

Belize

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39%

Population below international poverty line

€458

per month

National minimum wage

€452

per month

Rural living wage

21%

Agricultural workforce

8%

Agriculture share of GDP

3

medium

Risk to workers' rights

Context

Belize has a population of 400,031 people.^[1] Belizeans inhabit rural and urban regions almost evenly, as 54% reside in rural areas^[2] while the rest 46% live in cities.^[3] Around 21% of the population is employed in agriculture^[4], a sector that accounts for 7.7% of the nation's GDP.^[5]

Belize has bountiful land and water resources and exports large quantities of fruits to foreign markets. Despite its fertile land and ample resources however, the country imports half of its food for national consumption. Additionally, most production is driven by large plantations, with smallholders typically characterized as underproductive. Smallholders often own quite sizeable plots, sometimes as large as 10 hectares, but usually they only use a fraction of their land for production. ^[6]

The top produced commodities in Belize are sugar cane, oranges, bananas, maize and chicken meat.^[7] In terms of export quantity, the top products are raw sugar, bananas, molasses, maize bran and orange juice.^[8]

Wages

Minimum wage

The general minimum wage for Belize is 5 Belize dollars (2.3 EUR) per worker per hour or 975 Belize dollars (458 EUR) per worker per month.^[9] Due to an insufficient number of inspectors as well as the low fines assigned for violations, the government has not always been effective in enforcing labour law regulations. Even though the minimum wage is generally respected across the country, there are several incidents where undocumented Central American workers were paid below the minimum wage on a regular basis.^[10]

Living wage

The **Global Living Wage Coalition** has developed a living wage benchmark for rural Belize, based on the Anker methodology, which focuses especially on the so-called banana belt in the southern region of Belize.

The Anker Living Wage Benchmark for rural Belize is estimated at 963 Belize dollars (452 EUR) per worker per month. The benchmark is based on a family of 4 with 1.59 full-time workers. This is the wage required by workers in southern rural Belize to afford a basic but decent standard of living. Southern Belize, the region of focus for the given benchmark study, is where most of the country's banana production occurs. Due to the strong presence of the banana sector the area attracts many migrant workers, especially from Guatemala. The Belizean banana sector is characterised by a small number of producers with large plantations. Together with the citrus and sugar cane sectors, the banana sector serves as a key source of employment for the country. Even though the focus of the study is southern Belize, due to the country's size, it can be argued that the living wage estimate is generalizable for all of rural Belize. ^[11]

What's happening

RESOURCE

Living Wage Benchmark, rural Belize



Living wage benchmark for workers in the southern region of Belize to afford a basic but decent living standard. Global Living Wage Coalition.

INITIATIVE

Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association



A Fairtrade certified Belizean sugar cane farm, which was established in 1960 and counts more than 5,000 growers as members.

RESOURCE

Youth in the Belizean Sugar Cane Sector



This study aims to demystify the working conditions of young sugarcane workers and enable communities to address child labor issues.

INITIATIVE

Bananas in Costa Rica and Belize



This multi-stakeholder project explores living wage gaps, among other objectives, through 8 pilot farms in Belize and Costa Rica.

Footnotes

1. World Bank (2021). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BZ>
2. World Bank (2021). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=BZ>
3. World Bank (2021). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=BZ>
4. World Bank (2021). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=BZ>
5. World Bank (2021). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=BZ>

6. IFAD (2018). Resilient Rural Belize. <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/lapse-of-time/docs/english/EB-2018-IOT-P-2-Project-Design-Report.pdf>
7. FAOSTAT (2020). http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#rankings/commodities_by_country
8. FAOSTAT (2020). http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#rankings/commodities_by_country_exports
9. WageIndicator Foundation (2023). Minimum Wage – Belize. <https://wageindicator.org/salary/minimum-wage/belize>
10. U.S. Department of State. (2019). <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/belize/>
11. Global Living Wage Coalition (2022). Living Wage Report: Rural Belize. <https://www.globallivingwage.org/living-wage-benchmarks/living-wage-for-rural-belize/>