsened from 24.1% (2017) to 15.1% (2022), possibly signalling underlying economic challenges that need addressing. Likewise, reduced cost of remittances from 2.3% (2017) to 1.2% (2022) being received by Belizeans has also contributed to greater impact from these funds that are so important for the vulnerable population.

During 2020, the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples Affairs (MHDFIPA) played a critical role in mitigating the impact of Covid-19 through externally funded capital III PSIP amounting to US\$42.4 million which made up 78.9% of the Ministry’s budgetary allocation for 2020 but has since then been no more than 3.5%.

**Figure 13. Ministry of Human Development Budgetary Allocation/ Distribution**



Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue & Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/25



## SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Belize is working towards ensuring access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing, with initiatives under the #PlanBelize MTDS 2022-2026 facilitating housing loans through the Development Finance Corporation (National Development Bank) and the National Bank of Belize (commercial bank public sector owned). Furthermore, to mitigate the housing deprivation being faced by the most vulnerable population, the government established an affordable/ subsidized housing programme. As of May 2024, 250 houses had been built to accommodate poor, female-headed households, as well as senior citizens. Solid waste management is handled by the Belize

Solid Waste Management Authority, with ongoing projects funded under the Environment and Natural Resources Management budget. Efforts to provide safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces are complemented by local disaster risk reduction plans, aligned with national strategies to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters. With respect to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience disasters, disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management, the Government of Belize has put emphasis on developing local disaster risk reduction plans that align closely with national plans and strategies such as the Disaster Preparedness and Response Act (Revised edition 2020). As of May 2023, all 6 districts had developed some level of disaster risk management, including preparedness, risk reduction and resilience with a focus on safeguarding lives, property and the environment.<sup>26</sup> IOM has partnered with the Government to build resilience to climate change in the Cayo District, where significant improvements were done to water systems in 3 communities, drainage in two communities to alleviate flooding, provision of a water bowser to assist 5 communities with forest fires, the construction of three new hurricane shelters/community centres and refurbishment of two schools to be used as hurricane shelters, as well as the construction of a polyclinic which will services all the communities in the areas impacting over 6,000 persons.

## Planet SDGs

Belize has made notable progress across multiple planet SDGs, demonstrating both achievements and ongoing challenges. For Clean Water and Sanitation, Belize has successfully managed its groundwater resources, ensured a low water stress level and providing most of the population with access to good quality drinking water. However, sanitation services remain problematic, with 27% population not having access to wastewater treatment facilities, together with inadequate WASH facilities in schools impacting student attendance. To address these issues, Belize has partnered with UNICEF, WHO, and PAHO to enhance WASH activities and invested significantly in public utilities through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Regarding the Green Economy, Belize is working towards sustainable energy consumption. For Climate Action, the National Climate Change Office (NCCO) has implemented various policies and strategies, such as the Belize Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS) and the National Climate Finance Strategy 2021-2026, to enhance climate resilience and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. On marine conservation, Belize has made significant commitments to ocean conservation, including a Blue Bond agreement to fund marine conservation efforts, and has expanded biodiversity protection zones to 20.5% of its ocean space. On sustainable land use, Belize has focused on forest conservation and sustainable management, pledging to restore 130,000 hectares of forest by 2030 under the Bonn Challenge and launching the National Landscape Restoration Strategy to guide these efforts.

Despite progress, challenges such as deforestation and underreporting of greenhouse gas emissions remain, requiring ongoing strategic actions and international collaborations to achieve planet SDGs targets by 2030. Belize's global environmental performance index rank (Yale

<sup>26</sup> The Toledo district has village plans for 60%; the Stann Creek has 3 village plans and the Cayo district has 10 village plans. With respect to urban plan, Belize city has the City Emergency Management Organization (CEMO) city plan, while the Orange Walk and Corozal districts have their respective urban plans.



University) worsened from 49 in 2022 to 76 for 2024.<sup>27</sup> Indicators used for the global index included climate mitigation, environmental health (air pollution, water & sanitation, waste management and heavy metals exposure) and eco-system vitality (biodiversity/ habitat, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, water resources and air pollution).

**Table 11. Planet SDGs Assessment**

Pillar/SDG	Belize UNCT		
Planet SDGs	Achievements	Opportunities	Challenge
<b>6) Clean Water &amp; Sanitation</b>	Improved degree of integrated water resource management implemented at 20% (2017) and 32% (2022); Revised edition 2020 Belize Environmental Protection ACT	For maintaining high ambient water quality score, adequate groundwater reserves and low water stress levels	Agro-chemical/ by-product runoff from agriculture and agro-industry
	Significant government investment in water & sanitation projects thru' PSIP; 92.2% of the pop. with access to safely managed drinking water	Continued expansion of water and sanitation infrastructure under PSIP	Persistent issues with wastewater treatment capacity resulting in 27% of the population not connected to wastewater treatment
	Wash initiatives implemented;	Enhancing WASH facilities in schools, esp. for menstrual hygiene management	Financing installation costs for WASH facilities in schools
<b>12) Responsible Consumption &amp; Production</b>	Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) increasing renewable energy sources	Development & stabilization of renewable energy sources subject to CC impact	Fluctuations in output renewable energy: Watts/ capita went down from 187.2 (2018) to 182.4 (2022)
	GoB commitment to Sustainable Development: National Environmental Policy & Strategy 2014-2024 and National Environmental Action Plan 2022-2026	Development of an "Industrial Strategy with Green and Blue Policies"	Financing the preparation and implementation of Belize First Industrial Policy
<b>13) Climate Action</b>	Establishment of the National Climate Change Office (NCCO) & launch of the Belize Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS) 2021	Continued integration of climate change measures into national policies and strategies	Access to donor funds for climate adaptation/ mitigation and for GHG emission inventories
	National Climate Finance Strategy/ Policy & Action Plan 2014; National Determined Contribution 2021	Carbon sequestration/ agro-forestry & livelihood improvement - leveraging climate partnerships (GCF, GEF) for financing climate adaptation/ mitigation	Number of persons affected by disasters increased from 117 families (2020) to 172,000 persons (2023)
<b>14) Life Below Water</b>	Legal protection of significant portions of Belize's marine environment: 20.2% marine & protected areas; 11.65% designated high protection marine area; 8.64% medium marine protected areas; gill net fish ban on marine waters (2020)	Expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) & increased public awareness of ocean conservation	Implementation of international agreements; need for strengthening sustainable fishing practices; partnership and collaboration among agencies and with NGOs

<sup>27</sup> Reflecting Belize's SIDS challenge relating to deforestation, coastal management, biodiversity/conservation, combating climate change, progress in the planet SDGs and gap in international donor support.

	Belize Blue Bonds agreement supporting marine conservation (2021/2022); Belize Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy & Implementation Plan 2022-2027 (BEDPS)	Fostering greater community involvement in conservation; Enhancing resilience of coastal communities to Climate Change impact	Effective coordination among stakeholders: Gob, private sector and civil society:
15) Life on Land	Establishment of the National Biodiversity Office (NBIO) & launch of the National Landscape Restoration Strategy 2022-2030	Restoration of 130,000 hectares of forest by 2030 and continued sustainable forest management	Grant financing for managing and expanding protected areas
	Stable above-ground biomass stock: forest area within legally established protected areas 54.46% (2020-2024);	Carbo Sequestration: participate in carbon credit markets & international climate finance mechanisms such as REDD+ (reducing emission from deforestation & forest degradation)	Declining forest area as percent of total land area and need to balance agriculture expansion, urban development & conservation; forest area & Climate Change vulnerability (natural disasters & extreme weather conditions)

**6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION**



## SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Belize has made significant strides in improving water quality and access. Groundwater reserves ensure water availability, with low water stress levels (1% in 2020). Integrated water resources management improved from 20% in 2018 to 32% in 2023. Ambient water quality has been high, providing 98% of the population with good drinking water. Ninety two percent (92%) of the population uses safely managed drinking (potable water), while 83% of the population is using safely managed sanitation facilities with the Belize district being on the high end at 96.8% and the Toledo district being on the low end at 50.1%

**Table 12. Access to Drinking Water & Sanitation Facilities**

Proportion Of Population Using	2022 Census Data		
	Safely Managed Drinking Water	Safely Managed Facilities	Sanitation
Corozal	81.7%		76.1%
Orange Walk	91.7%		80.9%
Belize	94.2%		96.8%
Cayo	92.6%		84.4%
Stann Creek	96.6%		83.6%
Toledo	91.4%		50.1%
<b>Country</b>	<b>92.2%</b>		<b>83.0%</b>

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

Even though, wastewater treatment has seen some improvement since 2017, it is still a challenge, with 27% of the population still not having access to treatment facilities in 2021. Furthermore, agro-chemical runoff, wastewater from agro-industry impacts rivers and ground water and ultimately ends in the sea. In schools, poor WASH facilities contribute to absenteeism, especially for girls. The government, alongside UNICEF and WHO/PAHO, has promoted WASH activities in schools, focusing on handwashing hygiene. Significant investments in water and sanitation projects, such as the Safe Drinking Water initiative, demonstrate Belize's commitment to enhancing public access to safe water and reliable sanitation services.

**Table 13. Access to Wastewater System**

<b>Prop. Of Population:</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Connected to Wastewater Collection System	12.8%	15.2%	11.7%	NA	12.4%
With independent wastewater (septic tank)	55.2%	57.0%	61.0%	NA	60.8%
Not connected to wastewater system	32.0%	28.0%	27.0%	NA	27.0%

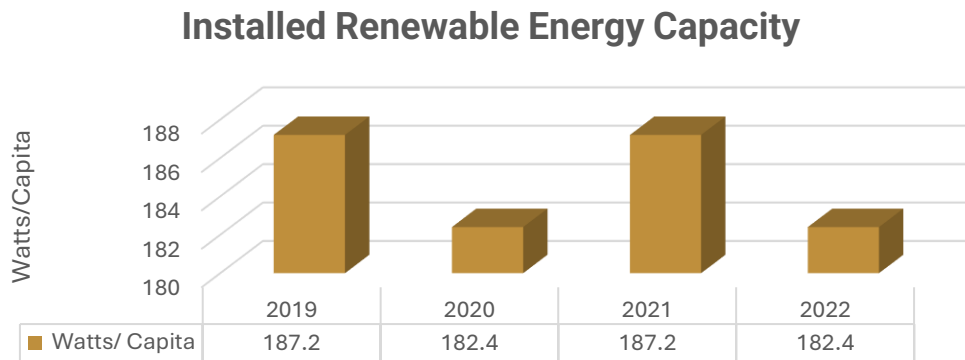
Source: *Statistical Institute of Belize*



## SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Belize's population growth, up 23.3% between 2010 and 2022, together with rapid growth of the tourism sector, has put pressure on energy resources. Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) has worked to maintain stable electricity generation (watts/ capita) from renewable sources despite fluctuating climatic conditions due to climate change impact. Efforts to support sustainable consumption and production include identifying and maintaining renewable energy sources to ensure resource renewal. Data on the circular economy to tonnes of recycled material for Belize City and San Ignacio/ Santa Elena amounting shows 328 and 143.1 tonnes respectively for 2015. No data is available beyond 2015 and also no data is available for other towns and cities, apart from the two already mentioned.

Figure 14. Installed Renewable Energy Capacity



Source: Statistical Institute of Belize/Belize 2024 VNR



## SDG 13: Climate Action

Belize is strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change. The National Climate Change Office (NCCO) coordinates the country's climate response, implementing strategies like the 2020-2050 Belize Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS). The government is investing in resilient infrastructure through PSIPs and integrated climate change measures into national policies. Efforts include updating GHG emission inventories and securing funding for climate resilience through the National Climate Finance Strategy.

Belize is also making significant progress towards climate action through comprehensive policies and participation in international climate agreements. Key achievements include the National Climate Change Policy, Strategy, and Action Plan (NCCPSAP) 2014 to address climate change; Belize's Nationally Determined Contributions 2021 (NDCs) and Belize's Low Emission Strategy and Action Plan 2021 as part of the Paris Agreement, committing Belize to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance climate resilience. Additionally, various adaptation initiatives have been implemented, focusing on building climate resilience in coastal zones, agriculture, and water resources with international support.

However, Belize faces several challenges in coping with climate change. Funding constraints<sup>28</sup> limit the implementation of comprehensive climate action projects, and public sector technical capacity and expertise in climate science and policy impede effective action. Belize is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as hurricanes, flooding, and sea-level rise, which threaten lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure. For example, during November 2022, Hurricane Lisa

<sup>28</sup> Funding gap for meeting National Determined Contribution, by 2030, is estimated at US\$1.7 billion (Source: National Climate Finance Strategy of Belize 2021-2026, p. 18)

impacted on Belize causing damage of US\$65.6 million, loss of US\$62.8 million, recovery cost of US\$106.2 million and 0.4% GDP negative macro-economic impact with 172,000 persons affected. Additionally, insufficient climate data and monitoring systems hinder informed decision-making and planning.

To accelerate progress towards Climate Change, opportunity areas for investment could include increased investments in climate-resilient infrastructure (PSIPs) to withstand extreme weather events and sea-level rise, expanding renewable energy sources (*US\$77 million from the Saudi fund for Development a 60-megawatt solar plant*) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependence, and enhancing the resilience of natural ecosystems such as mangroves and coral reefs. Strengthening technical and institutional capacities for climate action and policy implementation, along with promoting climate awareness and education to foster community engagement, and institution/ policy setting for entering carbon credit markets from carbon sequestration are also crucial areas with multiplier impact. Belize is also implementing innovative solutions such as leveraging climate financing mechanisms (*examples, US\$364 Blue Bond issue through The Nature Conservancy, climate partnership with the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environmental Facility for climate mitigation/adaptation projects*), as well as nature-based solutions, and community-based adaptation initiatives to enhance climate action sustainability.



## SDG 14: Life Below Water

The Fisheries Department under the Ministry of the Blue Economy oversees aquatic resource management, ensuring the protection of marine environments. Belize has made significant strides in marine conservation through the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). These MPAs cover about 20.3% of Belize's marine environment (11.65% designated high protection and 8.64% designated as medium protection marine area)<sup>29</sup>, playing a crucial role in protecting marine biodiversity, preserving habitats, and ensuring sustainable fishing practices. The Barrier Reef Reserve System, a UNESCO World Heritage site, includes seven MPAs and forms a vital component of the country's marine conservation efforts. This network of protected areas demonstrates Belize's commitment to safeguarding its valuable marine ecosystems.

In promoting sustainable fisheries, Belize has implemented several effective measures. The Managed Access Program regulates fishing activities for spiny lobster and queen conch by assigning specific fishing zones to licensed fishers, ensuring that fishing is conducted sustainably by limiting period of fishing and size of catch; all of which have contributed to fish stock being within biological sustainable levels for the period 2018-2023. Belize has banned destructive fish bottom trawling (2010) and gill net fishing (2020) on all marine water which used to severely

<sup>29</sup> Within the territorial sea, 36.1% is under MPA protection and 46.37% within the Exclusive Economic Zone is designated as an MPA.

damage the sustainability of marine ecosystems. These initiatives reflect Belize's dedication to maintaining healthy fish populations and protecting the livelihoods of fishing communities.

**Table 14. Sustainable Fish Stock Harvesting**

<b>Fish stock Within Biologically Sustainable Levels</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Spiny Lobster	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Queen Conch	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Stone Crab	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sea Cucumber	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Shark	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Fin Fish	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Source: Statistical Institute of Belize*

Belize has also undertaken significant efforts to protect its coral reefs, which are vital to marine biodiversity and local economies. Initiatives include coral restoration projects and policies aimed at reducing land-based pollution that affects reef health. The establishment of the Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve has been particularly notable, safeguarding one of the largest and most biodiverse coral atolls in the region. These efforts underscore Belize's proactive approach to conserving its coral reef systems.

Furthermore, Belize is actively pursuing a blue economy strategy to balance economic growth with marine conservation through the Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy & Implementation Plan 2022-2027. Belize was able to negotiate the purchase of US\$553 million of commercial debt, at a discount of 45 cents on the dollar, through The Nature Conservancy with the following commitments and benefits for life below water:

- Increase in Biodiversity Protection Zones from 15.9% to 30% of ocean area by 2026—half in high protection areas (Replenishment Zones) and half in medium protection areas (Multi-use Zones);
- Completion of a Marine Spatial Plan by 2026 (initiated in 2022) – the plan will determine where to expand ocean protection and management to cover 30% of Belize’s oceans and best deliver sustainable benefits for Belize and its natural resources.
- Protection of the public lands within the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as mangrove reserves.
- Revision and implementation of Belize’s Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan to include marine and coastal biodiversity offsets.
- Application for three formally designated marine protected areas as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List Areas.
- Deposit US\$23.5 million deposit into a Conservation Endowment Fund using proceeds funds from the Blue Loan, to be used in perpetuity after 2041 for marine conservation.
- Between January 2022 and October 2041, US\$4.2 million annual contribution to a Conservation Fund, totalling US\$84.2 million.



This comprehensive approach highlights Belize's forward-thinking vision for a sustainable Blue Economy that has contributed between 0.4% (2017) and 0.5% to GDP (2022).



## SDG 15: Life on Land

Belize has made significant progress on Life on Land by focusing on conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems. The National Biodiversity Office (NBO), established in 2021, plays a crucial role in coordinating the management of protected areas and biodiversity resources across the country. Through strategic plans and policies, the NBO aims to conserve key ecosystems, mobilize resources for biodiversity targets, and address the main drivers of biodiversity loss such as land use change and deforestation. Despite slight reductions in forest cover from 59.97% (2020) to 57.98% (2024), Belize continues to prioritize the assessment and mitigation of factors contributing to forest degradation.

**Table 15. Sustainable Forest**

Sustainable Forest Areas	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Forest Area as % of Total Land Area	62.6%	61.0%	59.97%	58.97%	58.64%	58.31%	57.98%
Prop. Of Forest Area Located Within Legally Established Protected Area	54.38%	54.38%	54.46%	54.46%	54.46%	54.48%	54.46%

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

The Forest Department in Belize oversees forest restoration and sustainable use, managing Forest Reserves where sustainable logging operations are conducted. The department also regulates timber and non-timber forest extraction under the Forests Act and Wildlife Protection Act. Despite a decrease in humid primary forest due to urban and agricultural expansion, Belize has committed to the Bonn Challenge, pledging to restore 130,000 hectares of forest by 2030. The National Landscape Restoration Strategy, launched in 2022, outlines actions to achieve this goal, emphasizing the need to update co-management agreements and mobilizing financial resources for biodiversity conservation.

To promote sustainable forest management and halt deforestation, Belize has developed forest management plans supported by the Belize National Protected Area Systems Act and the Protected Areas Conservation Trust Amendment Bill. Partnerships with NGOs and private agencies have been crucial in implementing these plans. By 2023, 16 out of a targeted 36 co-management agreements were signed, aiming to strengthen governance, management, and financial stability of the National Protected Areas System. These efforts ensure the continued protection and sustainable management of Belize's forests.

Belize's approach to integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national planning involves several transition pathways facilitated by the Department of the Environment. These include promoting good governance, social equity, shared economic prosperity, sustainable lifestyles, innovation, and technology. The country also focuses on sustainable agriculture, knowledge co-creation, resilience to climate change, and protection of natural capital. Belize's progress in these areas, supported by strategies such as the LEDS strategy and updated NDCs, highlights the government's commitment to cross-sectoral collaborations for the regeneration and sustainability of the country's environmental ecosystems.

Belize has established a comprehensive network of protected areas covering approximately 36% of its land, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, nature reserves, and forest reserves. Prominent protected areas such as Chiquibul National Park, Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, and Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve are crucial in preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. Forest conservation emphasizes sustainable management and reforestation projects, with significant initiatives like the Maya Forest Corridor enhancing climate resilience and carbon sequestration. Legislation such as the Wildlife Protection Act and Forest Act, along with conservation programs targeting species like jaguars, tapirs, and scarlet macaws, demonstrate Belize's proactive approach to biodiversity conservation. Additionally, sustainable agriculture practices, such as agroforestry, organic farming, and crop diversification, support environmental protection, while benefiting local communities.

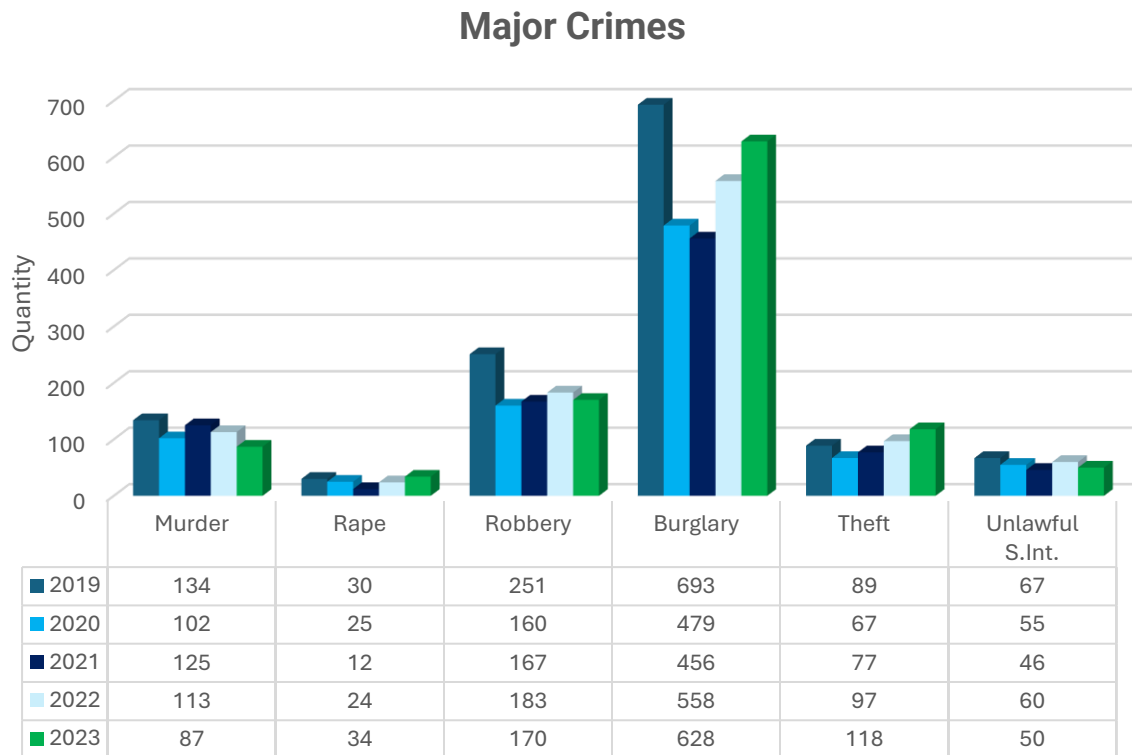
Belize is also pursuing engagement in carbon credit and carbon sequestration market and international climate finance mechanisms such as REDD+ (reducing emission from deforestation & forest degradation) so as to benefit from monetizing forest conservation and reforestation initiatives and generate additional financial resources to further invest in bio-diversity protection and sustainable land use practices. Carbon credits provide economic incentives for maintaining and enhancing forest cover, thereby reducing deforestation and promoting sustainable forest management. This market participation can also support community-based conservation efforts, improve livelihoods for local populations through eco-friendly practices, and enhance climate resilience by preserving vital ecosystems.



## Peace SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Belize has made progress in reducing violence, promoting the rule of law, and protecting fundamental freedoms (SDG 16). Despite high life satisfaction, homicide rates, especially among men, remain high. However, murders together with robbery and unlawful sexual intercourse have been on the decline.<sup>30</sup> Gender-based violence has surged, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to increased government and legislative efforts, including the Revised National Gender Policy and National Sex Offenders Database. Child abuse remains prevalent, with violent discipline affecting over 65% of children. Legislative measures and national policies aim to combat child exploitation and trafficking.

Figure 15. Major Crimes by Category



Source: Belize Crime Observatory (BCO) <https://bco.gov.bz/annual-analysis/>

<sup>30</sup> Homicide encompasses all types of unlawful killing of one person by another, while murder refers only to the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another. Robbery is the unlawful taking of another person's property with the intent to permanently deprive them of it, without the use of force or threat of force; while theft is the unlawful taking of property from a person or their immediate presence through the use of force, intimidation, or threat of force.

The Office of the Ombudsman and planned National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) strive to improve governance and human rights, though a high remand population in prisons underscores the need for legal reforms. Birth registration initiatives seek to reduce statelessness, while the Freedom of Information Act promotes transparency. However, social protection for vulnerable groups is hindered by inadequate funding, despite commitments to inclusive development under the Horizon 2030 Framework and #PlanBelize MTDS 2022-2026. Continued efforts and resources are essential to address ongoing challenges and achieve SDG 16 by 2030.

**Table 16. Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions Assessment**

<b>Pillar/SDG</b>	<b>Belize UNCT</b>		
<b>Peace 16) Peace, Justice &amp; Strong Institutions</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
	Several Legislative initiatives to combat gender-based violence (GBV); joint Gob/UN initiative to register unreported births particularly in rural areas	Continued legislative reforms and initiatives to promote gender equality and reduce GBV	Cultural norms of male dominated society; high proportion of individuals on remand in prison without trial;
	GoB commitment for setting up the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)	Strengthening human rights protection; enhancing governance & rule of law; enhancing international reputation and empowerment of marginalized groups	Establishment & operationalization, capacity building, inter-agency coordination, managing expectations and political/ social resistance to the NHRI
	Intentional homicide per 100,000 population decreasing: for males from 117 (2019) to 77 (2023) and for females from 17 (2019) to 10 (2023)	Leverage crime reduction by implement community development programs focused on education, vocational training, and social cohesion.	Persistent challenges with intentional homicide rates, particularly among men
	Digital Governance Act 2023; Freedom of Information Act Revised 2020; Public Sector Data Sharing Act 2021;	Enhanced accountability & transparency; improved public service; data driven decision; enhanced economic growth	Implementation & compliance; privacy & security concerns; inter-agency coordination

**Security:** Despite high life satisfaction reported in the 2016 UNICEF MICS survey, Belize faces significant challenges with intentional homicides, particularly among men. Between 2017 and 2022, male homicide rates fluctuated, with notable decreases from 117 to 91 per 10,000 population (2019-2020) and from 114 to 104 per 100,000 population (2021-2022). However, there was a rise from 91 to 114 per 100,000 population (2020-2021). Female homicide rates decreased from 17 to 9 per 100,000 population (2019-2022).

Reports of physical and sexual violence highlights gender disparities. Physical violence against women increased by 36% in 2022 and 24% in 2023, while male victims increased by 59.9% from 2021 to 2023. Sexual violence against women surged by 70% from 2019 to 2023, particularly

during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting a global "shadow pandemic" of gender-based violence (GBV).

The Government of Belize has implemented several initiatives, including the 2024 Revised National Gender Policy and the National Women's Commission's efforts to promote gender equity and prevent GBV. The development of the Essential Services Package outlines clear recommendations to be adopted by key sectors in the GBV pathway to ensure standardization of essential services for women in violent situations. Legislative measures, such as the 2020 Criminal Code amendment and the establishment of the National Sex Offenders Database, support these efforts. The EU and UN's joint programme, Spotlight Initiative and the #PlanBelize Women's Agenda 2020 emphasize safety and security for women and girls, advocating for mandatory counselling for perpetrators of domestic violence.

The 2015 MICS5 survey revealed that 65.1% of children in Belize experienced violent discipline, with boys (66.9%) subjected more than girls (63.2%). Psychological aggression was common (51.6%), and physical punishment affected 48.3% of children. Severe physical punishment was reported by 6.5% of children, with boys at 7.8% and girls 5%. The National Child Justice Steering Committee along with the Policy and Legislative Committee under the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), reviewed the Family and Children's Act, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Penal System Reform (Alternative Sentencing) Act to address the ongoing challenges with children in conflict/contact with the law. These amendments have been presented to Cabinet for endorsement. Additionally, a Child Interaction Policy and training for police officers has been rolled out across the country.

Policies like the National Children's Agenda 2017-2030 and the Belize National Child Labour Policy and Strategy 2022-2025 aim to address these issues. The imminent finalization and formalization of Hazardous child work and light work lists (which were developed and further revised by the Labour Advisory Board in 2021) seeks to provide actionable regulations to prevent the economic exploitation of children and teenagers from some of the worst forms of child labour. Legislation such as the 2020 Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act and anti-trafficking training for parliamentarians in 2024 further support efforts to combat child abuse and trafficking.

**Access to Justice** - The Office of the Ombudsman, established in 1999 and revised in 2020, investigates public sector service complaints and promotes good governance. By June 2023, the office was handling 87 complaints, with 36 resolved. Belize is also establishing a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in compliance with UN Paris Principles to enhance human rights protection. However, a high proportion of unsentenced persons on remand within the prison system (32-38% of the prison population from 2018-2023), highlighting the need for fair trials and legal reforms to address a systemic backlog of cases that needs to be addressed.

The Vital Statistics Unit maintains birth records under the Belize Registration of Births and Deaths Act (2020). From 2017 to 2021, birth registrations fluctuated, often being lower than documented live births, indicating under-registration.

The Belize Freedom of Information Act (2020) grants public access to government documents. In 2021, the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) began annual customer satisfaction surveys to improve its services, model other ministries are considering adopting.

Belize's Horizon 2030 National Development Framework and the #PlanBelize MTDS 2022-2026 emphasize the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle. However, inadequate public funding hinders social protection programs for underserved groups. Vulnerable groups include low-income households, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, LGBTQI individuals, and persons with HIV/AIDS. Key initiatives and challenges for these groups include addressing domestic violence, discrimination, and limited access to resources and services.

17 PARTNERSHIPS  
FOR THE GOALS



## Partnership SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Between 2017 and 2022, Belize experienced economic fluctuations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with real GDP falling by 13.4% in 2020 but rising nominally from US \$2.267 billion in 2017 to US \$3.079 billion in 2023. Total recurrent revenue fell by 20% in 2020 but increased to \$709 million in 2023. Efforts to strengthen domestic resource mobilization included an increase in the proportion of the domestic budget funded by taxes, rising from 87.04% of GDP in 2017 to 94.75% in 2023. Belize's Prime Minister has emphasized the need for international financial aid, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Belize that face several vulnerabilities.

Belize diversified funding by accessing funding under the International Development Association (IDA) concessional window of the World Bank, developing an SDG Investor Map, and taking steps to implement an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) for better national investment management. Debt sustainability was addressed through restructuring and a Debt-for-Climate/Nature Mechanism, reducing the public debt ratio. Internet access rose to 76.3% by 2021, supported by the e-Governance and Digitalisation Unit. Capacity-building through South-South partnerships and enhancing institutional capacities were prioritized. Trade initiatives aimed to reduce the long-term deficit with 35 projects outlined in the #PlanBelize MTDS 2022-2026. Belize worked on macroeconomic stability and leveraged global partnerships, such as the public-private partnership policy and the International Cooperation Council (ICC). Data capacity was strengthened by the Statistical Institute of Belize through the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics and the Belize National Statistical System (BNSS) Portal for SDG monitoring. A US \$3.4 million-dollar grant project signed in March 2024 titled "Enabling of Belize's Statistical System) funded by Korea's International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and implemented by five UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO and WFP) will further support the strengthening of the BNSS. PAHO/WHO continues to provide technical cooperation in the health sector to strengthen health systems and human resources for health capacity in collaboration with partners such as the European Union. Belize's progress on SDG 17 highlights its commitment to strengthening partnerships, enhancing financial stability, and improving data availability to support sustainable development. Continued efforts and international cooperation are essential to overcome challenges and achieve these goals by 2030.



**Table 17. Partnership for the Goals Assessment**

Pillar/SDG	Belize UNCT		
<b>Partnership 17) Partnership for the Goals</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
	Significant expansion in GDP and GoB revenue post covid-19  Establishment of the e-Governance & Digitalisation Unit (EGDU) & National Digital Agenda for Belize (NDAB) Access to IDA financing window and MCC grant allocation of US\$125 million for poverty reduction thru' economic growth with focus on increasing skilled labour force and reducing energy cost Foreign direct investment increased from 1.1% (2017) to 4.9% (2022); public sector debt/ GDP decreased from 78.1% (2017) to 66.2% (2023)	Enhancing digital services and increased internet access Greater Public-Private Partnership for reducing SDG financing gap  Collaboration with donors on SDG advancement on economic growth, energy, education, poverty, water and planet SDGs  Economic growth, technological advancement, diversification, fiscal health and greater global integration	High public debt burden and chronic trade deficit  Need for enhanced capacity-building and policy coherence for sustainable development  Financial sustainability/ legal and regulatory framework and stakeholder alignment  Economic vulnerability and maintaining fiscal space

**Finance:** Belize has experienced significant fluctuations in its gross domestic product (GDP) and recurrent revenue between 2017 and 2023. Nominal GDP increased overall from USD \$2.266 billion in 2017 to USD \$3.079 billion in 2023 (CBB), despite a 14.2% decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recurrent revenue similarly saw a decline in 2020 but increased steadily from USD \$546 million in 2021 to USD \$709 million in 2023. However, the ratio of total recurrent expenditure to GDP varied significantly, indicating economic instability and recovery phases post-pandemic.

Belize has actively sought international financial support to bolster its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the 2023 SDG Summit, Belize's Prime Minister emphasized the need for targeted international development assistance due to Belize's vulnerabilities as a small island developing state (SIDS). Nationally, Belize has increased its tax-funded budget from 83.3% of total expenditure in 2017 to 89.17% in 2023, despite a dip during the pandemic years.<sup>31</sup>

To diversify its funding sources, Belize applied for and gained eligibility for financing under the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) in 2024. This will allow Belize to access highly concessional resources for economic growth, reducing inequalities, and improving

<sup>31</sup> For fiscal year 2020/2021 taxes were only able to fund 50% of Government's total expenditure (Source: Belize Ministry of Finance).

living standards. On July 2024, the Millennium Challenge Corporation MCC approved a US\$125 million grant that aims to address the binding constraints of low-quality education and high electricity costs by *equitably* increasing the number of post-primary graduates with the skills relevant to labour market demands and lowering the wholesale cost of electricity. The Education component will receive 80% of funds with the remaining 20% going to the Energy component to be implemented over the period 2024-2029.

Additionally, international remittances have been a crucial financial resource, increasing from 3.8% of GDP in 2017 to 4.8% in 2022. In collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Belize developed an SDG Investor Map in 2021, highlighting 16 investment opportunities aligned with the SDGs. One significant investment is the establishment of an Electric Vehicle Public Bus System to reduce the carbon footprint and contribute to multiple SDGs.

To attract foreign direct investment (FDI), Belize passed legislation in February 2024 to promote itself as a premier financial services centre through Finance Belize Limited, a non-profit entity. Furthermore, Belize hosted a technical workshop in January 2024 to implement an Integrated National Financial Framework (INFF), enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration and aligning financial resources with national development priorities.

Belize's net FDI has fluctuated due to the pandemic, but inflows have recovered and exceed pre-COVID-19 levels by 2021. Despite this, Belize's FDI remains lower than neighbouring countries, prompting the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to approve an \$8 million loan in 2022 to improve FDI performance.

Belize's fiscal challenges include high sovereign debt, exacerbated by natural disasters and global market fluctuations. To address these challenges, Belize has engaged in innovative debt servicing approaches, such as the Debt-for-Climate/Nature Mechanism (DCNM), developed in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat. This mechanism allows debt savings to be redirected towards climate and nature projects, contributing to multiple SDGs.

**Technology:** Internet access in Belize has significantly improved, with household access increasing from 60.3% in 2019 to 76.3% in 2021. The government has invested in public sector digitalization through the establishment of the e-Governance and Digitalisation Unit (EGDU) in 2021. EGDU's mission is to implement the National Digital Agenda for Belize (NDAB) 2022-2025, enhancing service delivery and building trust in government services.

In support of the SDGs, the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) for Belize (2022-2025) emphasizes addressing social vulnerabilities and inequalities through digital solutions. The Belize Digital Government Act, enacted in 2022, facilitates EGDU's efforts to lead national digital transformation. The UNDP-funded project, "Strengthening the governance structure for the implementation of digital services and the digital agenda," has further supported these initiatives.

**Capacity-building:** Capacity-building remains a priority for Belize to support SDG achievement. The government has established partnerships to enhance in-country knowledge and skills, tailored to the national context. This includes North-South partnerships to build resilience and support socio-economic growth.

**Trade:** Belize engages in various regional and international trade agreements, including bilateral agreements with several Latin American countries and membership of the Caribbean

Community (CARICOM). Despite these agreements, Belize has faced a chronic trade deficit, with imports consistently exceeding exports. To address this, the #planBelize Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS) 2022-2026 includes initiatives to reduce the trade deficit and improve local industry competitiveness. Belize has also facilitated the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) to increase efficiency at border points and reduce trade costs, aiming to boost exports and diversify goods.

**Systemic Issues:** Belize's economy is vulnerable to external shocks such as natural disasters and global market fluctuations. Belize's heavy reliance on tourism and energy imports contributes to economic volatility. Hurricane Lisa in 2022 caused extensive damage, necessitating redirection of national resources for recovery efforts.

Despite these challenges, Belize has seen gradual macro-economic recovery post-pandemic, with the public debt to GDP ratio declining from 103% in 2020 to 71.4% in 2022. Innovative measures and incentives have been introduced to restore investor confidence. New bilateral partnerships with countries like Kenya, Moldova, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia aim to access new markets for Belizean products, contributing to economic opportunities and SDG progress.

Belize continues to address macroeconomic challenges, including high public debt and vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. The country enhances global macroeconomic stability through policy coordination and leveraging international support for emergency response and recovery, reflecting a commitment to sustainable development. Belize has established multi-stakeholder partnerships at both the regional and international levels to implement its national development plans and SDG commitments. Interministerial partnerships, such as those facilitated by the e-governance facility, have improved public sector service delivery, transparency, and accountability, benefiting from knowledge-sharing to enhance efficiencies.

In 2021, Belize approved a public-private partnership (PPP) policy to mobilize private sector capital for large-scale infrastructure and development projects aligned with the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). From 2018/2019 to 2023/2024, PSIP funding primarily came from loans, grants, and counterpart funds, with the Caribbean Development Bank as a major contributor. In September 2023, Belize inaugurated the International Cooperation Council (ICC) to optimize foreign aid usage and align international partnerships with national strategies. The Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) plays a crucial role in aligning national development with SDG investments through the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), supporting reliable SDG monitoring and reporting via the Belize National Statistical System (BNSS) Portal. SIB's ten-year census, with the latest in 2022, generates disaggregated data on key indicators, emphasizing partnerships to strengthen national statistical systems and ensure inclusive data generation and reporting. The US \$3.4 million grant signed in March 2024, funded by KOICA and implemented by five UN agencies, will further support the BNSS.



## 4) Human Rights Assessment

### Civil and Political Rights

Belize is a parliamentary, multi-party democratic state and a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and as such, the Governor-General represents the Head of State, the King of England. Belize is also a longstanding and active member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Constitution of Belize guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all Belizeans, including freedom of expression, conscience, religion, movement, assembly, and association. **Elections in Belize are held every five years, and in and in this current CCA period, national elections are expected to be held in 2025.**

#### Democratic space and elections

Elections in Belize are held every five years. They are contested by the two main political parties, the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the Peoples United Party (PUP). A redistricting exercise was undertaken in 2023 by the Elections and Boundaries Commission, guided by Section 90 of the Constitution, which addresses the near-equal nature of each division, the number of electoral divisions and requisite logistical and accessibility features. When law, redistricting comes into immediate effect at the next general election. Critically, redistricting is unlikely to address the disproportionate political representation distribution for the most economically disadvantaged



regions. The district with the lowest political representation in the National Assembly also has the highest levels of poverty among its population, including children and Indigenous Peoples.<sup>32</sup>

### **Constitutional Reform Commission**

In November 2022, the Governor General of Belize assented to the Peoples Constitution Act, 2022 to establish a People’s Constitution Commission (PCC) to draft and guide the process of promulgating a new Constitution for Belize or make amendments to the existing one. The PCC has since been engaged in a comprehensive, consultative constitution review process prior to submitting the final draft to the Prime Minister for consideration. This process supports, in part, the achievement of Belize’s MTDS 2022 – 2026 to develop constitutional reforms for a more modernised constitution.

### **State of Emergencies (SoEs)**

Since the start of 2023 to date, the Government has implemented multiple states of emergencies (SoEs), ascribed to rising conflicts, gang related violence and pre-meditated intentional homicides.<sup>33</sup> The first was launched in July 2023 and the second was in June 2024. Both SoEs imposed curfews and give police powers to search homes without a warrant and detain suspects for up to 90 days. In 2024, the measure has led to the arrest of nearly a hundred people. While this crime suppression measure was traditionally employed in the known hot spot of Southside Belize City, the two most recent SoEs were enacted in geographically specific areas of the Belize and Cayo Districts. As Belize has ratified the International Convention on and Political Rights (ICCPR), it is important that during SoEs, the State respects the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, certain limitations on imprisonment and trials, the legal protection of everyone and freedom of religion.

## **Commitment to International Conventions**

Belize has ratified all nine (9) of the core UN Human Rights Conventions, including the Optional Protocols for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-OP-AC; CRC-OP-SC) and the Optional Protocol for the Convention Against Torture, Cruel and Inhumane Treatment (CAT-OP) as well as the Escazú Agreement.<sup>34</sup> Like other Caribbean States, Belize uses an ad hoc system to report on its implementation of the ratified treaties, and the State is challenged to establish a formal structure such as a national mechanism for reporting, implementing and monitoring of recommendations. These challenges have led to Belize struggling to register long, overdue reports to treaty bodies, responding promptly to the list of issues before reporting and lacking

<sup>32</sup> The legal framework is set out in Section 90 of the Belize Constitution: Section 90 (1) (a) states, “Each electoral division shall have as nearly as may be, an equal number of persons eligible to vote”. Section 90 (1) (b) states that total number of electoral divisions should not be less than 28. Section 90 (2) states that in fixing boundaries, regard is to be given to transport, physical features, other facilities of the electoral division.

<sup>33</sup> The execution of a SoE is governed by the Statutory Instrument No. 59 of 2024 of the Belize Constitution.

<sup>34</sup> The Optional Protocols which the State of Belize has also ratified include the CRC-OP-AC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; CRC-OP-SC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children for prostitution and child pornography; and CAT-OP - Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture.

engagement with the UN Special Procedures mechanism. As a sign of progress, however, in 2023, Belize submitted its 5-6th Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and 3-4th Convention On the Rights of the Child (CRC) state reports, which were delayed by over 18 and 15 years, respectively. Generally, the government acknowledges challenges in meeting its reporting obligations due to limited technical, financial, and human resources. To enable coordination of the follow-up to and implementation of treaty obligations, monitoring of progress and the translation of commitments into policies and programs, the Government has begun preliminary actions to establish an Inter-Institutional Review Committee (IRC) as the National Inter-Ministerial Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up. Such a mechanism would align directly with the UPR third cycle recommendation to Belize, specifically, R: 77.2, 77.13, 17.14, encouraging the strengthening of national capacities to fulfil reporting obligations and improve the implementation of human rights recommendations. Support to the state on reporting obligations continues to be a critical area of technical assistance by the UN Agencies in Belize, especially through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In September 2022, the Government of Belize signed the **Escazú Agreement** and ratified it in April 2023. As a party to the Escazú Agreement, Belize is taking bold actions by advancing its leadership of environmental and natural resources through heightened attention to the rights of environmental human rights defenders. Support from the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change, for the development of a roadmap and implementation plan for the Escazu Agreement will open avenues for collaboration with regional and extra-regional stakeholders. The components of the roadmap will also strengthen the governance space for transparency and accountability in natural resource stewardship. Having ratified the Escazu Agreement, the State will now need to create an enabling environment that enhances the work of stakeholders, especially environmental human rights defenders to pursue a healthy environment for all.

Additionally, in June 2024, the Cabinet approved Belize's accession to three (3) conventions, specifically **the Hague 2015 Inter-American Convention on Older Persons, the Hague 1996 Convention on Child Protection, and the Hague 2007 Convention on Child Support**. By joining these conventions, the Government of Belize reinforces its dedication to social protection, equity, equality, and non-discrimination for vulnerable groups, specifically the elderly and children. People over 60 years old now constitute at least 18% of the total population and the State recognizes the importance of safeguarding their rights. Additionally, children in Belize are more likely to be multidimensionally poor, which makes acceding to the 2007 Convention on Child Support a critical step to reducing their vulnerability arising from poverty. This convention enables the recovery of child maintenance from parents, even when they reside abroad. Additionally, the 1996 Convention on Child Protection enhances cross-border child protection and enforces parental responsibilities. Through its legislative agenda, the state also needs to ensure that legal matters related to the previous conventions are also established in national law to put these into effect.

Among the international conventions of the ILO, Belize has ratified 9 out of 10 fundamental (core) Conventions. They cover issues including freedom of association and collective bargaining, forced or compulsory labour, child labour, discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, and safe and healthy working environment. The fundamental Convention remaining



unratified is the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

In this period of the CCA, the Government has further strengthened its commitment to pursuing rights-based development through its accession to these treaties.

## Engagement with UN Human Rights Mechanisms

### The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process led by the Human Rights Council that every five years, allows each UN Member State to present actions taken to enhance human rights in their country and meet their obligations. The UPR involves a review of all UN Member States’ human rights records. In line with the commitments therein, the State of Belize maintains its timely reporting to the Universal Periodic Review. The Government submitted the state report in October 2023 for the fourth cycle UPR which was reviewed on 29 January 2024 at the 45<sup>th</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group and the outcome of the review was adopted on 5 July 2024. Out of 166 recommendations received, 127 enjoy the support of Belize, and 38 are noted.

**Figure 16. The Universal Periodic Review Process, OHCHR**



Source: *Cycles of the Universal Periodic Review* | OHCHR

### National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)

With support from OHCHR Universal Periodic Review Voluntary Fund (UPR VF) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following the recommendations of the third cycle UPR, undertook a study of the potential structure of a NHRI in Belize. This study informed the Government’s endorsement of the proposal to transition the Office of the Ombudsman into the NHRI. The Government is currently mobilizing support for the next steps to establishment, which include enacting a law to amend the mandate of the Office of the

Ombudsman. There are ongoing discussions in this regard with UNDP, OHCHR and the European Union to formulate a project to support the NHRI establishment. Additional support from UN Belize to the Government is in progressive fulfilment of the 2017 Tripartite Partnership in Support of National Human Rights Institutions. Current efforts include discussions on budget and operating procedures for the proposed NHRI model; and sensitization of decision-makers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders on the merits of the model proposed, and a roadmap for the full functioning of the NHRI including accreditation standards as guided by the Paris Principles. NHRIs, that maintain compliance with the Paris Principles, are the cornerstone of national human rights protection system and not only serve as bridge between government and its civil society, but also serve as a relay mechanism between international and regional human rights system and the State.

The establishment of a NHRI is the responsibility of a Member State. Doing so contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels,” includes the existence of independent national human rights institutions as an indicator of achievement. As such, indicator 16.a.1 notes that *the existence of an independent, national human rights institution is in compliance with the Paris Principle. Indeed, their establishment can help States fast-track vital protection and other services to those left behind*<sup>35</sup>.

## Anti-Discrimination

### The Equal Opportunities Bill (EOB)

The Equal Opportunities Bill (EOB) although presented to the National Assembly in 2023, has not advanced through the legislative process. Instead, this bill was put on hold because more consultations and citizen engagement needed to be undertaken before it can be debated in the legislature. The instruction by parliament for more consultations and citizen engagement on the EOB is a positive step towards ensuring that the EOB reflects the rights of the people it is meant to protect. As these consultations progress, it is essential that the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups are heard and considered. The goal should be to create a robust and inclusive legal framework that promotes equality, protects against discrimination, and upholds the human rights of all in Belize.

The EOB introduces protections and addresses discrimination in education, employment, services, health and housing which are the rights of the people in Belize. The Belize Network of Non-government Organizations (BNN) is spearheading the new consultative efforts for passage of the EOB into law; the network is motivated by the general principle of equality established in the Constitution.

<sup>35</sup> The SDG Progress Report for 2024 mentions that between 2015 and 2023, the number of countries with independent NHRIs meeting international standards increased by 23%. More than 40% of countries now have independent NHRIs. Para. 33, Target 16.a.

Once enacted, the EOB will integrate the protections and rights embedded within international human rights frameworks into Belize's domestic law. This integration is crucial for the follow-up and implementation of recommendations from the 3rd and 4th cycles of the UPR. By aligning domestic legislation with international human rights standards, Belize will be taking significant steps towards ensuring that people enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled.

### **The Disability Bill**

The Government of Belize is in the final stages to pass the Disability Bill into law. This bill will address discrimination against people living with diverse abilities, providing for the establishment of a Disabilities and Equal Rights Tribunal, which will enable a legal mechanism for redress for acts of discrimination against this population. To support the sensitization of the bill, the Government through the Disability Desk are finalizing the production of two adverts that highlight the key areas of the bill as well as the importance of this prospective legislation to eliminate discrimination of persons of diverse abilities and advance a more equitable society. Belize has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) though, the State is yet to provide its first report to the UN Treaty Body for Disabilities. Preparing and submitting this report would lend to a substantive accounting of this population, which would also account for the situation of children and adults who live with a disability. Furthermore, reporting to the CRPD Committee can promote the development of policies and programs to put the Disabilities Bill (when law) into effect.

## **Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

In conducting the human rights assessment for this CCA update 2024, attention has been placed on promoting and protecting fundamental rights while specifying the populations most likely to be further behind in the context of marginalization, deprivation and social exclusion. The update is being conducted in a context where unemployment is unevenly distributed for some populations more than others, especially in the rural areas, cost of education is still out of reach for many families, social protection access continues to be limited and unequal, food insecurity persists, mostly women and girls experience increasing gender-based violence, and sexual assault and the prevalence of multi-dimensional poverty among children is disproportionate. In this section of the CCA, therefore, emphasis is placed on documenting the populations and groups that are challenged to claim and secure their rights owing to the main barriers, that prevent them from living a dignified life, participate in society and achieve their full potential.

### **Right to Employment**

#### Addressing Gender Disparities in Labor Force Participation and GBV Vulnerability

There is a persistently low female participation rate in the labour force, standing at 44.3% compared to 73.37% for males (2022) and this highlights a significant gender disparity that has profound implications for women's economic empowerment and overall well-being. This disparity not only hampers women's ability to escape poverty but also exacerbates their vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV). Addressing these issues through a human rights-based approach

is crucial for achieving true equality and non-discrimination for women and female and male youth who are still least likely to be gainfully employed.

### Impact on Women's Economic Empowerment

While there has been some progress towards achieving the targets set under SDG 5 on gender equality, significant challenges remain if specific measures are implemented to fully bridge the gap in gender disparities, particularly in the labour force. For instance, the low participation rate of women in the labour force is a critical barrier to economic independence. When women are unable to access equal opportunities in employment, they face increased financial instability, which perpetuates cycles of poverty. Economic dependence is a significant factor that can limit women's and female youth's options and make them more susceptible to various forms of violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence.

In its Fifth and Sixth Report to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2023, the State documented various programs aimed at addressing GBV. These initiatives are part of a broader commitment to upholding international human rights standards and protecting women from violence and discrimination.<sup>36</sup>

To effectively tackle these issues, it is essential to adopt a human rights-based approach that prioritizes equality and non-discrimination in the economy for women and men. This approach should consider:

- **Policy Reform:** Enacting and enforcing laws that promote gender equality in the workplace, including equal pay for equal work, protection against discrimination, and support for work-life balance.
- **Empowerment Programs:** Implementing programs that provide women with the skills, education, and resources needed to participate fully in the labour market.
- **Support Services:** Expanding access to services that support women in the workforce, such as affordable childcare, healthcare, and legal aid for those facing discrimination and violence.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting public awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms and stereotypes that hinder women's participation in the labour force and perpetuate GBV.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing robust mechanisms to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at reducing gender disparities and GBV.

GBV is also a workplace issue, and it is, therefore, related to SDG 8. In this respect, it is noted that Belize has not yet ratified the ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). Achieving gender equality in labour force participation is not just an economic issue but a fundamental human rights concern. By addressing the underlying causes of low female

<sup>36</sup> The Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls was implemented in Belize from 2019 – 2023. It aimed some critical mechanisms including the strengthening of legislation to improve access to justice for survivors of violence, enhancing capacities in government and civil society organizations for the mainstreaming of GBV prevention, and implementation of social and behaviour change communication interventions. UN Belize is undertaking preparatory actions to access resources for a second round of the Spotlight Initiative.

participation and enhancing protections against GBV, Belize can move closer to fulfilling its commitments under CEDAW and SDG 5.

## **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) made several requests related to the Settlement of Disputes in Essential Services Act (SDESA) 1939 and Collective Bargaining. These included amending the SDESA to prevent compulsory arbitration in certain sectors, ensuring Belizean workers are informed of their rights, and aligning the Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations Act with ILO Convention No. 87. The CEACR also emphasized the importance of respecting collective agreements. In the implementation of the new ILO country program workers' rights will be advanced and support the implementation of the recommendations of the CEACR.

## **Right to Education**

### **Ensuring Comprehensive Educational Rights in Belize**

The 2020 Education Act declares that no citizen or permanent resident of Belize shall be refused admission to any school on account of religion, race, ethnicity, language or political affiliation. Schools shall be free of gender, racial or other biases and shall be managed in such a way that all students shall, as far as may be applicable, co-exist as peacefully and harmoniously as possible. The preamble of the Constitution of Belize, as amended in 2021, confirms the individual's right to basic education. However, this preamble does not extend to a general right to education, and there is no legislation mandating at least one year of compulsory pre-primary education as only 8 years of primary education is compulsory. The current legislative framework, particularly Article 70 of the Education and Training Act, permits certain fees in the provision of learning, falling short of guaranteeing 12 years of free primary and secondary education. This gap leaves Belize's commitments under the Education 2030 Framework for Action unmet, hindering the realization of comprehensive educational rights for all its citizens.

### **Advancing Equal Access to Education**

In adopting the Belize Education Sector Strategy 2021-2025, the Government can institute measures that provide free access to education from preschool through secondary education. Such a strategy would align with the fundamental principle that all individuals, irrespective of gender, should have access to quality education. By committing to a minimum of 14 years of state-sponsored education, the State can significantly reduce gender inequalities in education by 2025. Additionally, embedding the right to education within the legal framework and guaranteeing at least 12 years of free primary and secondary education as envisioned in the SDG 4 Education 2030 Framework for Action will ensure that Belize upholds its international

commitments and fosters a more equitable and inclusive society, which immediately benefits the youngest population groups.

## Right to Health

Access to quality healthcare is a major contributor to exercising the right to health. Expanding this access to men and women, boys and girls requires removing barriers, the economic one being perhaps the most relevant. The country has considerably reduced out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure by eliminating such payments in all public primary and secondary care facilities in October 2023. OOP payments have been decreasing steadily from 37.88% in 2000 to 21.3% in 2020, although showing a slight increase by the end of the pandemic in 2021 to 22.76%; the desired target being no higher than 20% to significantly contribute to ensuring equitable access for people living in conditions of vulnerability.

Overall access to healthcare in primary care facilities through the National Health Insurance (NHI) has also improved in recent years. However, there is room for enhancing integration between this scheme and the rest of the publicly funded facilities in the country. Altogether, the percentage of government spending as a percentage of GDP has been increasing from 3% in 2000, reaching 5.31% in 2020 during the pandemic, and decreasing slightly to 4.98% in 2021<sup>37</sup>, with the desired target being 6%.

Equality in health means that women and men can fully realise their right to be healthy, contribute to health development, and benefit from the results. The Constitution of Belize acknowledges that a just system of health should be provided according to the principle of social justice. Furthermore, Belize has ratified the Convention on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in which the right to health is established, Art. 12. The Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) of Belize enables the furtherance of this fundamental tenet. The Belize Health Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2024 is also premised on respecting the human rights and dignity of everyone as a core value. The strategic plan also monitors the Patient's Bill of Rights Charter since one of its goals is to achieve universal access and health coverage while addressing barriers to timely service delivery.

## Mental Health

Data from the Belize Health Information System (BHIS) from public health facilities indicates that anxiety, affective disorders, and schizophrenia are the most prevalent mental health conditions between 2018-2021. *Women are disproportionately affected, with a higher rate of consultations compared to men.* Notably, suicide rates are increasing, particularly among young adults aged 25-29.<sup>38</sup> Recognising the evolving global and regional practices, the National Mental Health Policy

<sup>37</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS?locations=BZ>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.health.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NMH-Policy-Final-Signed.pdf>



was updated and launched in 2023. The revision was essential to ensure the policy aligned with current international best practices and initiatives from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) Plan of Action on Mental Health 2013-2030. Additionally, the update addresses the ever-growing body of knowledge in the mental health field and the landscape of mental health needs in Belize.

## Children's Health – Malnutrition

The health of male and female children in Belize remains a concern. As a group, children tend to experience malnutrition and stunting at very early ages. At least 6% of under-five-year-olds are overweight (2022), and 12% are stunted (2022). Malnutrition is a multidimensional issue with several underlying factors, including poverty and exclusion. Since stunting is a manifestation of multi-dimensional deprivation and malnutrition among children, addressing the immediate determinants (diets and care), underlying determinants (food, practices and services) and enabling determinants (resources, norms and cultural beliefs) require critical systems of social protection, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and social and behavioural change communication at the household, school and community levels. The national nutrition policy was launched in 2023 and provides the roadmap to addressing the double burden of malnutrition in the country.

The prevalence of overweight among school children 13-15 years in Belize is 35.8%, and obesity is 12.5%. To promote the right to health and protect well-being among students and adolescents, the Government of Belize, in 2023, enacted an executive order for the gradual banning of unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages in schools. The Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools, Healthy Belize initiative is a health promotion initiative aimed at creating enabling environments for the support and promotion of healthy eating and the promotion of physical activity in school settings and has been implemented in 18 pilot schools since 2023. The work to combat malnutrition among children is further strengthened by the National School Feeding program implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology to ensure access to healthy meals in selected schools in the country. School-aged children in urban and rural communities, continue to lack regular access to healthy and nutritious food for their growth and development. The healthy initiative in pilot schools needs to be expanded while those already under implementation need continued support.

<sup>11</sup> MOHW Belize Nutrition Policy 2023

Maternal mortality rates have shown significant fluctuations, peaking at 225.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, then dropping to 56.6 in 2022, and rising again to 78.8 in 2023. Child mortality rates have remained stable, while the infant mortality rate has also remained stable at 14.9 per 1,000 live births in 2022 and 15.1 in 2023. The neonatal mortality rate has decreased from 12.6 per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 10.6 in 2023. However, 31% of neonatal deaths in Belize occur within the first 24 hours, and 77% occur within the first week of life, primarily due to prematurity, intrapartum complications, and sepsis.

In 2023, Belize developed its first Newborn Action Plan, a bold roadmap aimed at ending all preventable maternal, newborn, and child deaths, including stillbirths, by 2030. Furthermore, to enhance universal health coverage and access to primary health care services, the monthly stipend for community health workers were increased from \$100 BZD to \$500 BZD, and user fees at all public health facilities were abolished. Additionally, Belize achieved certification by WHO of the dual elimination of mother to child transmission (EMTCT) of HIV and syphilis. This achievement signals to the world that ending paediatric HIV and MTCT of syphilis is achievable. Belize's Newborn Action Plan initiative considers all dimensions of prenatal care and the broader social determinants that hinder access to essential care. These measures are crucial steps towards ensuring equitable access to essential health services for all mothers and infants.

## Elder Care and Health

Belize's ageing population continues to increase, necessitating comprehensive health services tailored to the elderly. A draft Older Persons Welfare and Protection Act is currently under consideration with technical assistance being provided to ensure the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 principles are considered, specifically, 1) Changing the way we think and feel towards the aged and ageing, 2) Ensuring that communities foster the abilities of older people, 3) Delivering person-centred, integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people, and 4) Providing access to long-term care for older people who need it.

Specialized geriatric clinics provide essential medications for chronic non-communicable diseases, yet the demand for these services exceeds the available resources including human resources. To uphold the right to health for older adults, it is therefore imperative to expand these services and ensure that elderly men and women have uninterrupted access to healthcare, including preventive and curative services for chronic conditions.

# Challenges to Advancing Human Rights

## Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (S& RH)

The Statistical Institute of Belize reported an estimated 71,900 adolescents aged 10-19 in Belize, making up around 19% of the population. In 2023, the birth rate for girls aged 10-14 was 0.63 births per 1,000, and for girls aged 15-19, it was 55.2 per 1,000. Efforts to address adolescent health include the National Strategic Plan for Adolescent Health Strategy and the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (SRHP). There is a need to ensure access to comprehensive adolescent and youth-friendly health services, especially in emergency settings, and to address

issues such as mental health, gender-based violence, and non-communicable diseases that affect adolescent males and females in urban and rural communities.

## Child Marriage and Early Unions

**Table 19** below from the 2015 Belize Multiple Indicator Cluster Study (MICS)<sup>39</sup>, shows the proportion of women and men aged 15-19 who were married or in a union. It illustrates that girls (20.8 per cent) were nearly twice as likely to be in a marriage/union by the age of 15-19 compared to boys (10.7 per cent)

**Table 18. Child marriage and early unions by the age of 15 in Belize, 2015-2016**

	Women	Men
	%	%
Aged 15-19 years currently marriage/in a union	20.8	10.7
Aged 15-49 years married before the age of 15	5.5	4.1
Aged 20-49 years married before the age of 15	5.9	3.8
Aged 20-49 years married before the age of 18	29.0	16.3

Source: Belize MICS, 2015-2016

The 2015-2016 MICS found that the adolescents and women aged 15-49 who were married before the age of 15 were most likely from Stann Creek (11.6 per cent) and Toledo (9.2 per cent) and least likely to be from Orange Walk (2.8 per cent) and Cayo (3.2 per cent). Men aged 15-49 years who married before the age of 15 were also most likely to be from Belize City South Side (7.8 per cent) and Belize (6.4 per cent) and least likely to be from Corozal (0.9 per cent).

The data also shows that teenage girls and women aged 15-49 were not realising their right to education since they were more likely to marry before the age of 15. This is unlike their male counterparts who, when they marry by the age of 15, were more likely to have some secondary or higher education. Nonetheless, early marriage prevents both males and females from reaching their full educational potential. Notably, the ethnicity of the head of the household also influences early marriage. On this basis, girls across all the major ethnic groups are engaged in CMEU, while mostly boys and men from the Creole and Garifuna ethnic groups were more likely to be in CMEU as outlined in **Table 20**. The data also revealed regional differences in the prevalence of early marriage, with rural areas showing a higher percentage of currently married or unionized male and females. CMEU is a matter of concern in urban and rural communities, and among specific groups. CMEU impinges on the rights of male and female adolescents to education and earn a livelihood that reduces their experience of poverty.

**Table 19. Women and men aged 15-49 married before the age of 15 (%), 2015-2016**

	Girls aged 15-49 Married before age 15	Boys aged 15-49 Married before age 15

<sup>39</sup> Statistical Institute of Belize and United Nations Children's Fund Belize, 'Belize Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2015-2016', Government of Belize and UNICEF Belize, Belmopan, Belize, 2017, [https://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/MICS5\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](https://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/MICS5_Report_2015.pdf)

	%	%
Total	5.5	4.1
<u>Area</u>		
Urban	5.2	5.3
Rural	5.8	3.3
<u>Education</u>		
None	15.3	3.0
Primary	7.5	3.5
Secondary	4.9	4.8
Higher	1.8	4.3
<u>Ethnicity of household head</u>		
Creole	4.8	7.2
Maya	7.8	2.0
Mesitizo/Spanish/Latino	5.3	3.4
Garifuna	7.3	9.2
East Indian	7.7	2.7
Other	4.1	0.4

*Figures are based on 25-49 unweighted cases; (\*) Figures that are based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases*  
*Source: Belize MICS, 2015-2016*

## Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence

Despite notable interventions in Belize, especially through the Spotlight Initiative to End Gender-based Violence, women and girls continue to be the main victims of both domestic and sexual violence with 99% of the victims of sexual violence being females. Furthermore, 50% of all victims of sexual violence were females aged 10 to 19 years and 94% of the domestic violence reports occurred in the residence of either the victim or the perpetrator.

### Key gaps and main issues to address on VAWG & GBV

Addressing GBV in Belize requires the continued targeted focus and multisectoral approach to close the widened inequality gap. The perception of impunity from the law coupled with low conviction rates for perpetrators and lack of rehabilitative services for perpetrators of GBV, reveals the broader systemic issues of the high cases of GBV, especially for women and girls:

- **Laws, policies, and institutions:** The Labour Act (Cap. 297) addresses issues related to the employment of women, but it does not cover issues related to violence and harassment, including GBV. However, the Act is under review through joint efforts by the government and employers' and workers' organizations. Notably, the multisectoral GBV response should be strengthened for consistency in implementation across the national and sub-national levels. Doing so would remove fragmented actions and initiatives in government ministries, agencies, civil society, and other organisations. A comprehensive response will require that the protection system supports the

implementation of these legislations at sub-national and community levels where gaps in access to services and response to GBV services are lacking.

- Prevention and Service Delivery (Response): Access to support services for GBV survivors remains fragmented and varied in quality and is generally limited in rural and migrant communities and among other vulnerable populations. Where services are available, there remains limited frontline workers with the capacity to manage the demand for critical-level GBV services, including violence against women and children.
- Constrained CSOs' capacities, particularly those in the social services sector, are challenged by the unpredictability of their resource mobilization efforts, low institutional capacities, and ad hoc programming interventions.

**A rights-based response will also require that GBV is monitored using** standardized indicators to support harmonized data collection, analysis and reporting on GBV, so that the rights of victims are attended to in a responsive and protective system.

## Climate Vulnerability

In 2021, Belize updated and presented its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) at the November 2021 UN Conference of Parties for Climate Change (COP26). These NDCs advance the initial National Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP 2015) to include the mobilisation of infrastructure investments for Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA), the establishment of new and improved public conservation measures.

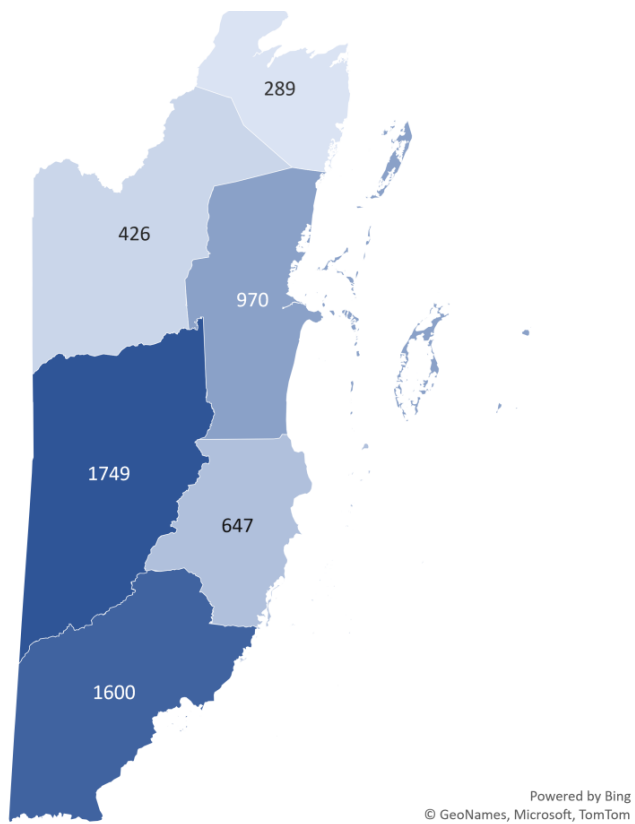
## Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations

### Migrant Populations

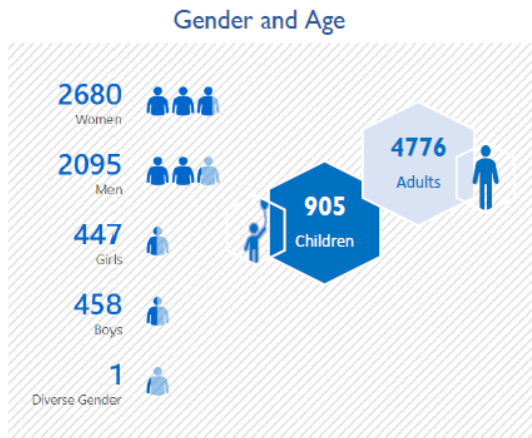
Belize is a transit country and a destination for migrants, and a host country for asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Central America. It is still common practice for migrants to be imprisoned when they are detained for irregular entry. Hence, IOM is currently supporting reforms of the Immigration Act, the Nationality Act, and the Permanent Residence Act to advance adherence to international standards for the fulfilment of the rights of migrants. It would be incumbent on the Government of Belize to put the necessary infrastructure in place to facilitate the implementation of these revisions. This would include, as a priority, a reception centre to accommodate unaccompanied minors, families, and men and women.

Through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN has strengthened support for the state and partnered with CSOs to help protect and promote the rights of migrants. In 2022, the Government implemented an Amnesty Program, which accepted applications from August 2022 to March 2023. Of an estimated 14,000 persons who applied for the Amnesty Program, IOM supported 5,681 persons through mobile hub activities in the field. Below is the number of persons supported by IOM by district and disaggregated by gender and age:

**Figure 17. Amnesty Applicants Supported by IOM**



**Figure 18. Amnesty Applicants by Sex Supported by IOM**



Source: *International Organization for Migration, Belize Office*

Despite these efforts, the absence of a consolidated database for vulnerable persons across all UN agencies creates duplication in services, an inability to leverage best practices to address vulnerabilities, and stunts follow-up initiatives required to address the needs of vulnerable persons. IOM is working in partnership with the Ministry of Rural Transformation to create a database of information on rural communities.

This database will also include village profile information collected from a legal identity survey from 20 villages in the Toledo district. In addition, IOM intends to create an internal database that can house all the records from all migrant centers, mobile hubs and outreaches conducted from February 2021 to present.

A closer partnership that would facilitate better information sharing among UN agencies, and with the Government of Belize would facilitate identifying the needs of migrants, together with providing possible solutions. These needs include, supporting safe, orderly regular migration through legislative reform that will address how Belize responds to regular/irregular migration, a strong referral mechanism to better facilitate integration of migrants in the country, and an assessment of Belize’s capacity to support the influx of persons on the move including in transit, irregular migration, unaccompanied minors, seasonal workers and persons who are interested in integrating. The UN will continue to urge the Government of Belize to adopt a Migration Policy that can support these needs in a multi-sectoral manner.

## Asylum-Seekers and Refugees

Belize has a history of welcoming forcibly displaced people (FDP) mainly from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua (UNHCR, 2024). In 2021, the Government of Belize initiated a review of the 1991 Refugees Act, in consultation with UNHCR, to further strengthen the legislation and refugee status determination procedure, and recommended amendments were submitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for endorsement. The review recommended that the proposed amendments be approved and incorporated into law. Some of the proposed amendments under consideration include the removal of the 14-day timeline to register an asylum claim (no longer enforced after a 2020 Supreme Court decision struck it down), streamlining of the refugee status determination process, strengthening of the appeal procedure, and establishment of a pathway to permanent residency and ultimately naturalization for recognized refugees.

While largely in compliance with international standards, the proposed amendments seek to strengthen protection for vulnerable asylum-seekers who lack the formal authorization to work



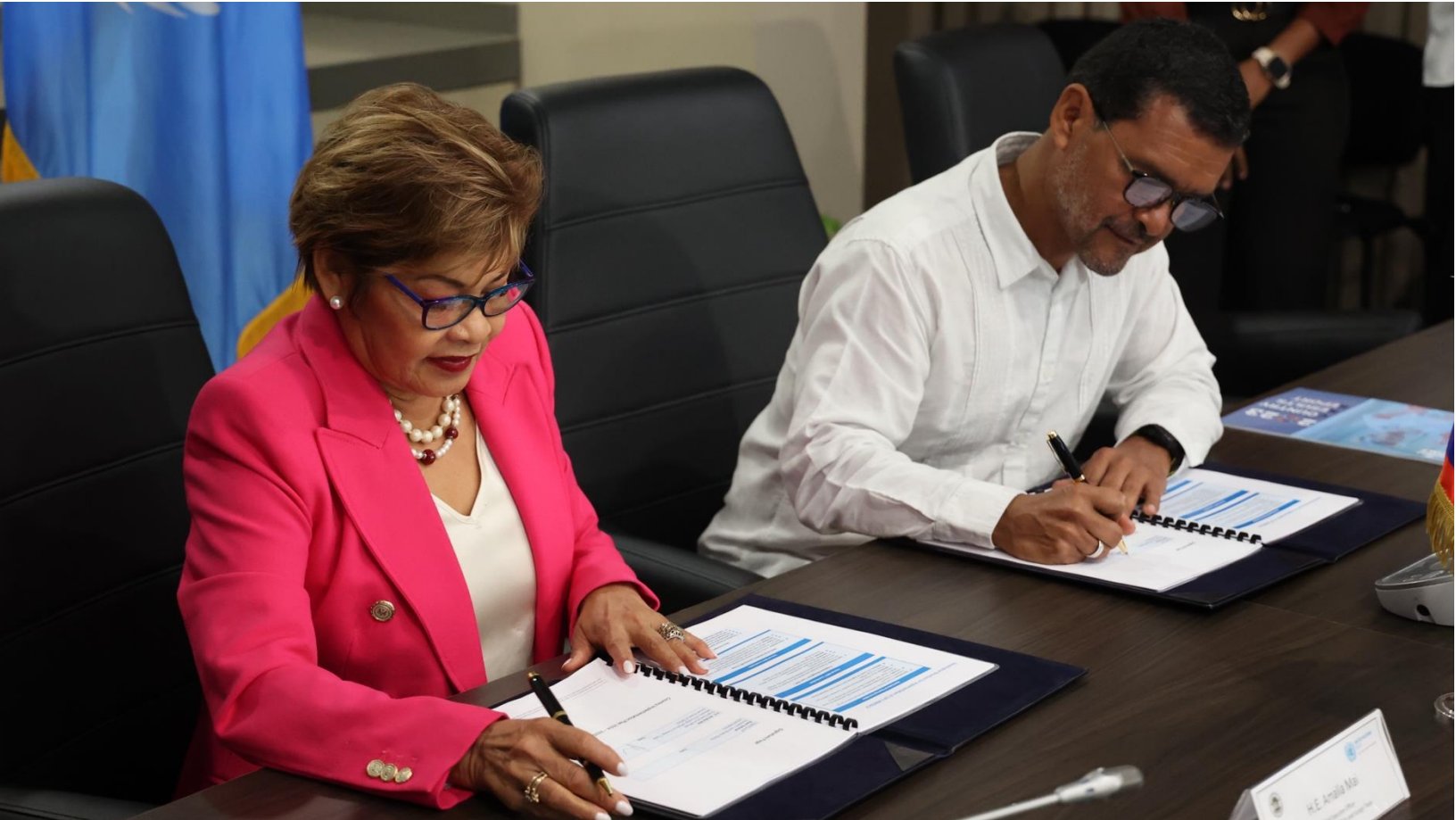
during the procedure. Prior to the current Amnesty exercise, many asylum-seekers remained in a protracted procedure for many years, without the ability to work. The amendments, therefore, address this through establishing a 90-day timeframe for a case to be processed, with the issuance of work permits should the procedure extend beyond the prescribed timeframe. In addition, recognized refugees in Belize currently do not have a pathway to citizenship, thus leaving them in a protracted state of displacement. Thus, the proposed inclusion of a pathway to permanent residency seeks to ensure integration and solutions for refugees in Belize.

With the latest Amnesty exercise and the anticipated adoption of the strengthened Refugees Act, the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in Belize will enjoy enhanced legal rights that will facilitate the obtainment of durable solutions. However, even with legal status, most forcibly displaced persons lag behind the general population in terms of socioeconomic solution, and UNHCR will continue to support the government of Belize to ensure access to dignified work, education and healthcare.

## Indigenous Maya

In 2007, the Maya people in Belize brought a case to the Caribbean Court of Justice (which would later become the country's final court of appeal in 2010) on recognising and protecting their traditional land rights. After years of litigation, the CCJ issued a consent order in 2015, recognising the Maya people's communal ownership and traditional use of their ancestral lands. It affirmed their protection, referring to article 32 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As per the CCJ consent order, the Government of Belize would "develop the legislative, administrative and/or other measures necessary to create an effective mechanism to identify and protect the property and other rights arising from Maya customary land tenure, in accordance with Maya customary laws and land tenure practices". In recent years, the Government of Belize has attempted to develop a policy that informs the legislative mechanism to protect Maya property rights.

The Maya Leaders Alliance and other Indigenous organizations claim that the government's attempts to implement land policies have been pursued without fully consulting the affected communities. In a report to the Human Rights Council dated July 2023, the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples noted that there have been significant delays in implementing decisions due to the government's failure to engage with Indigenous Peoples to establish a mechanism for protecting the Maya people's land rights and ensuring their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). The Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples held public consultations on the draft policy in Maya villages of the Toledo District. However, representatives of the Maya community expressed their rejection of certain parts of the draft Maya Customary Land Policy and called on the government to reconsider the document's drafting process. The affected communities should have the opportunity to participate in land tenure decisions as ruled by the CCJ. This involves providing accessible information, transparent procedures, and opportunities for all community members to express their views, and representation in processes that reflect diverse perspectives of the affected communities. Of note, Belize has not utilized the UN Special Procedures since 2013 although this mechanism can provide independent human rights experts to report on human rights from a country-specific perspective. These resources can be accessed to support engagement and dialogue with the Maya Indigenous Peoples.

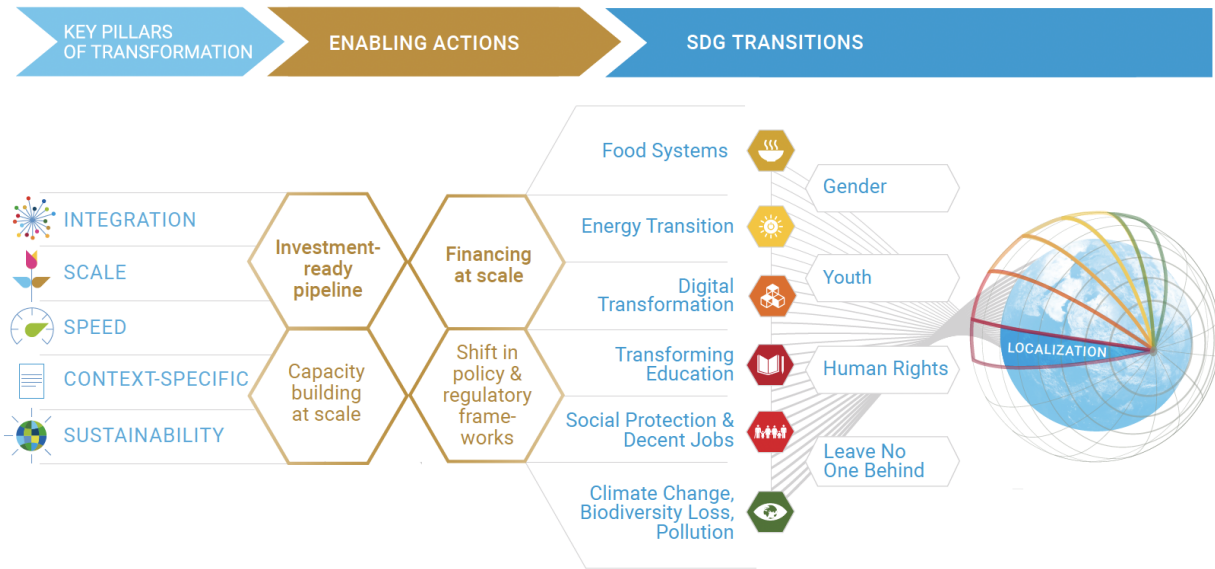


## 5) Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Delivery on the SDGs

The transitional approach towards SDG acceleration focuses on 6 areas: sustainable food systems; energy and access; digital transformation; transforming education; social protection and decent jobs; and addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution given their multiple SDGs impact multiplier <sup>40</sup>. These transitions offer significant synergies that can drive progress across several goals simultaneously. However, they also present trade-offs that need careful management to ensure that progress in one area does not come at the expense of another. Strategic planning and policy integration are essential to maximize synergies and mitigate trade-offs, fostering a holistic approach to sustainable development. It is important to note that these 6 transitions are not a mandate from the UN System for Belize but simply strategic entry points for the UNCT to engage with Government and Stakeholders on what works best for Belize. Furthermore, it is important that these transitions be localized by engaging local stakeholders, understanding community needs, and leveraging local knowledge since this contributes to strengthening the impact of SDG initiatives while fostering ownership and accountability, leading to greater sustainability and inclusive development.

<sup>40</sup> Based on best practice and research the UN System came up with these 6 six transitions as investment pathways or key transformative entry points that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs. These transitions were presented at the SDG summit (New York 2023) to put the SDGs back on track and secure the collective commitment of Governments and stakeholders for SDG acceleration, thereby, meeting the targets of the 2030 agenda.

Figure 19. UNDCO Transitional Approach for SDG Acceleration

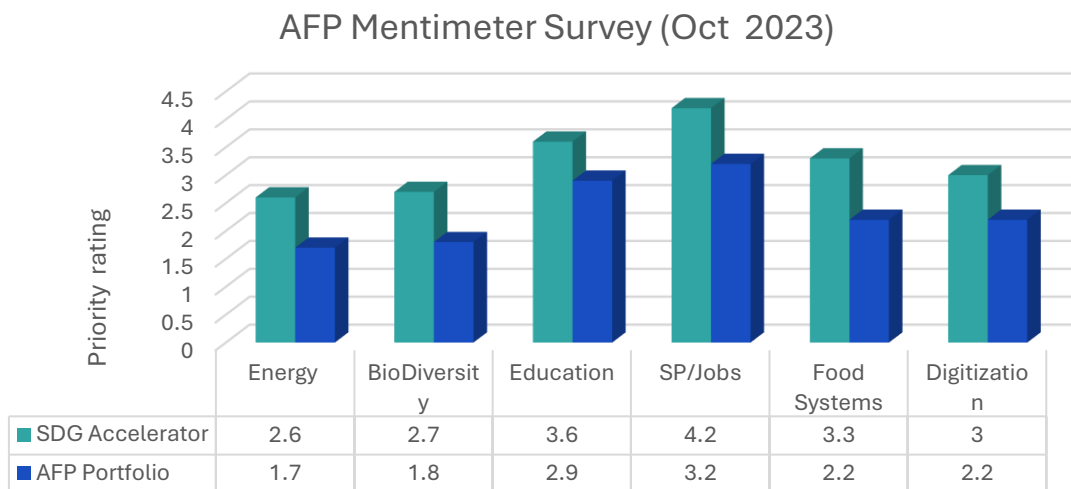


Source: United Nations Development Coordination Office

## The Transitions

At an RC Town Hall meeting (October 31, 2023), UN agencies present indicated priority # 1 being Social Protection & Decent Jobs; followed by Education, Food Systems, Digital Transformation, Biodiversity/ Nature and Energy Transition in this order as the most effective way to accelerate SDG progress. With respect to which transition UN Agencies contributed the most to, the response coincided in terms of priority for acceleration as reflected in the graph below:

Figure 20. Belize AFPs Survey on the Transitions



Source: UN Country Team Town Hall Mentimeter Survey (2023)

It is important to note that Belize’s 8 commitments at the 2023 SDG summit coincided with the 6 transitions plus two cross-cutting areas of National Disaster Risk Management and Data

Strengthening as (Statement by Hon. John Briceno, Prime Minister of Belize, SDG Summit 2023, Leaders Dialogue 2: Building Resilience and Leaving No One Behind) follows:

- **Energy Transition:** Implementing the **National Energy Policy**, the National Land Use Policy, develop a comprehensive Industrial Strategy that integrates green and blue industrial policies, and increase investments in climate resilient infrastructure by 2026.
- **Biodiversity:** Fostering a **low carbon resilient development pathway and strengthen climate change adaptation** and mitigation, achieve protection of 30% of marine space by 2026, including protection of 20% of the coral reef, implement Belize’s National Blue Economy Policy, and further commit to reducing land degradation through Belize’s Land Restoration Strategy, **mitigate biodiversity loss via the Revised National Biodiversity Strategy, implement Integrated Water Resource** Management approaches and foster agroforestry systems;
- **Education Transformation:** By 2025, finalize a Special Education Policy, implement Early Childhood Development Investment, expand adult remedial initiatives, skills training and upskilling.
- **Social Protection/Jobs:** Approve, by 2024, a costed Social Protection Strategy, including the Social Protection Floor and accompanying institutional mechanisms.
- **Food Systems:** Implementing the National Agriculture & Food Policy, and Belize’s Food System Pathway, including a School Feeding program.
- **Digital Transformation:** Implementing by 2025 Belize’s National Digital Agenda to modernize governance.

#### Cross-Cutting Issues

- **Data:** Adopting a revised National Strategy for Advancing Statistical Development by 2024 to enhance evidence -based decision-making.
- **Disaster Risk Management:** By 2024, implement a National Risk Management Plan supplemented by disaster-specific strategies for hurricanes, floods and droughts.

The following table illustrates some of Belize achievements, opportunities and challenges as it relates to the six strategic SDG transitions and linkages with the corresponding SDGs.

**Table 20. Six Strategic SDG Transitions Assessment**

SIX SDG	BELIZE UNCT		
Transition	Achievements	Opportunities	Challenges
<b>1) Food Systems</b>	Food Supply Stability:over 80% of cereals produced locally, ensuring ample daily food energy availability.	Promote local foods to reduce dependence on imported processed products	Persistent economic disparities impact access to quality food in rural & vulnerable populations, exacerbating issues of food inequality/ insecurity

	Completion of Belize's Food System Transformation Pathway 2023	Nutritional regulations and front of package warning labels could promote healthier consumption habits	Climate Change Vulnerability: threats to agricultural productivity, food security, and economic stability; Health Concerns: High rates of obesity and diabetes
	Environmental Conservation Commitment with 56% of land remaining forested	Promote sustainable agriculture practice that are climate smart and friendly	Increasing pressure on land from urban and agriculture expansion, particularly, livestock expansion
<b>2) Energy Access &amp; Affordability</b>	Investment in renewable energy sources	Increase renewable energy share in the energy mix	Disparities in electricity access across districts and high energy cost
	Grid expansion making access more readily and affordable	Developing off-grid & mini-grid renewable energy solutions for reaching remote and underserved communities	Vulnerability to climate conditions affecting renewable energy supply
<b>3) Digital Connectivity</b>	Digital governance unit established	Generating econ. growth and job creation through e-commerce, digital payments, and remote work opportunities	Uneven digital access between rural & urban areas and expanding infrastructure development to remote areas
	National digital agenda developed	Increase internet access & connectivity particularly for rural areas/ marginalized communities	Need for improved cybersecurity measures & data privacy & affordability for low income population
<b>4) Education</b>	High primary school completion rates; 80% of the US\$125 grant from the MCC is allocated for education	Increasing participation in early childhood education	Disparities in educational access between rural and urban populations particularly for early childhood education, secondary and university schooling
	Gender parity achieved in pre-primary & secondary education	Improving secondary school completion rates, especially in rural areas	Ensuring quality education standards and teacher qualifications
<b>5) Jobs &amp; Social Protection</b>	Decrease in unemployment rates, particularly among youth	Enhance employment opportunities for vulnerable groups	Persistent youth unemployment & underemployment
	Expansion of social protection initiatives	Strengthen protections for migrant and vulnerable workers	Vulnerabilities in the labor market, especially for migrant workers
<b>6) CC, Bio-diversity Loss &amp; Pollution</b>	Establishment of climate change offices and strategies	Integration of climate change measures into national policies	Underfunding and insufficient data for climate change actions
	Legal protection of marine and terrestrial environments	Involvement of local communities and stakeholders	Impact of agricultural expansion and urban development on biodiversity
	Implementation of Sustainable practices in agriculture, tourism and industry	Environmental education for greater stewardship and ownership	Land based pollution and climate Change impact on infrastructure, livelihoods, and ecosystems



## 1). Food Systems

The transition towards sustainable food systems is integral to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Life on Land (SDG 15). An assessment of these 4 SDGs is provided in chapter 3.

Belize has achieved significant milestones in its food systems, demonstrating robust food supply stability with over 80% of cereals produced locally, ensuring ample daily food energy availability. Small-scale farmers play a pivotal role in cultivating a diverse array of food crops and livestock, contributing substantially to local livelihoods and economic sustainability. Key exports like sugar, citrus, bananas, fisheries, livestock, grains and legumes bolster agricultural resilience and economic growth. Moreover, Belize's commitment to environmental conservation, with 56% of land remaining forested, underscores Belize's dedication to sustainable agriculture and biodiversity preservation. Following on the World Food Summit 2021, on July 2023 Belize completed its Food System Transformation Pathway 2023-2030, and is now, working on developing an implementation plan for the following 6 levers:

- Access to safe, local and nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all.
- Shifting to inclusive, resilient and sustainable consumption patterns (promoting and creating demand for local and healthy, climate-friendly diets, reducing waste).
- Boosting nature-positive production at sufficient scale (acting on climate change, reducing emissions and increasing carbon capture, regenerating and protecting critical ecosystems and reducing food loss and energy usage, without undermining health or nutritious diets).
- Advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution (raising incomes, distributing risk, expanding inclusion, promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all).
- Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress (ensuring the continued functionality of healthy and sustainable food systems).
- Improved and inclusive disaster and climate risk informed policies and programmes for agriculture and food system transformation.

Belize remains vulnerable to climate change, evidenced by increasing occurrences of hurricanes, floods, and droughts, which pose significant threats to agricultural productivity, food security, and economic stability. Economic disparities, high poverty, limited infrastructure and limited diversification persist, impacting access to quality food in rural and underserved communities, exacerbating issues of food inequality. Health concerns such as high rates of obesity and diabetes highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to promote healthier diets and lifestyles across the population.

Looking ahead, Belize has identified opportunities to enhance its food systems. Developing local fertilizer production using sustainable practices can reduce dependency on costly imported agro-chemicals, promoting economic resilience. Embracing climate-resilient agro-ecology practices not only strengthens agricultural sustainability but also offers environmental benefits and economic opportunities. Policies that prioritize local, safe, and nutritious foods can improve public health outcomes while boosting local economies. By integrating climate resilience into agricultural strategies and continuing to invest in renewable energy and infrastructure, Belize



aims to build a resilient and inclusive food system that supports sustainable development and enhances the well-being of its population.

## 2). Energy Access and Affordability

SDGs that interact with Energy Access and Affordability would include Affordable & Clean Energy (SDG 7) and Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG9). A progress assessment is provided of these two SDGs in chapter 3.

Belize has made significant progress in expanding energy access and integrating renewable energy sources into its energy mix. Investments in hydropower, biogas-power (mainly sugarcane bagasse) and solar plants, along with efforts to expand the national electricity grid, have improved access to reliable and sustainable energy for most Belizeans. Additionally, the completion of Belize's National Energy Policy framework 2023 encouraging private sector investment in renewable energy and commitment for US\$77 investment in a 60-megawatt solar plant will bolster Belize's progress toward a cleaner and more secure energy future; likewise, 20% of the US\$125 million 5-year projected investment by the Millennium Challenge Corporation will focus on increasing Energy Access and making it more affordable.

Despite these advancements, Belize still faces challenges in achieving universal and affordable energy access. Rural and remote areas often struggle with adequate energy infrastructure, leading to limited access and higher costs. The high cost of energy, remains a burden on households and businesses, impacting economic competitiveness and affordability. Furthermore, the energy sector is vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as extreme weather events that can disrupt supply and infrastructure. By developing off-grid renewable solutions, promoting energy efficiency, and investing in modern energy technologies, Belize can enhance energy access and affordability, ensuring a more accessible, resilient and sustainable energy system.

## 3). Digital Connectivity

Based on SDG progress (chapter 3): Quality Education (SDG4); Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9) and Partnership for the Goals (SDG 17), Belize continues to make progress in enhancing digital connectivity. The country has expanded broadband infrastructure, particularly in urban centres, and achieved high penetration of mobile networks, which has significantly improved access to communication services nationwide. Government-led initiatives have played a pivotal role in fostering partnerships with private providers and establishing supportive policy frameworks aimed at advancing ICT development. A digital governance unit has been established and with it the development of Belize's National Digital Agenda 2022-2025 to plan for opportunities in e-commerce, digital payments and remote platform work while dealing with challenges of this new service in terms of rural/urban disparities, rural infrastructure deficit, and need to improve cyber security. The following table illustrates the main digital initiatives in Plan Belize MTDS 2022-2026.

**Table 21. Plan Belize Digital Initiatives 2022-2026**

<b>Plan Belize MTDS 2022-2026</b>	
<b>GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>RURAL LIVING, TRANSPORT &amp; INFRASTRUCTURE</b>
1). Implement a transparent GoB procurement process: E-market place for the GoB	1). Provide internet access to rural schools & online education for all rural schools where applicable
<b>ANTI-CORRUPTION</b>	<b>SAFE SOCIETY &amp; JUSTICE</b>
2). Implement a national budget planning & monitoring system to guarantee transparency of the budget	1). Hall of Justice (courts, registry, legal library, admin. Media center & a judicial education institute); 2). Digitizing the Court System
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>LAND</b>
1). Digitizing of student applications 2). Technology skills for youths 3). E-book program / digital device for children	1). Digitize the lands department to ensure non-partisan, efficient, and convenient distribution of land and other services; 2). Surveillance technology for forest protection
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	<b>ECONOMY &amp; JOBS</b>
1). Update of National Health Formulary; 2). National Health Record System; 3). Establishment of a fair, competitive & transparent tendering procedure; 4). Virtual doctor consultation in rural areas (telemedicine)	1). Establish a Ministry of Information Technology & Digital Transformation to spearhead development in ICT, the transformation of GoB services, and spur technological innovation & development of the digital economy; 2). Systems: Establish systems to integrate the response effort (data, communication, transport, referrals etc)
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>TOURISM</b>
1). Review the entire tax system and enact reforms to have a simplified, fair, efficient, and development driven system; 2). Climate smart systems for farmers; 3). Improved storage & logistic facilities	1). Develop & adopt new digital technologies that enable easy & safe travel and improve the overall travel experience; 2). Develop capacity building & training programs for current and new tourism workers and small businesses and empower them with the essential digital skills to adjust
<b>WOMEN'S AGFENDA &amp; FAMILY</b>	
1). Promote women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; 2). Creating empowerment/ special development zones to better target specialized assistance and strengthen the capacities of families and communities	

*Source: Belize National Digital Agenda 2022-2025*

Looking ahead, Belize stands at a critical juncture with several opportunities for further advancement. These include expanding digital infrastructure in rural and underserved areas, fostering the development of the digital economy through e-commerce and digital skills training, and ensuring equitable access to affordable internet services across socio-economic groups. However, challenges such as affordability of services, the logistical complexity of infrastructure development in remote regions, and the need to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural populations remain pressing issues that require concerted efforts and innovative solutions moving forward. Addressing these challenges while seizing emerging opportunities will be essential in ensuring Belize continues to progress towards a digitally inclusive and resilient future.

## 4). Quality Education

Based on SDGs progress in chapter 3: Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG10) Belize has made progress over the past 3 years but still faces challenges on transforming education based on the latter SDGs.

Belize's education system is characterized by a mix of public and private institutions, with primary, secondary, and tertiary education being widely accessible. The country has made progress in achieving universal primary education, with nearly all school-aged children enrolled in primary schools. Secondary education enrolment and completion remains a challenge, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Early childhood attendance decreased with the covid-19 experience but has seen some improvement since the recovery process started in 2021. The government has implemented reforms aimed at enhancing curriculum standards, teacher training, and greater focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, aiming to improve educational quality. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant investment of US\$125 million focus (80%) is on education, increasing the skill-set of the population and aims to have a greater rate of primary school student attending and completing high school. The Belize Education Sector Strategy 2021-2025 which was completed in 2021 has the following overarching goals:

- Increase access to all levels of education, from preschool to university.
- Reduce gender, rural/urban and socioeconomic inequities in education.
- Improve the quality of education provided at all levels of the system; and
- Align the system of education to national development needs.

## 5). Jobs and Social Protection

SDG progress on Chapter 3 provide assessment of the following SDGs that are linked to Jobs and Social Protection: No Poverty (SDG 1), Good Health & Wellbeing (SDG 3), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work & Economic Growth (SDG 8) and Reduced Inequality (SDG 10).

Belize high economic growth in tourism, services and some sectors of agriculture, led to job creation and record employment opportunities. Government initiatives on improving the business environment and promoting foreign direct investment have supported job creation and skill development, while social protection programs like conditional cash transfers and food assistance have provided relief to vulnerable populations. The following tables provides an inventory of the instruments available in Belize in support of social protection:

## Table 22. Social Protection Policy Instrument

Source: Draft Belize Social Protection Strategy 2024

The increase in the minimum wage from US\$1.65 to US\$2.50/ hour, effective January 2023 has made its positive contribution for workers at the lower end of the income scale, helping these workers to cope with increasing living standards. ILO led the preparation of Belize's Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2024-2029. In July 2024 it was endorsed by Government, the private sector and labour unions focusing on 3 strategic areas:

- Rights and Governance
- Inclusive Labour Markets
- Productivity, Sustainable Enterprise and Local Economic Development

Opportunities for improvement include diversifying the economy to reduce reliance on traditional sectors, expanding the agro-processing sector, investing in vocational training to equip the workforce with modern skills, and strengthening social protection systems to offer a more robust safety net for workers. Addressing these areas can enhance job security, reduce economic inequality, and improve the overall well-being of Belizeans. The DWCP highlights that Belize's

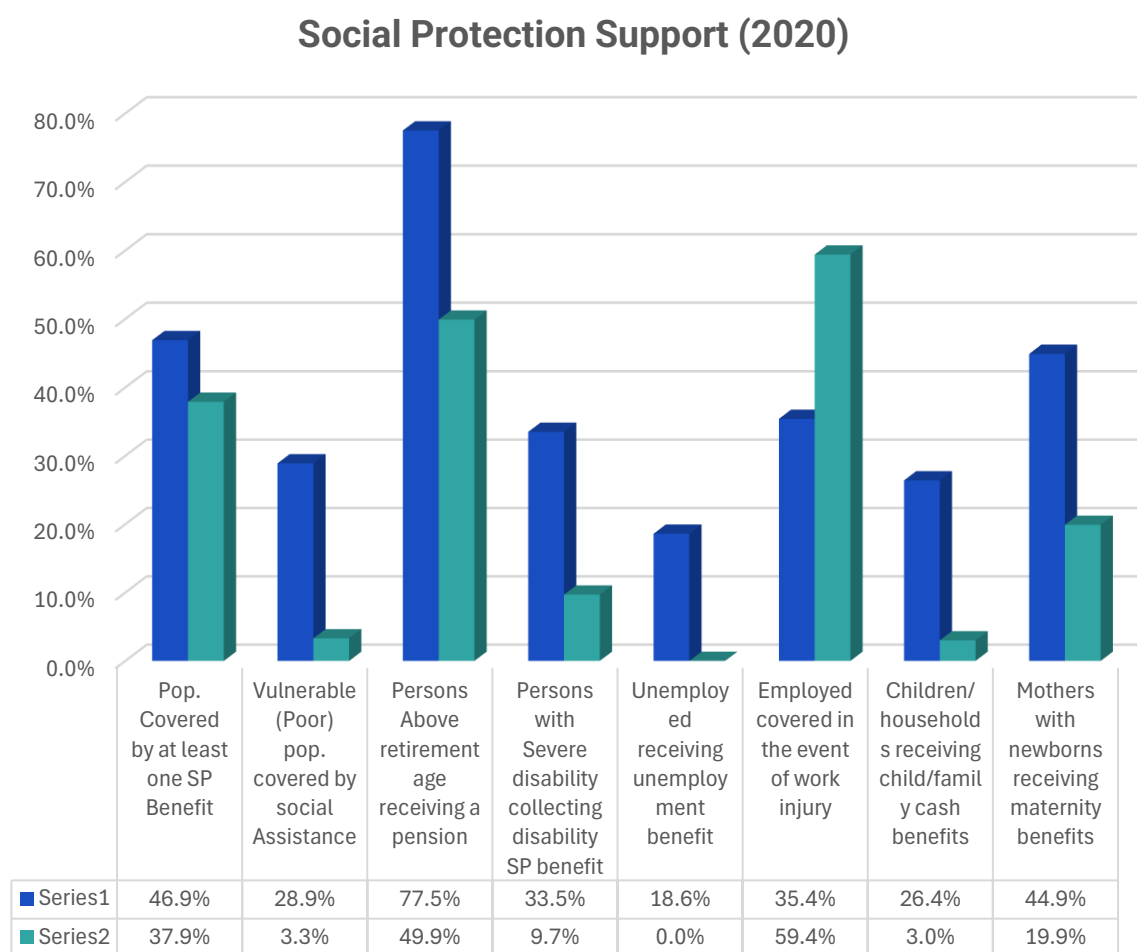
SP Policy Instruments	In Belize
<b>Social insurance (SSB)</b>	
Long term benefits	Retirement pension; retirement grant; survivors' benefit; survivors grant; invalidity pension; and invalidity grant.
Short term benefits	Maternity allowance; maternity grant; sickness benefit; and funeral grant.
Employment injury benefits	Employment injury/prescribed disease benefit; death benefit; constant attendance allowance; medicare benefit; disablement pension; and disablement grant.
<b>Social assistance</b>	
Unconditional cash transfers	Pension Plan for Public Officers (PPPO), Non-contributory pension (NCP, managed by SSB)
Contributory cash transfers	Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST)
In-kind transfers	National Healthy Start Feeding Programme (NHSFP), Education Upliftment Programme (EUP), Public Assistance, Grocery Bag
Fee waivers	National Health Insurance (NHI), EUP
<b>Social care</b>	
Social services	Social work 7-step case management system, Roving Caregivers programme, Community and Parent Empowerment programme
Subsidised childcare	None currently
<b>Labour market policies</b>	
Active labour market policies	Public Employment Service, Youth Apprenticeship Program, Belize Youth Challenge Programme, Web-based Employment Services Programme
Passive labour market policies	Wages Council Order 2022 (on minimum wage). Labour Act Chapter 297 (employment legislation)

labour market remains characterized by mostly low skilled with low productivity, high informality (average of 32 hours of work per week and 60% of average weekly wages of formal employment),

low labour force participation especially for females and labour force under-utilization with 10,000 person of the Working Age Population (WAP) not seeking employment but willing and available for work, seasonal jobs, and youth unemployment contributing to low wages and poverty for a good portion of the labour force.

By focusing on latter opportunities and challenges, Belize can work towards a more resilient and equitable labour market and a more sustainable and equitable social protection (SP) system. Data on social protection shows that Belize is well below SP provided to its population on a global basis. The only category where Belize is above the world average is on “employed covered in the event of work injury” with the global average being 35.4% while for Belize it was 59.4% in 2020.

**Figure 21. Social Protection Coverage**



Source: <https://ilostat ilo.org/topics/social-protection/#>

## 6). Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution

Chapter 3 provides an assessment of the following SDGs: Clean Water & Sanitation (SDG 6); Affordable & Clean Energy (SDG 7); Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11); Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12); Climate Change (SDG 13); Life Below Water (SDG 14); Life on Land (SDG 15); that are linked to Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution.

Global climate change is one of the biggest threats to sustainable development and Agenda 2030 for Belize. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Belize is vulnerable to climate impacts such as rising sea levels, hurricanes, floods, droughts, global warming and extreme heat. These threats jeopardize critical sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism and significantly negatively impacting GDP growth. In the future it is expected that climate change impact will intensify and negatively impact Belize's physical and socio-economic stability. Despite these challenges, Belize has made notable achievements, including the establishment of protected areas, promotion of sustainable practices, and active participation in international climate agreements. These efforts have helped conserve biodiversity and mitigate some of the impacts of climate change.

Opportunities for further progress include expanding the use of renewable energy, investing in the restoration of critical ecosystems like mangroves and coral reefs, and enhancing environmental education to foster greater stewardship. However, Belize must also address significant challenges such as increasing climate vulnerability, deforestation, and pollution from land-based sources. Continued commitment to sustainable development, innovative solutions, and collaborative efforts will be essential for Belize to strengthen its resilience and protect its natural heritage, ensuring a sustainable and resilient future for Belizeans. The following table summarizes Belize's funding requirement and gap (US\$1,645.8 million) to meet Belize's National Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Climate Change Agreement, highlighting that the greatest investments and gaps are in energy, land use change & forestry and waste management in this order and all under mitigation.

**Table 23. Climate Financing Landscape**

Sector (US\$ millions)	Budget	Gap
<b>Mitigation Actions</b>		
Land Use Change & Forestry	\$ 595	\$ 542
Agriculture	\$ 41	\$ 10
Energy	\$ 624	\$ 617
Waste Management	\$ 327	\$ 317
<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>\$ 1,588</b>	<b>\$ 1,487</b>
<b>Adaptation Actions</b>		
Coastal & Marine Resources	\$ 35.0	\$ 12.0
Agriculture	\$ 113.0	\$ 72.0
Water Resources	\$ 25.0	\$ 11.0
Tourism	\$ 36.0	\$ 17.0
Fisheries & Aquaculture	\$ 13.0	\$ 0.8
Human Health	\$ 13.0	\$ 8.0



Land Use, Human Settlements & Infrastructure	\$ 83.0	\$ 38.0
<b>Adaptation</b>	<b>\$ 318.0</b>	<b>\$ 158.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,906.0</b>	<b>\$ 1,645.8</b>

Source: *Climate Finance Strategy Belize 2021-2026*

## Enabling Actions (formerly Engine Room Actions)

Enabling actions are essential for accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within each of the 6 transitions, the UN System is being requested to focus on the following enabling actions:

Development of **investment-ready pipelines** - Creating a robust pipeline of well-prepared, clearly defined projects for SDG advancement on the 6 transitions to attract funding and support from various donors. It is important to note that these project proposals need not be prepared by the UN but, also, by other partnering stakeholders and implementing agencies committed to SDG progress such as the IFIs, and multiple other development and cooperation partners such as the MCC that operate at the national level so as to enhance investor confidence and expedite implementation.

Providing **capacity building at scale** - Strengthening the capabilities of Civil Society Organizations, communities, public sector institutions and the private sector to equip stakeholders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively plan, execute and monitor SDG-related initiatives. The UN could focus on capacity building for which it has comparative advantage and for which it will make the greatest impact leaving other areas to the remaining development players in the SDG arena.

**Financing at scale through partnerships (Convening Power of the UN and deal rooms)** - Mobilizing financial resources through innovative partnerships, including public-private collaborations, and leveraging diverse funding mechanisms is crucial in addressing the Belize transition/SDG financing gap. This collective approach of convening and integrating the private sector, development banks, climate finance, bilateral and non-traditional donors and Government creates synergies and will facilitate reducing the financing gap faced in meeting the 2030 agenda.

**Shifting policy and regulatory frameworks** for the transitions - creates an enabling environment for SDG progress. This involves introducing supportive policies, removing barriers, and fostering an environment conducive to achieving the SDGs that goes beyond sectoral approach that incorporates principles of environmental sustainability, social inclusiveness and resilience to ensure sustainability and equity in the outcome.

## Key Pillars for SDG Acceleration

Adopting a transition approach to SDG acceleration hinges on several key pillars for transformation. **Integration** of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national policies is crucial, requiring a holistic strategy where all sectors align and work towards common objectives. This involves dismantling silos and fostering intersectoral collaboration to maximize synergies and mitigate trade-offs between various SDGs. Equally important is the aspect of **scale**,

where success and interventions need to be expanded through strategic investments and partnerships, replicating best practices and pilot projects across regions and sectors to enhance their reach and impact.

Additionally, **speed** is essential in accelerating progress towards SDGs, necessitating swift actions and innovative solutions to address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities. Rapid deployment of resources and technologies plays a critical role in this acceleration. Tailoring interventions to the **national environment** ensures relevance and effectiveness by considering the unique needs, and socio-economic conditions of Belize. Finally, **sustainability** underpins long-term success, requiring approaches that balance economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This involves adopting practices that are environmentally sound, socially inclusive, and economically viable, ensuring that progress is sustainable with benefits shared equitably.

## Cross-Cutting Issues

Accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires addressing cross-cutting issues that impact all areas of development. **Gender equality** is fundamental to achieving all SDGs, as empowering women and girls enhances the effectiveness and equity of interventions. Gender-responsive approaches ensure that both men and women benefit from development initiatives, fostering inclusive growth. Similarly, **youth** engagement is crucial, as young people bring innovative ideas and energy to SDG efforts. Youth-centred policies and programs empower the next generation, driving long-term sustainability and resilience.

Another vital cross-cutting issue is the upholding of **human rights**. Ensuring that all individuals can participate in and benefit from development processes is essential for achieving social justice and inclusion. Rights-based approaches address inequalities and ensure that development benefits are shared equitably. The principle of **leave no one behind** emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups in SDG initiatives. Targeted strategies to uplift these groups are necessary for equitable development, ensuring that the benefits of progress reach everyone, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. By addressing these cross-cutting issues, SDG acceleration efforts can be more comprehensive, inclusive, and effective.



## 6) Public Sector SDG Financing

The focus of this financial landscape is on public sector funding, domestic and external, in the context of the SDGs, highlighting progress, challenges, and opportunities. The public sector budget analysis provides insights into the government's financial health, spending priorities on SDGs, and roadmap on economic strategy for the 2030 Agenda.

Government of Belize budgetary expenditure structure is divided into 3 parts: **Recurrent Budget** refers to the portion of the government's budget allocated for ongoing operational expenses such as regular, day-to-day costs necessary to keep the government functioning. **Capital II budget** are capital expenditures that are funded entirely by local resources. These are typically long-term investments aimed at developing infrastructure and enhancing the country's productive capacity. **Capital III budget** consists of capital expenditures funded through external sources, such as loans and grants from international organizations, bilateral partners, or other foreign entities.

**Table 24. Public Sector Performance**

GoB Budget Operations	2021	2022	2023
Nominal GDP Growth	18%	15%	9%
Recurrent Rev. Growth	21%	18%	10%
Recurrent Exp. Growth	-0.2%	9%	9%
Capital Expenditure Growth	-40%	13%	28%
Total Expenditure Growth	-13%	10%	13%
Overall Deficit/GDP	-1.30%	-0.10%	-1.00%

*Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025*

Because of rapid economic growth, the fiscal situation improved during the period 2021 to 2023. Nominal economic growth correlated and drove Government revenue outpacing growth in Government expenditure. During this period annual nominal GDP growth averaged 13.7% while Government recurrent revenue dependent on taxes expanded annually at 16.2% which facilitated a reduction in the overall fiscal deficit while permitting Government budget to expand on average by 11.7% during fiscal years 2022/23 – 2023/24. During the period 2022/23 – 2023/24, annual growth in recurrent expenditure expanded by 9% and, likewise, capital investments expanded annually by 20.3% for infrastructure development, social protection, improved public administration and enhanced productivity/ competitiveness. With nominal GDP projected to slow down to 6.5% in 2024, the public sector may be challenged in continuing its expansion of capital investments without increasing the overall budget deficit.

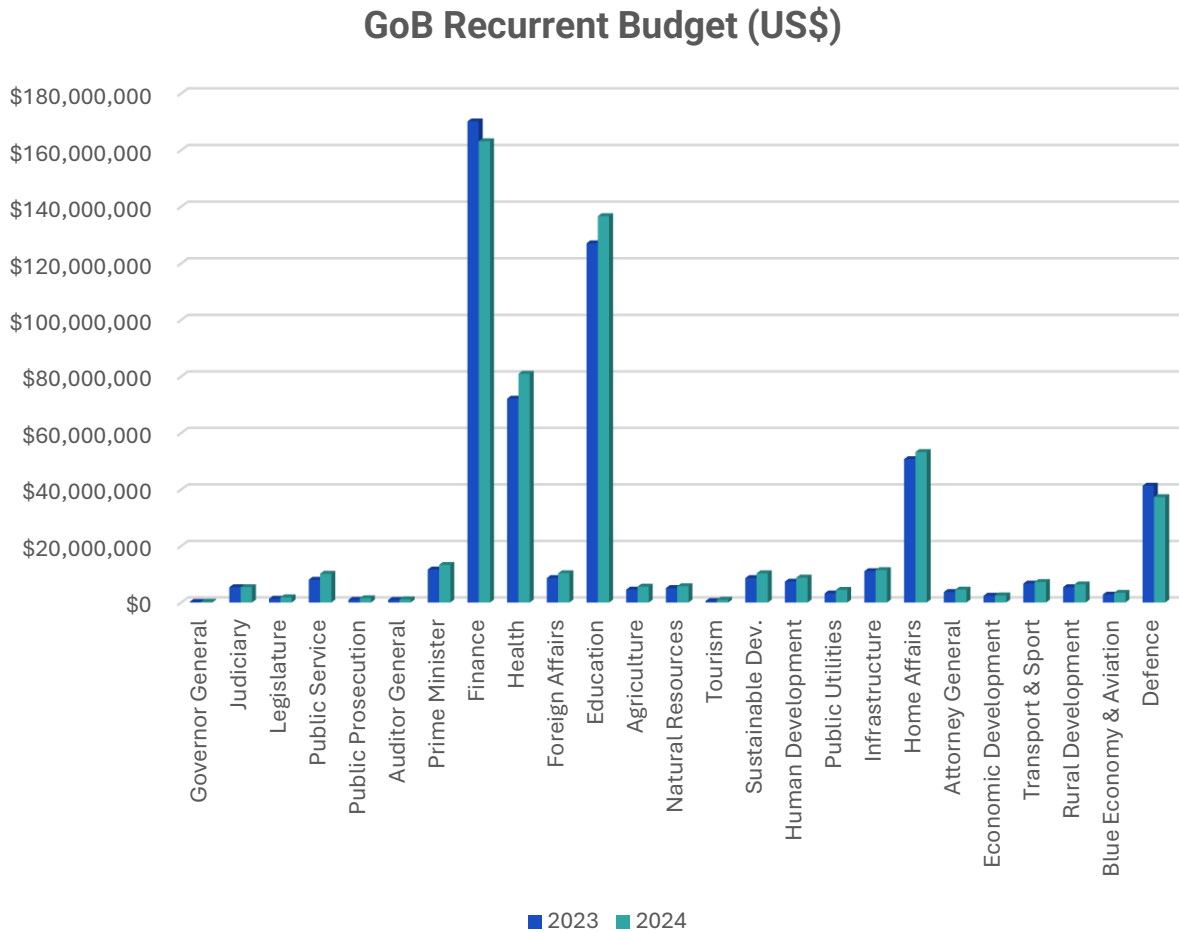
**Table 25. Public Sector Performance**

GoB Operations Millions US \$	Actual			Estimate	Submitted
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Revenue	\$ 461	\$ 549	\$ 645	\$ 713	\$ 759
Grants	\$ 16	\$ 20	\$ 14	\$ 7	\$ 15
Revenue/Grants	\$ 477	\$ 568	\$ 660	\$ 720	\$ 774
<b>Revenue Growth</b>		<b>19%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Current Expenditure	\$ 470	\$ 470	\$ 514	\$ 561	\$ 594
Capital II Investments	\$ 105	\$ 75	\$ 93	\$ 124	\$ 134
Capital III Investments	\$ 106	\$ 52	\$ 51	\$ 60	\$ 69
Capital Investments	\$ 211	\$ 128	\$ 148	\$ 188	\$ 207
Net Lending	\$ 7	\$ 4	\$ 1	\$ 1	\$ 4
Total Expenditure	\$ 688	\$ 601	\$ 662	\$ 750	\$ 804
<b>Expenditure Growth</b>		<b>-13%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Primary Deficit</b>	<b>-\$ 178</b>	<b>-\$ 1</b>	<b>\$ 48</b>	<b>\$ 75</b>	<b>\$ 79</b>
Debt Service	\$ 33	\$ 32	\$ 50	\$ 69	\$ 70
<b>Deficit incl. Debt Service</b>	<b>-\$ 211</b>	<b>-\$ 33</b>	<b>-\$ 2</b>	<b>-\$ 31</b>	<b>-\$ 31</b>
Amortization	\$ 48	\$ 33	\$ 49	\$ 63	\$ 65
Financing	-\$ 259	-\$ 65	-\$ 51	-\$ 94	-\$ 96

Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

Government recurrent budget for 2023 was US\$561 million and for 2024/2025 fiscal year it is projected to be around US\$594 million representing an increase of 5.8%. For fiscal year 2024/2025, winners in terms of increased allocation were almost all ministries with the larger beneficiaries being education, health, and home affairs (citizen security). The main loser could be considered the Ministry of Defence with a 10% reduction. Government priority allocation for 2023-2024 fiscal years were education, health, citizen security and defence in this order. For 2023 these 4 ministries were allocated 52% of the recurrent budget. With Ministry of Finance being allocated an additional 30% of the budget, it means that the other 20 Ministries and/or branches of Government had to share the remaining 18% among themselves.

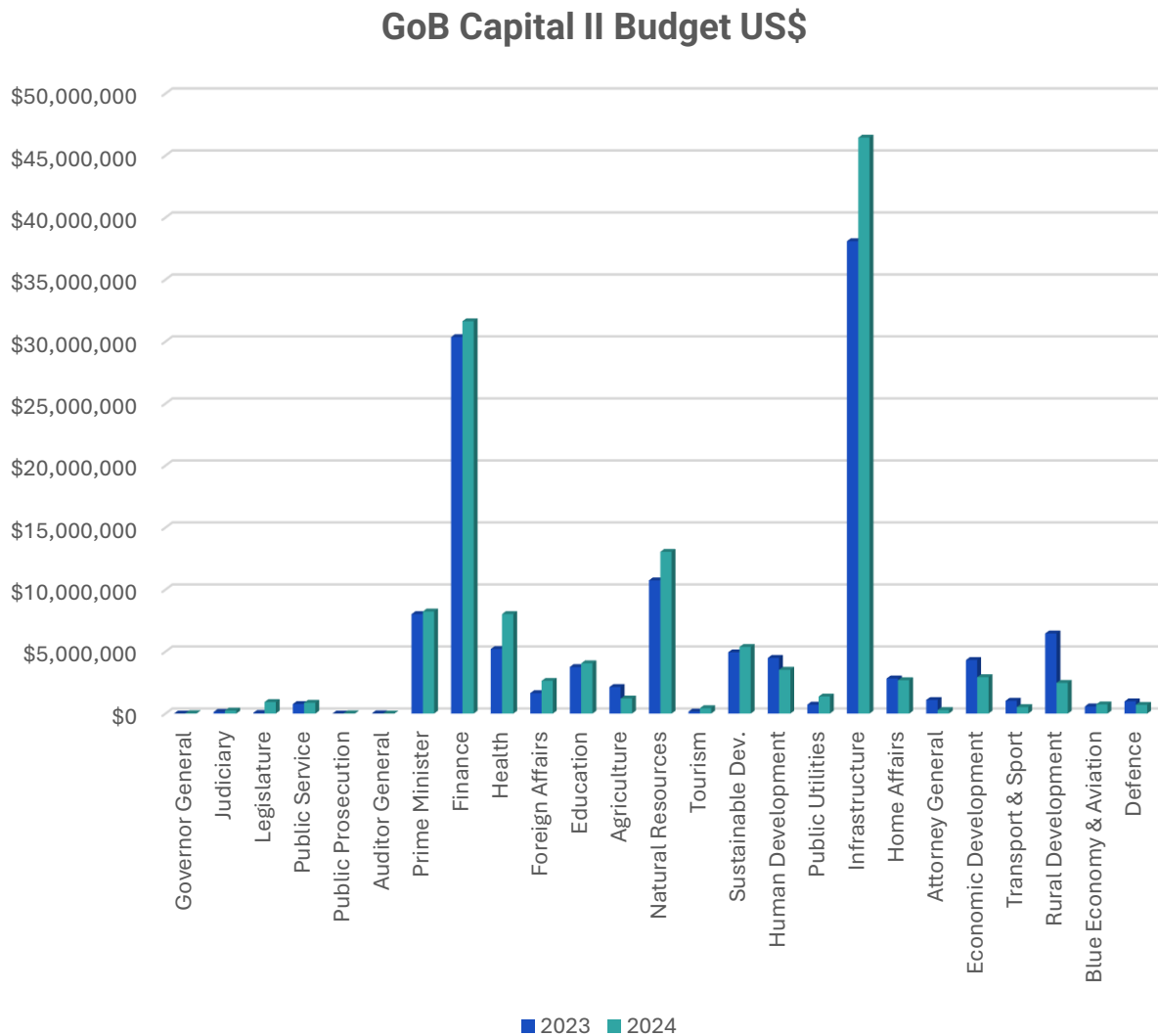
**Figure 22. Government of Belize Recurrent Budget by Ministries for 2023 & 2024 Fiscal Years**



Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

For fiscal year 2023/2024, capital II budget which is financed domestically by Government amounted to US\$124 million. Infrastructure investment captured 30% while together with natural resources, health and rural development made up 47% of all capital investment by Government of Belize. For fiscal year 2024/2025, capital II budget submitted amounted to US\$134 million and provides for an increase of 8% with some of the major winners being infrastructure, natural resources, health and sustainable development.

**Figure 23. Government of Belize Capital II Budget Distribution by Ministry for FYs 2024 & 2025**

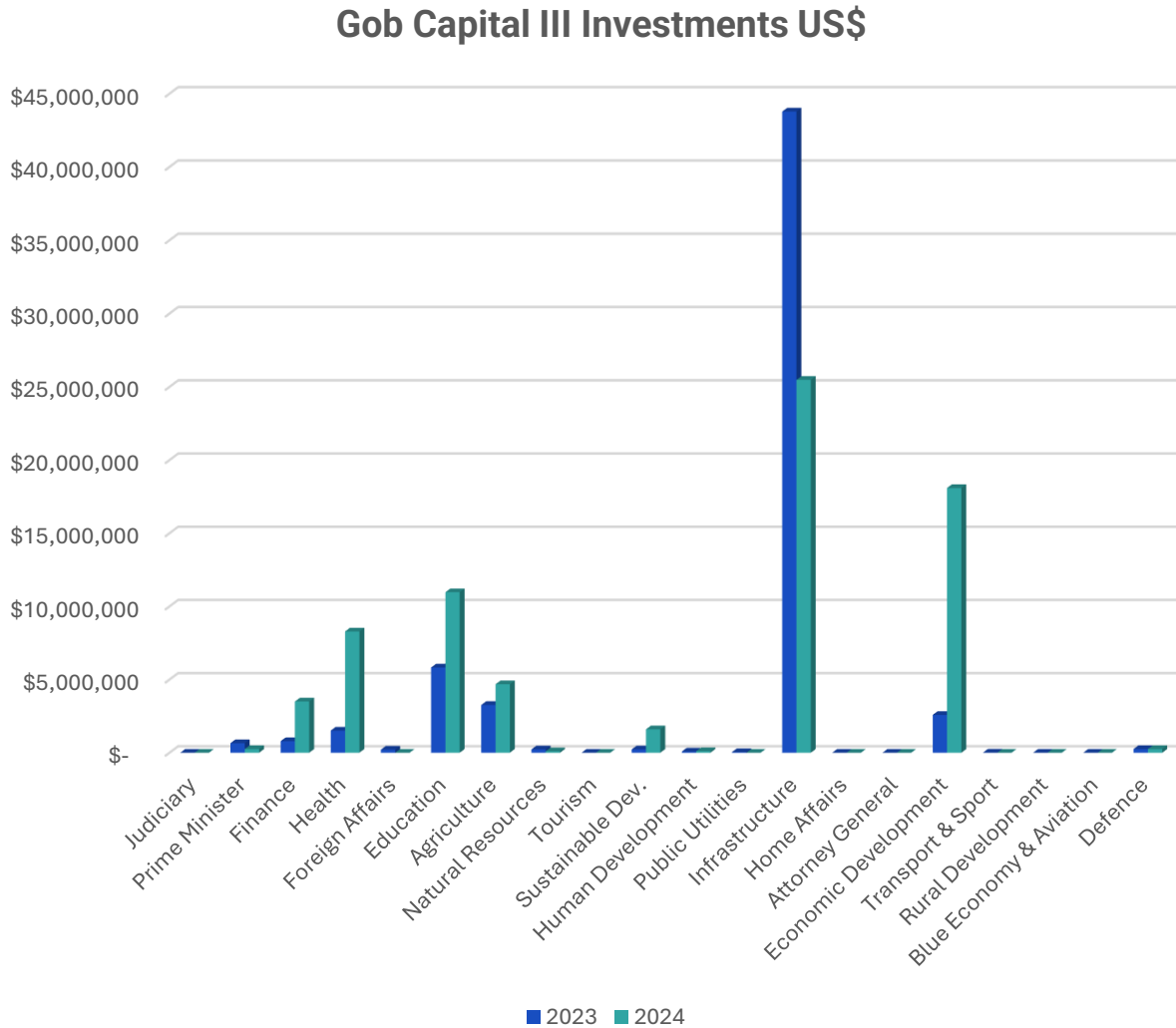


Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

For fiscal year 2023/2024, externally funded projects amounted to US\$60 million with infrastructure making up 73.7% while together with agriculture and economic development made up 93% of all capital III investment. For 2024/2025, capital III investment is forecasted to be around US\$69 million and represents an increase of 23%; even though, this category of the Government budget is prone to fluctuations given dependence on project implementation and external donor funding.



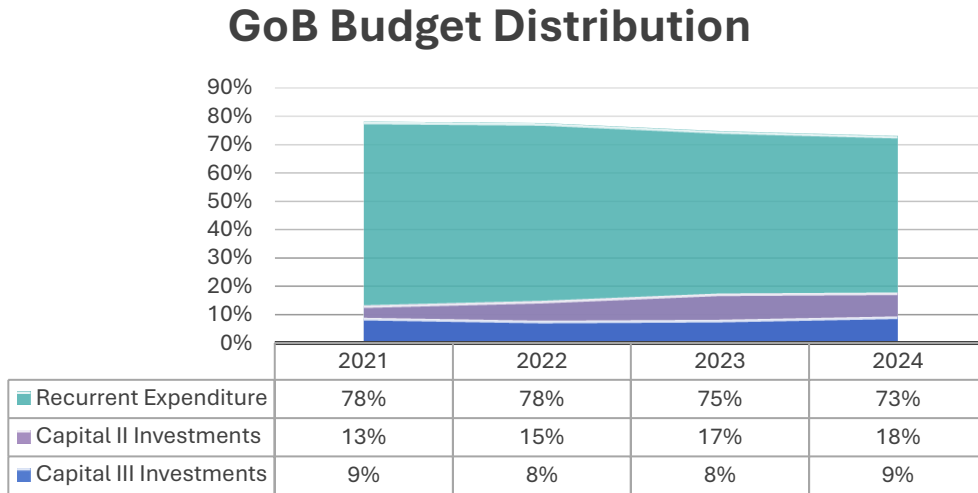
Figure 24. Government of Belize Budgetary Distribution by Ministry for FYs 2023 & 2024



Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

In the aggregate Government’s recurrent budget, covering routine operations, has been trending downward from 78% to 73% over the period 2021-2024. Capital II investment has been the main beneficiary of reduced recurrent expenditure by expanding its contribution from 13% to 18% while capital III investments has remained constant at 9% of budget distribution.

Figure 25. Government of Belize Budget Structure



Source: Belize Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

With respect to the multi-year donor funded projects (loans and grants), as reflected in the Public Sector Investment Projects (PSIP) being implemented, it amounts to US\$670 with focus being infrastructure capturing 52% of all investments, followed by economic services, social protection and public administration. CDB being the main donor is responsible for 35% of PSIP financing with a heavy focus on infrastructure and to a lesser extent social protection. IDB is responsible for an additional 27% of donor investment with support being provided to the 4 focus areas: infrastructure, economic services, social protection and public administration. Together CDB, IDB and OFID account for 72% of all donor support for the PSIP being implemented. Some other major donors joining the financial landscape and not reflected in the PSIP include the following:

- The Millenium Challenge Corporation with aim on poverty reduction through economic growth with focus being education and energy. Grant funds over the coming 5 years could potentially reach US\$125 million which is the amount already approved for implementation.
- The International Development Assistance (IDA) Window of the World Bank could provide roughly \$50 million/ annum, through the SDR country allocation, in concession loans over the coming 4 years.
- Saudi Fund for Cooperation with a loan of US\$77 to build a 60-megawatt solar power plant and US\$45 million loan to build a tertiary level/ Teaching hospital in the capital city of Belmopan.

**Table 26. Public Sector Investment Projects Update/Ministry of Economic Development**

PSIP/ Cummulative Contribution (US\$'000,000)	Up-to Sept 2023	Infrastratructure	Economic Services	Social Protection	Public Admin.	Share
CABEI	\$ 30.95	3%	0%	0%	97%	5%
CDB	\$ 232.25	59%	17%	24%	0%	35%
EXIM BANK (ROC)	\$ 50.00	100%	0%	0%	0%	7%
IADB	\$ 183.65	30%	32%	20%	18%	27%
OFID (UK)	\$ 64.45	100%	0%	0%	0%	10%
WB	\$ 31.20	0%	80%	20%	0%	5%
Others	\$ 78.20					12%
Total	\$ 670.70	52%	21%	17%	11%	100%

Source: PSIP, Ministry of Economic Development

## Social Sector Financing

The current financial landscape for social services and protection faces numerous challenges, reflecting a significant strain on resources and sustainability. Notably with respect to the Belize Social Security, the population of Non-Contributory Pension (NCP) recipients has drastically decreased from 4,934 in 2008 to just 761 as of September 2023. This decline points to reduced coverage and possibly unmet needs among older persons. Moreover, the Social Security (SS) Fund is grappling with long-term sustainability issues. The fund is projected to reach its period of equilibrium by 2029, with reserves turning negative by 2043. Compounding these issues, the Social Security Board (SSB) experienced a rate of return of **-1.3%** in 2022 due to high inflation, eroding the fund's value and financial stability.

**Table 27. Social Security Coverage**

Social Security Coverage (2022)	Total
Working Age population (14 year +)	35%
Employed Labour Force	64%
Age 60+ Years Receivinga SS Pension	46%

Source: Belize Social Security Board

A significant portion of the workforce, including self-employed individuals, domestic workers, and those in the informal economy, do not contribute to the Social Security Fund (SSF). This gap in

contributions undermines the fund's revenue base and sustainability. Additionally, there is limited coordination and dialogue among stakeholders involved in social protection policy, investment, programs, and priorities, hindering effective and cohesive policy implementation.

To address the financial challenges, the Government of Belize may explore several options for financing social protection. Broadening the tax base and tackling tax evasion can generate additional revenue. Implementing taxes on unhealthy food products, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and items high in sugar and sodium, can also generate revenue while promoting public health. Eliminating corruption and illicit financial flows is crucial for ensuring that available resources are utilized efficiently and effectively. Targeted social services and interventions are essential to address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. This approach would ensure that limited resources are directed where they are most needed, enhancing the impact of social protection programs.

The government has demonstrated a commitment to social protection through its Medium-Term Development Strategy 2022-26, which adheres to the principle of "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) with the aim of reducing poverty by 50% by 2030. By 2024, a costed social protection strategy, including a social protection floor and accompanying institutional mechanisms, is expected to be approved. This strategy will provide a structured approach to expanding and enhancing social protection programs. Furthermore, the Government's budget allocation for social services on education, health, human development and community development have increased from 30.9% to 33.0% during the period 2022-2024 fiscal years, reflecting an annual growth rate of 13.9%.

**Table 28. Public Sector Budgetary Allocation on Social Services**

<b>Gob Ministries (% Budget)</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Health & Wellness	10.6%	10.5%	12.1%
Education (MECST)	18.2%	18.2%	18.9%
Human Develop. (MHDFIPA)	1.9%	1.6%	1.6%
Rural Community Develop.	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%
<b>Gob Budget</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>33.0%</b>

*Source: Ministry of Finance*

Government of Belize plans to continue expanding the school feeding program and implement a national risk management plan by 2024, supplemented by disaster-specific strategies for hurricanes, floods, and droughts. By 2025, a special education policy will be finalized, to be supported with investments in early childhood development, expanded adult remedial initiatives, skills training, and upskilling. By 2025/2026 fiscal year, the National Health Insurance (NHI)<sup>41</sup> program will be extended nationwide, to cover the remaining Cayo district and larger Cayes. In the 2024/2025 fiscal year, the Education Upliftment Project<sup>42</sup> is to be further expanded to the

<sup>41</sup> Cost of funding the NHI for 2024 is estimated at US\$17.5 million.

<sup>42</sup> The EUP provides essential support to high school students such as meals, uniforms, footwear, school supplies, textbooks, transportation assistance and coverage of school fees. An estimated 40% of the high school student population is projected to be impacted for 2024 with more than 9,000 students benefitting. Estimated investment for 2024/2025 is projected to be US\$5.3 million.

most vulnerable and marginalized geographic areas covering 18 Government high schools and 3 Government Aided Schools in the country.

**Table 29. Public Sector Budgetary Investment on Social Services**

Ministries Budget (Millions US \$)	2022	2023	2024
Health & Wellness	\$70.0	\$78.9	\$97.3
Education (MECST)	\$120.5	\$136.7	\$151.7
Human Develop. (MHDFIPA)	\$12.3	\$12.0	\$12.5
Rural Community Develop.	\$1.5	\$2.5	\$3.6
Social Sector Budget	\$204.3	\$230.0	\$265.1
<b>Growth</b>		<b>12.6%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>

*Source: Ministry of Finance*

The current social protection floor has notable gaps and areas for improvement. Health coverage through NHI includes all districts except Cayo and the larger Cayes. For children, the BOOST<sup>43</sup> program reaches less than 10% of the eligible population, while the high-school subsidy program reaches more than 47% of students in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> form in the Toledo, Stann Creek and Corozal districts where US\$150/ annum per student is provided. Working-age individuals have social security options for formal employment and optional coverage for informal employment.

Older persons face significant challenges, with the non-contributory pension for those aged 65 and above declining sharply. Less than 50% of the population aged 60 and above receive a social security pension, indicating a substantial coverage gap that leaves many elderly individuals without adequate financial support. Even though, the government is committed to enhancing social protection, substantial financial and structural challenges need to be addressed to ensure sustainability and broader coverage. By exploring diverse financing options and ensuring targeted interventions, the social protection system can better meet the needs of the most vulnerable population.

## Climate Financing

Between 2015 and 2019, a total of US\$227 million was tracked as climate finance flows from various donor sources. Multi-lateral organizations with 39.4% emerged as the primary source of these funds, with 52% of the financing being provided in the form of loans. The investments primarily targeted two key areas: resilient infrastructure and energy. More than US\$75 million was allocated to resilient infrastructure, while over US\$40 million was directed towards energy projects.

<sup>43</sup> Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST) is a conditional cash transfer targeting households living in poverty. The program is of national scale and targets households with children, elderly, disabled persons and pregnant women. The monthly transfer is between US\$ 22 - US\$ 75, and it is limited to six beneficiaries per household. The conditionality for children and pregnant women is 85% school attendance for school age children, children must receive all vaccination and in the case of pregnant women must attend all pre-natal checkups.

Figure 26. Sources of Climate Investment

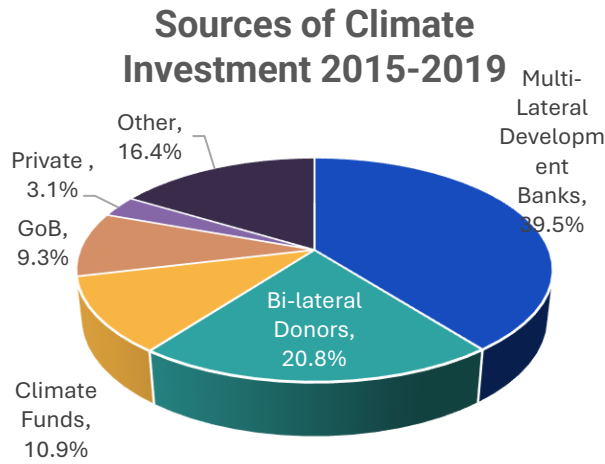
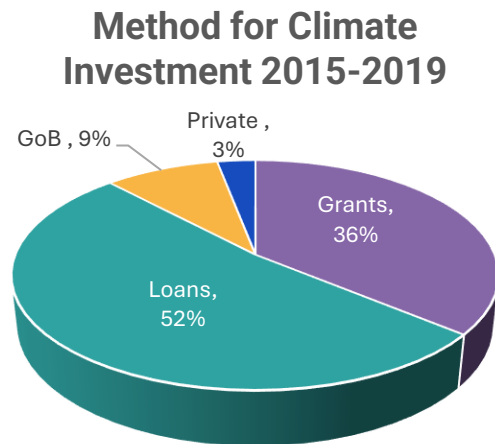


Figure 27. Methods for Climate Investment



Source: National Climate Finance Strategy of Belize 2022-26

Several challenges impede effective utilization of climate finance. One major issue is national capacity gap in developing robust project proposals that meet the diverse requirements of various climate finance mechanisms. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and limited access to information about available climate finance options and the procedures to access them. This is compounded by the fierce global competition for climate finance, which drives up the transaction costs associated with meeting the complex application procedures and stringent requirements.

Co-financing requirements also present a significant hurdle, particularly given the constrained fiscal space of Government. The high cost of domestic financing further discourages private sector interest in mobilizing funds for climate projects. Moreover, commitments made by developed countries during COP26 in Glasgow 2021, which amounted to US\$100 billion in climate financing (comprising both loans and grants), are deemed insufficient to address the global challenges posed by climate change. In the case of Belize, US\$1.645 billion is required for Belize meeting its national determined contribution commitment by 2030 of which there is a gap of 86% amounting to US\$1.645 billion.

Addressing the latter challenges requires enhancing national capacities to develop eligible project proposals, increasing awareness and access to climate finance information, and simplifying application procedures to lower transaction costs. Furthermore, expanding the fiscal space of Government and incentivizing private sector participation through favourable domestic financing conditions are critical steps towards mobilizing sufficient climate finance to meet country needs.



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