



General Assembly

Distr.: General
26 October 2023

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
Forty-fifth session
22 January–2 February 2024

National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21*

Belize

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Acronyms

AG	Attorney General
A-TIP- PU	The Anti-Trafficking in Person Police Unit
AVID	The Advancement Via Individual Determination program
BPD	Belize Police Department
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CDEMA	The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
CITO	Central Information Technology Office
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Child
DVA	Domestic Violence Unit
GBV	Gender Base Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGU	Good Governance Unit
GoB	Government of Belize
IEPs	Individual Education Programs
KCIS	the Keep Children in School initiative
IRC	Inter-Institutional Review Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	Organization for Migration
LGBTQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer
LLLC	Life and Let Live Campaign
MHA&NGI	Ministry of Home Affairs and New Growth Industry
MHDFPA	Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples Affairs
MCHD	Maternal and Child Health Department
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
MWCs	Mobile Women Centres
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NPM	National Preventative Mechanism
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMB	Office of the Ombudsman
PES	Public Employment Services
PMTCT	Prevention of mother-to-child transmission

PSB	Police Special Branch
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic review
VSU	Vital Statistics Unit
VNR	Voluntary National Report

Introduction

1. Belize has made commendable progress in protecting, preserving, and promoting human rights since its last report. However, these accomplishments have not been impervious to obstacles. Belize's 2018 Poverty Study unveiled rising poverty and inequality across districts, with the Toledo District facing an alarming increase to 82%, a 22-percentage point surge. Economic indicators revealed fluctuation, with real GDP growth shifting from -13.40% in 2020 to 15.20% in 2021 and 12.10% in 2022. Debt-to-GDP ratios improved from 101.40% in 2020 to 80.10% in 2021 and to 68.5%¹ in 2022. Unemployment rates underwent a similar reduction, ranging from 13.70% in 2020 to 9.25% in 2021, and ultimately reaching 5% in 2022. Income poverty and income inequality persisted, with rates at 52% and a Gini coefficient of 0.49 in 2018. The multidimensional poverty index underscored deprivation in various dimensions, impacting 35.70% of the population in 2021. The plight of women, youth, and vulnerable groups amplified the complexity of the poverty challenge.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, straining healthcare infrastructure, causing loss of life and livelihoods and disrupting education. The conflict in Ukraine and Eastern Europe has also introduced disruptions to food, energy, and finance, compounding the challenges already faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Belize and adversely affecting the global and local economies.

3. Nevertheless, the Government of Belize (GoB) remains resolute in its commitment to all living in Belize, to uphold the human rights enshrined in its Constitution and treaties to which Belize is a party. This determination is evident in the implementation of progressive legal reforms, policies, and strategies that prioritise human rights principles when addressing the needs of marginalised groups. This principled approach underpins the execution of pro-poor social programs that address essential needs such as food security, education, healthcare, and social services for the poor and marginalized. Belize's emphasis on education and awareness-building since its last review also showcases its dedication to equipping all with the knowledge and tools necessary to assert and protect their rights.

4. The present report stands as a resounding testament to the unwavering commitment of the GoB to prioritise the safeguarding and advancement of the rights of all citizens. This steadfast dedication remains a fundamental pillar of Belize's overarching national development agenda.

Methodology

5. This National Report was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Immigration in adherence to the General Guidelines for the Preparation of Information under the Universal Periodic Review. The process was initiated in June 2023 and entailed collaborative consultations with a range of key ministries and departments (Annex, table 1).

6. A second public consultation was conducted on the 29th of August to ensure comprehensive input. This participatory approach was further complemented by ongoing consultations spanning 3 months, ultimately leading to the completion of this Report.

Developments following the 2018 Universal Periodic Review

7. During the third UPR cycle, Belize was presented with 133 recommendations, of which Belize accepted 100, and noted 33. Belize has since embarked on a series of legislative enactments, amendments, and policy implementations to address those recommendations which it accepted.

8. Among the notable advancements, Belize adopted a new medium-term strategy, the #PlanBelize Medium Term Development Strategy (# Plan Belize).² This strategic approach centres on upholding fundamental rights and ensuring equitable access to essential services such as education, primary healthcare, employment opportunities, land ownership, and housing for all Belizeans. Though not explicitly termed a "Leave No One Behind" strategy, #PlanBelize effectively operationalizes this principle by prioritizing inclusive development

that uplifts every segment of society. In line with #PlanBelize, Belize has increased the minimum wage to BZ\$5.00; and USD\$1:BZ\$2 for all categories of workers effective January 1, 2023, expanded its National Health Insurance program and initiated a low-housing program.³

9. Also, significant was the establishment of the People’s Constitutional Commission. This commission holds the responsibility of reviewing the Belize Constitution to improve its constitutional framework while increasing citizen engagement. The Commission is currently on a full-fledged Public Education Outreach as it meets with stakeholders across the country. Stakeholders include teachers, students, cultural councils, public service members and other community members at large. The outreach also extends to the Belizean Diaspora in the US, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

10. In the realm of justice administration, Belize has made commendable progress through initiatives like the Senior Courts Bill. This legislation seeks to consolidate the Courts of Appeal Act and the Supreme Court of Judicature Act and will introduce reforms that streamline judicial leadership under the Chief Justice. The intent is to improve the efficiency of justice delivery, with clearly defined roles for key positions within the High Court and the Court of Appeal.

11. Furthermore, the Belize Refugees Act establishes a comprehensive legal framework for refugee protection and assistance. Measures have been put in place to facilitate refugees’ access to humanitarian aid and fair asylum procedures. Additionally, previous challenges, such as the 14-day restrictions on asylum application access have been removed, and the asylum system has been modified to enable asylum seekers to work.

12. Belize also launched its amnesty program in August 2022. Undocumented migrants residing in Belize and recommended asylum seekers stalled in the refugee process who met any of the eight criteria were offered permanent residence status with a path to citizenship.

13. In the spheres of child protection and workplace safety, the Children Act addresses child abuse while extending crucial care to vulnerable children. In the realm of labour rights and workplace safety, the enactment of the Belize Occupational Safety and Health Act (2021) upholds standards that guarantee secure working environments for employees. Similarly, the Belize Public Health Act (2020) addresses public health concerns and infectious disease management, while the Belize Cybercrime Act (2020) enhances online security.

14. In tandem with these advancements, Belize’s comprehensive National Security Strategy (2018-2023) outlines multifaceted measures to combat crime, reinforce border security, and promote community-based crime prevention.

15. Belize also signed the Escazú Agreement in 2022, a testament to its commitment to global collaboration on environmental protection and sustainable development.

16. With the change in administration in November 2020, and in view of the economic devastation occasioned by COVID-19, the focus tended toward stimulating economic growth. This notwithstanding, the legal and policy reform agenda outlined above reinforces the country’s commitment to advancing and protecting the human rights of Belizeans and foreigners who reside in Belize. Furthermore, the Pandemic brought to the fore existing weaknesses and introduced new challenges which many of these legislative changes sought to address. For example, COVID-19 showed up several weaknesses in the social protection framework, which was subsequently addressed with the support of the UN system, in the design of a first-ever Social Protection Policy.

Cooperation with treaty bodies – R: 77.2 , 77.13, 77.14

17. Following the conclusion of the third National Report before the Human Rights Council, Belize, with support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), conducted State-led, multi-sectoral consultations, which aimed to create a comprehensive draft reporting timetable and associated arrangements to fulfil Belize’s pending human rights treaty obligations. Belize with continued support from OHCHR and the Commonwealth Secretariat, has submitted its overdue reports to the relevant treaty

bodies, such as the CEDAW and the CRC. Additionally, the Common Core Document and the report to CAT have been completed and are awaiting final approval before submission to the OHCHR.

18. To enhance cooperation with treaty bodies, Belize is working to establish its Inter-Institutional Review Committee (IRC) as the National Inter-Ministerial Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up. The intention is to streamline its efforts and systematically advance the integration of human rights considerations in its domestic frameworks.

19. The envisaged IRC's first mandate is the coordination and preparation of all national reports to the UN international mechanism. This includes preparation of the Voluntary National Reports (VNR), Treaty Reports, Universal Periodic Review, Special Procedures, and reports to various international and intergovernmental organizations.

20. The IRC's second mandate is to foster effective coordination and tracking of the national follow-up and implementation of treaty obligations and recommendations derived from reports submitted to UN international mechanisms. By undertaking this pivotal responsibility, the IRC will serve as a proactive vehicle through which Belize can monitor progress in transitioning commitments to tangible actions and impactful policies.

Structure of the national human rights machinery – R 78.2

21. In the absence of the National Preventative Mechanism (NPM), in 2022, the Ministry of Home Affairs and New Growth Industries re-introduced the Visiting Justices Program at the Belize Central Prison.

22. The Visiting Justices Program allows for appointed justices of the peace, the Ombudsman, and a magistrate to conduct regular visits to the Belize Central Prison in accordance with the Prisons Act Part V, which directs visiting Justices to look at the overall welfare of prisoners. Main functions include investigating prisoner complaints, inspecting prisoner diets, assessing risks to prisoners' well-being due to confinement conditions and reporting and providing suggestions thereon to the Superintendent or Minister.

National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) – R: 77.3, 77.4, 77.5, 77.6, 77.7, 77.8, 77.9, 77.10, 77.11, 77.12

23. The GoB collaborated with the OHCHR and the Commonwealth Secretariat to conduct a feasibility study on establishing a Paris Principle-Compliant NHRI in Belize. The consultations at all levels revealed an awareness of the need for a properly resourced Human Rights Institution, particularly in light of the pandemic which brought to the forefront several human rights concerns. The assessment was conducted in August 2022. Currently, the recommendations of the assessment inclusive of a roadmap for establishing a Paris Principal NHRI is under consideration by the executive.

24. Notably, since the last review, the budget allocated to the Ombudsman's Office (OMB) has increased by 9% since the last review. The OMB remains dedicated to securing further funding for essential resources, demonstrating its commitment to improving its functioning.

25. The OMB has undertaken to further collaborate with key groups such as the Women's Commission, The People's Constitution Commission and the Kolbe Foundation as well as other government systems to address key areas of human rights complaints.

Good Governance – R: 77.36

26. The Good Governance Unit (GGU) within the Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional and Political Reform (PSCPR) has worked to implement the UNCAC. The Ministry continuously offers training to public officers in good governance to ensure the most effective functioning of the GGU which implements anticorruption efforts.

27. The Good Governance Unit is collaborating with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to create a platform that will accelerate the protocols for implementing the UNCAC. An October meeting is planned with all participants who have agreed to join the physical platform and virtual Hub to discuss thematic areas of interest will be discussed in detail.

28. As part of its multifaceted approach to combating corruption, Belize will launch a corruption sensitization campaign in December 2023. This campaign will encompass debates, invigorating competitions, and open dialogues, aimed at shedding light on the various facets of corruption. The overarching goal is to foster heightened awareness and a deeper understanding of the detrimental impacts of corruption.

Equality and non-discrimination – R: 77.18, 77.15, 77.16, 77.17, 77.20, 77.21, 77.23, 77.32, 77.25, 77.19, 77.22, 77.24

29. On December 30, 2019, the Court of Appeal upheld the Supreme Court’s judgment, affirming that non-discrimination on the grounds of “sex” in Sections 3 and 16 of the Constitution includes sexual orientation.

30. In response to the opposition by faith-based and other groups to the anti-discrimination Bill,⁴ the Life and Let Live Campaign was launched in 2020. This community-led campaign highlights persons with lived experiences of discrimination particularly women, people living with disability and LGBTQ+ persons. The campaign raised awareness about rights through public service messages in English, American Sign Language, Ketchi, Mopan and Spanish on TV channels, radio, and social media. The Life and Let Live Campaign is estimated to have reached over 70 per cent of Belizeans. The results of both the 2020 and the 2021 surveys which measured how Belizeans view these social groups, acceptance, respect, and neighbourliness and how much they reject discrimination after the campaign show positive increases in all areas.

31. In January 2023, GoB also launched a dynamic communication campaign strategy to tackle societal stigma against LGBTQ+ individuals and combat gender-based violence (GBV).⁵ Through this initiative, GoB intends to empower and sensitise to instigate positive behavioural and social transformations across diverse sectors of Belize.

32. Provisions have also been incorporated into the BPD Policies and Procedures Manual to guide police interactions with the LGBTQ+ community. Paragraph 409 outlines the relevant guidelines and procedures in this regard. The BPD in December 2022 also released its revised Human Rights and Use of Force Policy and continues to train officers on its use.

Transitional justice – R: 77.26, 77.27

33. The convergence of Hurricane Lisa and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic during this UPR review cycle has underscored the pressing need to bolster our national emergency and disaster response systems. These dual crises have had far-reaching and profound effects, strained essential sectors and placed immense pressure on existing mechanisms that were initially designed to address the pre-existing social issues. As a result, overall vulnerability has increased, with Belize’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities bearing the brunt of these impacts.

34. In its commitment to rebuilding and recovering from the economic and social fallout caused by the COVID-19 crisis and aftermath of Hurricane Lisa, the Government of Belize, mindful of the ongoing global climate change crisis, has launched a comprehensive set of inclusive national climate change policies, strategies, plans, and systems. GoB in 2022, launched Belize’s National Climate Change Policy, Strategy, and Master Plan for the period 2022-2026.

35. Additionally, in partnership with the governments of Canada and the United Kingdom, Belize is actively implementing the “Included in the Climate Change Showcase” project. This initiative aligns with the framework of UNDP’s Enabling Gender-Responsive

Disaster Recovery, Climate, and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER). EnGenDER directly addresses national priorities for resilience and sustainability, as elaborated in #Plan Belize, and long-term development vision for creating an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Belize.

36. EnGenDER's 2022 work program encompasses a range of critical interventions, including climate-proofing rural agricultural livelihoods, enhancing the connectivity of indigenous communities to microgrid networks in the context of "Energy for Development," providing remote communities with access to safe drinking water, and facilitating the leveraging of additional climate financing from international organizations such as the Green Climate Fund. These efforts are crucial for addressing issues of shoreline erosion and instability in coastal communities, including areas like Hopkins, Dangriga, Monkey River, and Barranco.

Conditions of detention – R: 77.33, 77.35

37. GoB introduced the Senior Courts Bill, in conjunction with the Time Limit for Judicial Decisions Act (2021) to strengthen the criminal justice system, to speed up the court process and to reduce the amount of time prisoners are held on remand before trial. The latter introduces a 180-day deadline from the conclusion of hearings, supplemented by a defined procedure and criteria for judges to request extensions from the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. Significantly this legislative amendment modifies the Constitution, enabling the removal of judges from office for persistent failure to provide written decisions and reasons within specified timeframes. To support these legal amendments at the operational level human resource capacity has been strengthened with the recruitment of additional judges and upgrade in existing technology.

38. To proactively address instances of arbitrary detention, and misconduct by security forces the BPD took a significant step in December 2022 through the implementation of its updated Human Rights and Use of Force Policy and continuous training for on its use.

Prohibition of slavery, trafficking – R: 77.44, 77.43, 77.41, 77.42, 77.45, 77.39, 77.40, 77.78

39. After a significant update in 2013 to its Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) (Prohibition) Act, and the passage of the 2013 Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) (CSEC) Act, Belize is once again in the process of amending the TIPs legislation. The proposed amendments seek to broaden the definition of pornography, define aggravated circumstances" in more details, and include attempted trafficking. These changes will align with national laws and regional and international standards, improve prosecution, and promote consistency with other offences. The amendments are expected to be passed into law by the end of 2023.

40. Since the last review cycle, GoB has also increased its efforts against human trafficking. Frontline Immigration Officers have received comprehensive training, enabling them to identify potential victims effectively. Other government actions also included prohibiting worker-paid recruitment fees, conducting an extensive public awareness campaign, and improving data collection accuracy. See Annex, table 2 for data on training.

41. At the operational level the Anti-Trafficking in Person Police Unit⁶ (A-TIP- PU) remains the dedicated office of the BPD for trafficking investigations and Trafficking operations. The A-TIP- PU actively engages in anti-trafficking investigations and capitalises on opportunities for partnerships with international NGOs to support their mandate to carry out nationwide sensitization programs. Since the last review, the office has expanded and now includes a total of eight (8) officers.⁷ The Unit operates from a location not attached to a police station; this creates an environment for survivors of human trafficking to feel comfortable when providing statements to police officers.

42. The Department of Human Services has a TIPs Care Unit which is exclusively dedicated to providing care to suspected and confirmed victims of human trafficking in Belize.

43. Notably, GoB in partnership with UNICEF has established a migrant shelter for children as they are at risk of human trafficking and in need of assistance. In 2022 the Ministry of Human Development signed an MOU with an NGO that established a shelter to accommodate adult migrants and trafficking victims and support victims during trials.

44. The Amnesty 2021 has also contributed to reducing vulnerabilities to trafficking. At least four confirmed trafficking victims sought protection and relief through the program.

45. GoB remains resolutely committed to eradicating any official complicity in trafficking crimes, vigorously prosecuting, and convicting all traffickers without compromise. To this end, the legislative amendment was made in March 2022 to the Indictable Procedures Act, adding trafficking to the list of crimes that could be tried by a judge without a jury, to expedite prosecutions, eliminate backlogs, and improve the comfort of victim-witnesses.

Domestic violence and violence against women – R: 77.80, 77.82, 77.85, 77.75, 77.76, 77.77, 77.78, 77.79, 77.81, 77.84, 77.86, 78.5

46. Belize has grappled with the escalation in domestic violence incidents, as underscored by data trends presented in the Annex, tables 3,4 and 5. Prior to the outbreak of the Pandemic, Belize was seeing some decreases in reported incidences of domestic violence. Undoubtedly, the lockdowns brought on by the Pandemic worsened the situation, with a marked increase in the incidences of domestic and GBV.

47. The period from January to December 2022 saw a 21% increase in reported domestic violence cases compared to the same timeframe in 2021 with a 41% increase in cases leading to arrests or investigations. The demographic breakdown reveals that almost 7 out of 10 cases involved individuals between the ages of 18 to 45, highlighting the vulnerability of this age group. Reports made for ‘future reference’ escalated by 11%, (Annex, table 6) and an uptick in unlawful sexual intercourse incidents within the major crimes category was also recorded by the BPD.

48. In response to these disconcerting trends, in 2022, the House of Representatives unanimously supported the Domestic Violence in Belize Motion.⁸ The motion denounced and condemned domestic violence and further pledged additional resources to conduct legislative reviews and prioritize domestic violence as a national concern. It also committed to supporting the comprehensive Women’s Agenda⁹ aimed at fortifying strategies to safeguard the well-being of women and children.

49. Furthermore, Belize’s commitment to addressing GBV and domestic violence was GOB’s granting of a posthumous pardon to Nora Parham. Nora Parham was a victim of domestic violence, unjustly convicted of murdering her partner, and became the only woman to be hanged in Belize. The government’s act of pardon serves as a significant milestone in acknowledging past injustices and underscores the importance of ensuring justice and protection for victims of domestic violence.

50. Belize continues with efforts to implement a national response to ending GBV, which is guided by national policies and plans inclusive of inter alia: Belize’s long-term development plan the Horizon 2010-2030, the #PlanBelize Medium-term Development Strategy 2022-2026 which aligns and support SDGs implementation, the National Gender Policy and the National Gender-based Violence Action Plan[vi] (draft National Gender Policy and National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action 2021). The national and sub-regional response is supported through the National Gender and GBV Committee and the District GBV Committees, this provides a national coverage and multi-sectoral response by government and non-government actors.

51. Operationally, The BPD operates Domestic Violence Units in key municipalities. The Belize City Family Violence Unit operates round-the-clock and has an in-house Counsellor,

while other municipalities have specialised Domestic Violence Officers during regular hours. To integrate and mainstream gender and for sustainability, the Police Training School has included in their curriculum and carries out ongoing training on gender, gender norms and GBV.

52. The unit handles more complaints monthly due to heightened awareness efforts and improved support systems, encouraging victims to report incidents with increased confidence. The period from January to December 2022 witnessed a 39% increase in reported domestic violence cases compared to the same timeframe in 2018 under the last review period (Annex, table 5)

53. The court system has become more gender-responsive through the adoption of the “Model Guideline for Sexual Offence Cases” in 2017 and the approval of a “Gender Equality Protocol for Judicial Officers” in 2018. Members of the judiciary were trained on this protocol. The Spotlight Initiative funded by the EU collaborated with government ministries to develop a training manual for court officials and provided capacity development for magistrates in preventing and addressing family violence. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the integration of video conferencing, virtual sessions, and protective screens into court proceedings to uphold complainants’ dignity, particularly for those impacted by sexual violence.

54. GoB have increased its trust and relationship building with the CSO organizations and networks by forging vital partnerships with a network of NGOs, such as Haven House, Child Development Foundation, Belize Family Life Association, Mercy Clinic, Productive Organization for Women in Action, and Toledo Maya Women Council, to bridge service and resource gaps. Together, they are designing new policies and programs with comprehensive implementation and monitoring and evaluation plans to track service gaps, identify shared responsibilities, report impacts, and direct resources effectively.

55. The Spotlight Initiative was launched in partnership with the Government of Belize and the United Nations (UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP) to address violence against women and girls by realizing changes through legal and policy reform, institutional strengthening, prevention, quality services, data and increasing women-led networks and civil society organizations.

56. In 2020, the UNFPA, through the Spotlight Initiative, collaborated with organisations like the Child Development Foundation, Human Rights Commission of Belize, Belize Family Life Association, and Productive Organization for Women in Action to establish Mobile Women Centres (MWCs). These centres deliver life-saving services, including legal support, psychosocial counselling, sexual and reproductive health services, and information sharing on GBV and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights.

57. Building on this success, the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples Affairs embarked on the implementation of these crucial services through both government and civil society channels. By reaching out to the hardest-to-reach women and girls, these efforts are set to bring about substantial advancements in empowering and supporting the most vulnerable citizens.

58. Belize established the Sexual Offenders Database in 2014 through an amendment to the Criminal Code. Operationalizing the registry is a priority for the MHA&NGI. However, progress has been modest due to challenges arising from data silos across the justice sector. The registry requires the maintenance of a national database housing sex offenders’ information for ten years, with updated and securely shared data among relevant authorities. Despite its launch in November 2018 as the Belize Sex Offenders Registry, deficiencies in the portal’s architecture and security have been noted in a 2022 consultancy report. The current state of the registry is managed by CITO and the MHA&NGI, with the BPD having the legal mandate for its enforcement. Development efforts continue from 2014, including database establishment, application development, deployment, and modernization concepts through 2023.

Discrimination against women – R: 77.73, 77.83, 77.72

59. To intensify efforts in reducing gender-based inequalities, particularly in the areas of reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity, Belize has developed a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable development. This includes the Horizon 2010-2030 long-term development plan, the #Plan Belize for 2022-2026, the National Gender Policies of 2013 and 2021, as well as the National Gender-based Violence Action Plan of 2017 and 2021 and the Health Sector Strategic Plan (2014-2024). These GoB's strategic frameworks serve as the basis of programs aimed at addressing gender-based inequalities and improving access to reproductive health services, education, and resources, with a specific focus on underserved and marginalised communities.

60. As such, some programs prioritised by the Government of Belize, with support from the Spotlight Initiative, United Nations agencies, Civil Society Organizations and other international partners since the last review include:

(a) The implementation of 12 Mobile Women's Centres across southern and northern villages of Belize. These centres provided critical sexual and reproductive health services, legal support services, psychosocial support and counselling, information on GBV, HIV prevention, and referral to services.

(b) The Government eliminated the General Sales Tax (GST) from women's sanitary products which came into effect on 1 April 2023. The decision was a result of months of advocacy through the "Don't Tax My Femininity Campaign". In addition to the removal of GST, the Government also eliminated 20% import duty and 3% Environmental tax from women's sanitary pads. The decision was a crucial step towards ending gender-based price disparities as it relates to women's reproductive health.

(c) Support mobile health teams to provide child immunizations in rural communities.

(d) Implementation of measures to foster post-pandemic economic recovery and social stability of women to strengthen institutional capacity. This includes providing vocational skills training for women, support and guidance for women entrepreneurs, and business relief counselling for MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises).

(e) In 2021, Belize secured a technical cooperation program, the "Enhancing the Economic Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the COVID-19 Post-Pandemic Era: Technical Assistance for Women's Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Inclusion" project. The project is ongoing and seeks to enhance the training capabilities of institutions that provide economic empowerment and vocational training services to women and young entrepreneurs. So far, 115 women have completed vocational training in various areas, nine women-led MSMEs have received seed funding, 100 professionals have completed capacity-building courses, and two infrastructures, including an MSME mobile incubation centre, have been constructed to further support women's economic empowerment.

61. Despite these efforts, addressing gender-based inequalities remains challenging, as reflected by Belize's ranking of 95th out of 146 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Index and 21st out of 22 in Latin America and the Caribbean region. In 2018 Belize ranked 111 of 149 countries in the Global Gender Index and 24th of 24 in Latin America and the Caribbean region. This notwithstanding, Belize remains committed to reducing inequalities and empowering women across various domains.

Participation of women in political and public life – R: 77.71

62. Belize ranked 125 out of 149 countries in 2018 with respect to the global gender gap for Political empowerment in 2018 and 133/146 in 2022. Belize has four women elected to the House of Representatives, four women appointed as Senators and two serving as presiding officers. The total number of parliamentarians in the National Assembly (both chambers), including the presiding officers, is 46. Collectively, women parliamentarians

account for 22% of the National Assembly. While this is the greatest number of women serving in parliament in the history of Belize, women are still a minority in parliament.

63. At the municipal level of the 66 elected officials, 23 were women accounting for 34 percent of the municipal seats.

64. The establishment of a Women's Parliamentary Caucus in 2022 aims to strengthen the advocacy of women parliamentarians on issues directly affecting women as well as mainstreaming gender perspectives in the operations of Parliament.

Liberty and security – general and arbitrary arrest and detention – R: 77.34, 77.29, 77.31, 77.37, 77.28, 77.30

65. The Criminal Code CAP 101 of the Laws of Belize, R.E. 2011, Section 32(a), (b) explicitly prohibits the excessive use of personal violence or ill-treatment towards any individual.

66. To provide easy access for citizens to address complaints, branches of the Professional Standards Branch (PSB) have been established countrywide. These branches serve as dedicated platforms for receiving, investigating, and addressing complaints related to injustice, injury, abuse, or other wrongdoing by any police officer. The PSB is actively engaged in programs aimed at reducing police abuse and enhancing the professional development of police officers, fostering a more accountable and responsible law enforcement force.

67. A crucial aspect of this initiative is ensuring the confidentiality and confidence of aggrieved individuals. The PSB offices are physically separate from regular police stations, encouraging individuals to come forward and lodge complaints without fear.

68. Complementing the establishment of PSB branches is a comprehensive program of public education, which aims to further educate Belizeans on their rights and responsibilities as citizens. By enhancing awareness, this education program empowers individuals to assert their rights and seek redress when necessary.

69. In cases where complaints are raised, the severity of the allegation is thoroughly investigated. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, officers can face criminal and/or disciplinary charges. The Constitution's Section 20 provides for both judicial and civil redress, ensuring justice and accountability.

70. More than 300 police officers have undergone training to ensure compliance with the updated Human Rights and Use of Force Policy, designed to mitigate instances of excessive force and uphold human rights standards. Belize remains committed to collaborating with international partners to enhance human rights training. To date, training sessions facilitated by these partners have been extended to law enforcement officers, magistrates, judges, and prosecutors.

71. The Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) has also played a proactive role in investigating matters related to excessive use of force, taking necessary actions to ensure proper education and awareness among the public of available recourse options when reporting instances of excessive force. The OMB comprehensive plan includes social capacity building, strengthening relationships with vulnerable populations, and fostering positive perceptions of the Office of the Ombudsman among the public and the BPD.

Rights related to name, identity, nationality – R:77.90, 77.98, 77.97

72. Efforts are underway to adopt comprehensive legislation that will establish a statelessness determination procedure, effectively identifying and safeguarding the rights and protection of stateless individuals. Once this legislation is implemented, the statelessness determination procedure will play a crucial role in granting stateless individuals the necessary

recognition and protection. This will create a more inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that every individual's rights are respected and upheld within Belize.

73. To enhance accessibility and efficiency, registry offices have been strategically located at all public hospitals. This measure aims to make birth registration more convenient and readily available for all, ensuring that individuals have their identities recognized and protected from the earliest stages of life. Additionally, birth registration is free from birth to one year, removing any financial barriers and ensuring that every child can assert their rights without any impediments.

74. In line with the #Plan Belize's 2022-2025 digital agenda,¹⁰ the Vital Statistics Unit has embarked on a comprehensive digital transformation program to bolster birth registration coverage.¹¹ This initiative inter alia will: strengthen Belize's legal framework for vital events to align with international standards, reinforce human resources and IT infrastructure to modernize the civil registry system, expand birth registration coverage while enhancing public awareness of available services, streamlining and simplifying business processes related to vital events, facilitating the transition to a fully functional online application platform, enhancing public perception of the Vital Statistics Unit's significance and reliability, and fostering collaboration and interoperability among public sector agencies to facilitate efficient data exchange. This multifaceted effort aims to ensure that each citizen can access their legal identity seamlessly, ultimately advancing inclusivity and efficiency in public service delivery.

Right to work – R: 77.47

75. Following the impact of the pandemic on unemployment GoB designated a "Job Readiness Course" program to empower individuals and enhance their skills through capacity-building and individual work plan development. The Labor Department in the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour, and Local Government, oversees the Public Employment Services (PES).

76. The PES equips job seekers with essential skills through "Job Preparedness Training." This training aims to boost their employability and ensure they are better prepared to enter the workforce confidently. Additionally, the Labour Department conducts informative Education Sessions for both employers and workers, focusing on "Rights and Responsibilities of Workers and Employers." These sessions cover essential labour laws and the rights and responsibilities of both parties in the employment relationship.

77. Notably, The Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs through the Women and Family Support Department has introduced an Economic Empowerment Unit that promotes the right to work for vulnerable populations, especially promoting women's economic empowerment.

Right to health – General – R: 77.56, 77.55, 77.55, 77.27, 77.57, 77.63, 77.51, 77.50, 77.52, 77.53, 77.54

78. The health system in Belize encompasses a comprehensive network of Tertiary Referral Hospital, Regional Hospitals, Community Hospitals, and Polyclinics, ensuring accessibility to healthcare for inhabitants of rural areas and indigenous peoples. Satellite clinics and mobile clinics further enhance accessibility, with doctors and nurses stationed in rural areas to cater to the healthcare needs of all individuals. The government remains committed to following the National Health Sector Strategic Plan indicators to consolidate achievements and reduce health vulnerability in vulnerable population groups. The implementation plan is closely monitored and evaluated quarterly to ensure adherence to key indicators.

79. Since its last UPR presentation, Belize has increased its budget for health. The government has invested in the construction of new hospitals and improvements in the polyclinic network. Recent improvements in healthcare facilities have made them accessible, climate-friendly and disaster-resilient. GoB has also invested in expanding the national health

insurance to cover more Belizeans in an incremental but progressive manner – focusing on promoting primary health care.

80. To promote effective HIV/AIDS prevention, the Ministry of Health and Wellness collaborates with the National AIDS Commission and the Human Rights Commission to develop policies that prioritise patient-centred and integrated healthcare. The Ministry of Health & Wellness has recently developed a Point of Care Testing Strategy and Updated Guidelines to reflect a client-centred approach. The National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs, Viral Hepatitis and Tuberculosis is a people-centred approach grounded on Human Rights, Equity and Universal Health Coverage.

81. Although there is no HIV Prevention Strategy in place, many activities focus on the prevention of HIV such as the PMTCT Program, free ARVs at all health facilities (public and private), free testing for HIV and STIs, health fairs, and community testing using Champions. Health sector staff are trained on Point of Care HIV and STI testing.

82. In the realm of sexual and reproductive health services, the MCH Department ensures that pregnant women are screened for HIV and STIs through the PMTCT Program, guaranteeing inclusivity regardless of sexual orientation or identity. The recently launched Adolescent Health Strategic Plan 2019-2030 focuses on ensuring accessibility to Sexual Reproductive Health services for all adolescents. The plan focuses on transforming adolescents' lives, particularly in the realm of sexual and reproductive health. It encourages collaboration among key sectors and centres on three core outcomes:

(a) Improved and equitable Access to Quality Services: Ensuring that adolescents easily access high-quality sexual and reproductive health services through enhanced sector collaboration.

(b) Holistic Development: Promoting comprehensive cognitive, sexual, social, and physical development to reduce risk behaviours and empower informed choices.

(c) Safe and Supportive Environments: Creating nurturing and secure environments that prioritize sexual and reproductive health, with community-wide engagement in promoting well-being.

83. Additionally, in the education system, health education lessons are designed to promote inclusive learning outcomes.

Right to education – General – R: 77.60, 77.67, 77.66, 77.65, 77.68, 77.69, 77.70, 77.79, 77.58, 77.61, 77.64, 77.62

84. The COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on Belize's education landscape, amplifying pre-existing disparities and disproportionately impacting vulnerable children. With school closures, disrupted learning, and the adoption of remote or hybrid models, the divide between rural and urban students has widened significantly. Many disadvantaged students lacked access to essential technology and resources, hindering their educational progress.

85. Enrolment statistics further underscore these challenges, revealing a 7% decrease in primary school students and a 0.9% decrease in secondary school students for the 2021/2022 period compared to the last review year in 2017/2018. Equally concerning is the 11.3% reduction in transition ratios to secondary schools, a 4.4% increase in repetition rates, and a 0.4% rise in dropout rates during the same period (Annex, table 7).

86. However, the Government of Belize (GoB) has demonstrated its commitment to addressing these issues head-on. As part of its comprehensive response to the pandemic's challenges, GoB has not only made significant strides in tackling pre-existing educational disparities but has also taken proactive measures to address pandemic-induced gaps.

87. One notable achievement is the legislation that raises the compulsory school age from 14 to 16 years old, effective from August 1st, 2023. This will ensure that more youths, especially those adversely affected by the pandemic, will have access to formal education. It

is expected to have a positive impact on the transition rates from primary to high school and contribute to a reduction in high school dropouts in the years to come.

88. Additionally, in 2021, in response to high school dropout rates in vulnerable communities, GoB introduced the Education Upliftment Project. This initiative aims to provide targeted interventions in secondary schools located in vulnerable and at-risk communities. The program was initially launched at Gwen Liz, Sadie Vernon, Maud Williams, and Excelsior high schools in Belize City's southside, where neighbourhoods and communities face unique challenges.

89. The program effectively addresses critical needs by ensuring access to free education, providing essential stationery, uniforms, transportation support, and improvements in school infrastructure. It also covers various aspects of educational assistance, including tuition fees, daily school feeding programs, and the provision of uniforms, books, and shoes as needed.

90. Furthermore, additional funds were allocated to expand the Free Education Program to schools in the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts. Notably, the Toledo District, with the highest percentage of multidimensionally poor persons at 82 percent, underscores the urgency of this initiative.

91. Moreover, the program provides \$200 subsidies to 11,820 students, amounting to a total cost of \$2,364,000. Considering the total high school population of approximately 22,000, this initiative is poised to provide financial assistance to nearly two-thirds of high school students automatically, with a primary focus on those most at risk in Belize's youth population.

92. The COVID-19 pandemic also underscored the necessity of innovative technology adoption within an effective education system. Responding to this, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Digicel Belize, initiated the ConnectED program. This initiative ensures consistent internet access, providing 500 Mbps of internet 24/7 along with monitoring, support, and maintenance. As a result, 252 schools have been connected, benefiting over 66,000 students, empowering 3,807 staff members thus far, and bridging the access gap between rural and urban communities.

93. During the reviewed period, the data also demonstrates significant progress in teacher training across different school levels. The percentage of trained teachers increased to 71.3% for pre-school, 88.2% for primary school, and 69.1% for secondary school since 2017. Schools have been actively enhancing the delivery of core subjects like English, Math, and Science, contributing to improved educational outcomes.

94. Acknowledging the significance of continuous development in the education system, the Ministry of Education invests in professional development for teachers. Training and continuing education programs enable educators to hone their skills, ensuring quality instruction and support for students.

95. The ongoing curriculum reforms represent the country's dedication to providing all students with a relevant and engaging learning experience. These updates align the educational curriculum with best practices and cater to the evolving needs of students, promoting holistic development.

96. Regarding students with special needs, the implementation of the Functional Life Skills Curriculum in special classrooms aims to equip students with essential skills and facilitate their transition to the workplace. The Inclusion Corner webpage¹² streamlines access to resources, supporting teachers and parents in promoting inclusive education.

97. The successful pilot of special education classrooms in high schools underscores Belize's commitment to expanding opportunities for students with special needs. Efforts to develop Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for students in special classrooms have seen significant progress, with plans to reach 100% coverage.

98. To identify students who may require additional resources, MoE conducted a comprehensive survey, doubling referrals for evaluations. Partnering with an NGO, Belize has engaged Behaviour Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Speech and Language Therapists to provide comprehensive support, including teacher training.

Children: definition; general principles; protection – R: 77.91, 77.46, 77.87

99. Belize continues with efforts to reinforce the implementation of legislation aimed at fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and enhancing the protection of children. Since the last review, an amendment was made to the Criminal Code introducing stricter penalties for offences related to child exploitation, abuse, and trafficking. This legislative change was complemented by the formulation of a National Child Protection Strategic Plan, providing a coordinated approach to safeguarding children's rights. This plan serves as a guiding framework for implementing policies, programs, and interventions to prevent child abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

100. Additionally, the Belize annual National Children's Parliament,¹³ resulted in the drafting of the Criminal Justice (Exploitation of Children in the Commission of Offences) Bill, 2021, which aims to make it an offence for any person to recruit or groom children in the commission of an offence.

101. As Belize works towards raising the minimum marriage age from 16 to 18, it faces legal hurdles due to conflicting definitions and varying age limits in laws related to adolescents. For example, the Families and Children Act of 1999 defines a child as an individual aged 16 or under. Conversely, the Summary Jurisdiction (Procedure) Act considers an adult to be anyone aged 16 or above, while a child is defined as under 14 years old. Additionally, the Criminal Code designates the age of sexual consent as 16 years, while the Marriage Amendment Act of 2005 permits marriage at 16 with parental consent. The age of criminal responsibility is set at 12 years, further complicating the alignment of the minimum marriage age, and associated legal provisions with international standards.

102. To address this issue, in 2020, the GoB launched the Road Map to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize, which takes a holistic approach across sectors with a specific focus on girls. The areas of intervention include increasing access to training for both girls and boys, as well as providing sexual and reproductive health education and services. The road map seeks to transform social norms and behaviours by fostering national and community dialogues on the perils of child marriage. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of gathering robust data to inform policies and endeavours to strengthen and enforce laws that establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage.

103. Belize has since launched several awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to inform the public, parents, and communities about children's rights and the importance of safeguarding them. These efforts include sensitizing stakeholders about child protection laws and existing mechanisms. Collaborative support from the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIPS) Council has facilitated advancements in partnerships aimed at strengthening children's rights and protecting them from sexual abuse and violence. The forthcoming implementation of the Criminal Justice (Exploitation of Children in the Commission of Offences) Bill, 2021, is expected to further fortify Belize's commitment to children's welfare within the next 12 to 24 months, contingent on available resources and stakeholder support.

Children: protection against exploitation – R: 77.89

104. Belize is committed to safeguarding the rights of all children, and its actions reflect this dedication. Belize was among the first countries to ratify the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990, a cornerstone of its child protection efforts. Further solidifying this commitment, Belize ratified the ILO Convention on Minimum Age C-138 and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour C-182, demonstrating its resolve to combat child labour. Additionally, Belize has signed onto crucial protocols such as the UNCRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict, UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Palermo Protocol on TIPs.

105. In alignment with its international commitments, Belize incorporated Target 8.7 of the SDGs to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2025. The Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, and Labour (MRTCDL),

has been proactive in translating these commitments into action. Notable milestones include the revision of the National Child Labour Policy in July 2022, culminating in the launch of “The Belize National Child Labour Policy and Strategy 2022 to 2025.” Collaborations with various stakeholders such as the Labour Department, immigration department, Ministry of Education, MHDF&IPA, and the BPD reinforce the country’s comprehensive approach.

106. Concrete efforts to eradicate child labour have been robust since the last national report. Belize has established an active National Child Labour Secretariat and Inspectorate Desk to ensure rigorous monitoring, execution, and reporting of incidents nationwide. In its commitment to eradicating the employment of migrant children under the age of 14, rigorous site visits and checks are being conducted to identify and eliminate instances of unauthorized child labour. Importantly, the country strictly enforces the non-issuance of work permits to individuals under the age of 18, reinforcing its dedication to protecting children’s rights and preventing their exploitation in the workforce.

107. In 2022 GoB, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association wherein both parties agreed to work together to eliminate child labour in the Sugar Industry by 2025. The MOU will be monitored by the Child Labour Secretariat desk.

108. Additionally, Belize joined “The Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour” – An active Child Labour secretariat desk is responsible for implementing the new Child Labour policy in collaboration with other partners/agencies such as the immigration department, the ministry of education, the ministry of human development, the police department, and the labour department.

109. Education and awareness remain paramount. Belize’s engagement in workshops, training sessions, and commemorative events exemplifies its proactive stance. From producing videos commemorating World Day against Child Labour to implementing Child Labour Education tours, Belize strives to sensitize stakeholders and educate its citizens on the importance of child protection. The country’s commitment to a future free from child labour is fortified by its actions, collaborations, and unwavering resolve to create a just and equitable society for all children. since 2022 MRTCDL provided capacity development for twenty-four (24) Labour Inspectors , conducted a total of 831 inspections countrywide and 57 were child labour inspections to ensure compliance and to detect violations, particularly in child labour.

Members of minorities – R: 77.92

110. The Constitution of Belize recognizes the multicultural nature of Belizean society and guarantees the protection of fundamental rights for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or social background. Notable actions include:

(a) The current government has elevated the importance of Indigenous people by adding a portfolio of Indigenous People’s Affairs within the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs (MHDFIPA).

(b) In 2022, GOB adopted the Maya of Southern Belize Free Prior and Informed Consent Protocol which was submitted to the Caribbean Court of Justice . This Protocol was developed in full consultation with the Maya People’s organizations. GoB is also developing a Maya Customary Land Policy which will guide the drafting of legislation to legally protect the Maya Customary Land Tenure System. After a consultation process, the policy is expected to be finalized by mid-2023. GoB continues to work with the relevant stakeholders to implement the 2015 Judgment in recognition of Indigenous and Tribal Lands.

(c) Belize is committed to promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity. The Ministry of Education integrates cultural sensitivity and inclusion into the curriculum, fostering an appreciation for various ethnic identities. Educational initiatives also target eliminating discrimination and promoting tolerance.

(d) Belize ensures equitable access to healthcare for all citizens. The Ministry of Health provides medical services and information to underserved populations, addressing the specific health needs of vulnerable groups, including indigenous communities.

(e) The Government continues to actively engage with ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in policy-making processes. Consultations with these communities ensure their voices are heard, leading to policies that address their unique needs.

(f) Belize has also taken significant strides to enhance the work of the Bilateral Technical Committee, focusing on promoting and safeguarding the rights of the Mayan and Garifuna peoples, two indigenous communities with rich cultural heritage. Through structured dialogue and consultation, Belize has established a platform for engaging with representatives from these communities, facilitating discussions on land tenure, cultural preservation, and community development.

(g) The MHBFI&IPA with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank is leading the process of collecting and analysing data on gender and diversity in Belize (e.g. gender and GBV data and data on indigenous peoples).

Migrants – R: 77.95, 77.96

111. During this review cycle, one of the significant developments in the realm of human rights in Belize was the launch of the Amnesty Programme in August 2022, focusing on migration. This ground-breaking initiative aimed to address the situation of undocumented migrants residing in Belize and recommended asylum seekers facing delays in the refugee process. Meeting specific criteria, these individuals were offered a path to Permanent Residence status with the potential for citizenship.

112. Recognizing the vulnerability of this population, GoB has been working to provide inclusive social protection systems. Belize is shifting its approach from criminalizing irregular migration to addressing the human rights aspect of the issue.¹⁴ A comprehensive review of the Immigration Act is in progress, aligning it with international treaties and conventions that Belize has ratified. This legislative process aims to establish a framework that respects migrants' rights while adhering to global standards. In collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Belize is developing a dedicated facility for the temporary housing of immigration violators, ensuring proper treatment during administrative detention.

Conclusion

113. Belize is firmly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights. GoB has integrated human rights principles into various facets of its governance, including development planning, social services, and policy formulation and implementation. Its commitment is evident through the prioritization of key human rights issues on the national agenda, such as poverty reduction, economic transformation, and inclusive development, particularly in education, healthcare, and social services for marginalized communities, and managing migration during this reporting cycle.

114. Nonetheless, this reporting process has underscored areas where Belize recognizes the need for further progress in the realm of human rights. These include, inter alia, addressing the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, combatting GBV, ensuring gender-equitable representation in public positions, and aligning the minimum marriage age at 18 for all genders. Additionally, Belize acknowledges the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous communities, particularly the Maya and Garifuna peoples, within the broader human rights framework.

115. The pandemic accentuated challenges in Belize and redirected already limited resources, potentially hindering human rights progress. Despite fiscal constraints, Belize exhibited commitment and resilience in addressing these issues and takes pride in its achievements in education and awareness, with dedicated efforts to sensitize the population about their rights, particularly concerning child exploitation and protection, GBV, labour

rights, and LGBTQ+ issues. GoB is also proud of its work in reaching disadvantaged migrants and ensuring their inclusion through the Amnesty program.

116. An innovative response to pandemic-exposed weaknesses is the first-ever National Social Protection Policy and Strategy, aiming to bolster vulnerable groups, with a focus on women. Belize's commitment to this policy is underscored by an initial review of existing social protection measures, contributing to the development of a costed minimum social protection floor.

117. Belize's dedication to safeguarding and advancing human rights is further exemplified through its innovative approach to digitalization. The government has taken significant steps to usher in a new era of digital governance with the launch of the National Digital Agenda for Belize 2022-2025. The Digital Agenda aligns with Belize's commitment to human rights by ensuring equal access to digital resources and services for all citizens. It forms an integral part of national efforts to balance immediate crisis response with sustainable human rights advancements, further underscoring national resilience and determination to meet the evolving needs of its diverse population.

Notes

- ¹ annual-report-accounts-2022.pdf (centralbank.org.bz).
- ² Belize-Med-Term-Dev-Strategy-Action-Plan-2022-to-2025.pdf
- ³ #Plan Belize Low Income Houses – Ministry of Infrastructure Development & Housing (midh.gov.bz).
- ⁴ The Bill seeks to provide for the protection of persons against discrimination, including discrimination involving harassment, victimisation and vilification on the grounds of [HIV status], [sexual orientation], [lawful sexual activity], [disability], [gender] and [status as an orphan]; and to provide for related matters.
- ⁵ This strategic initiative encompasses multiple elements, such as establishing safe spaces through workshops and training sessions, highlighting personal stories to increase awareness, conducting research to drive inclusive policies, leveraging media campaigns to promote positive norms, and organizing community-based sessions to foster healthy relationships and address gender norms.
- ⁶ The Unit was increased in size in 2021 from five (5) officers to eight (8).
- ⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁸ <https://www.bco.gov.bz/download/domestic-violence-in-belize-motion-2022/>
- ⁹ The National Women's Commission | Belize Women's Rights Advocacy Organization (nwcbelize.org).
- ¹⁰ National Digital Agenda for Belize 2022-2025.
- ¹¹ Strengthening Civil Registry Program – (digitalagenda.gov.bz).
- ¹² The Inclusion Corner – 501 academy.
- ¹³ This is a platform that offers young individuals a unique opportunity to actively participate in discussions and decision-making processes concerning their rights, well-being, and issues relevant to their lives. The annual Children's Parliament convenes young representatives from diverse backgrounds and regions, ensuring a multiplicity of perspectives are considered. Through the formulation of recommendations and proposals, these youthful parliamentarians directly influence policy discourse, advocating for improvements that address their distinct needs and concerns.
- ¹⁴ Announcement of Amnesty 2022 – Government of Belize Press Office.