

TRAFFICKING OF PERSONS IN BELIZE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Taking into account that nowadays one of the key issues of the cultural and sociopolitical agenda in Central America is migration flow, Belize is in a strategic position, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. Crossing the borders towards this country has been an historical feature because it reunites a number of benefits that makes it highly attractive. It has a relatively good development level, high land and job availability due to the fact that it is sparsely populated, many natural resources and a good service structure. In addition to this, Belize has a long and open border particularly difficult to control and regulate without a large amount of human, technological and economic resources. This last characteristic has turned the country into an appealing migratory transit spot towards other final destinies such as the United States and Mexico.

As every young country, Belize is still building its institutional area. Even though it has shown a good economic performance, encouraging social indicators and an institutional web in good progress, the model of a cohesive public policy system able to react with flexibility when facing new challenges, is still under construction. Hence, migratory flow towards Belize is, in occasions, a serious problem that doesn't find an effective answer neither from the preventive policies (from migratory or police institutions) nor from the social policies, that should both confront the strong feelings of rootlessness that entire families suffer, social risk, vulnerability and violence. It is well known that the attitudes of abuse towards the needy and the multiplication of human trafficking and smuggling flourishes in a society where, in addition to the social vulnerability of the population, the policies are too weak to tackle the intense migratory flow.

Since the United States included Belize in the list of countries (tier number 3) that don't comply with the international legislation on human trafficking, this issue has become increasingly important in the public debate agenda. It is in this context that the research for this paper was undertaken. And in this context

too is that Belize's public authorities started to introduce new strategies to tackle a problem that was categorized as of great magnitude. Hence, laws were passed, corrective actions were implemented by public institutions from different areas (migration, police, social services), workshops were created and the debate on the real extent of the phenomenon started, in order to design new strategies to stop it.

The aim of this research is to determine the extent- from an external and independent perspective- the characteristics and the volume of human trafficking in Belize. From then on, government measures are suggested to improve the prevention of this serious problem (focusing on the contexts that support it) and to assist social situations of familiar and cultural disintegration.

The approach of this paper can be compared to the zooming of a camera that, starting on the big picture it continues to get closer and closer to the details and arrives to conclusions. It starts with the general setting of human trafficking phenomenon and its relation with migration and economic ups and downs in the region. It then sets a conceptual frame in accordance to the current international legislation. The social situation of the country will be observed and then the field work is analyzed. This data collection leads to the analysis of migration, trafficking and other social problems as a whole in order to arrive to conclusions. Finally, the paper sets a list of recommendations for the Belize's government with the participation of the civil community.

Some preliminary research depicts Belize as a country of transit and destination for irregular migrants, mainly citizens from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and to a lesser extent Colombia, Peru, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana who are attempting to make their way to the United States and Canada. The objective of this study is to assess the current status of trafficking in personas, its incidence, character, the profile, and trafficking circumstances of victims¹. We also hope it will be a useful tool for all the decision makers and organizations involved in creating a new social development environment for the people of Belize and its promising society.

II. A NEW CRIME

Globalization has brought new communicational opportunities, development and cultural interchange, but it has also created environments that lead to new types of crimes and exploitation of human beings. Sometimes, crimes as old as the hills have regained strength taking advantage of a world that has suddenly become smaller due to the expansion of communications. In this new frame, organized crime has developed effective tools to grow, trespassing borders and legislation and taking advantage of the social crisis that many countries have had to bear. All kind of criminals- organized and acting alone- have seized the chance of this sad landscape: great sections of the population in a vulnerable position (specially young women and children), unstable families that cannot cope with the economic issues, little or no social services to support them and obsolete educational systems unable to face new challenges. Promises of a golden future, offers of well paid jobs, the splendor of developed societies have been the most common strategies to tempt the victims of this swindle, a swindle that is one of the most serious problems of our times: human trafficking. It is a crime that involves thousands of people and it takes place in the middle of enormous migration flows that nations are unable to stop because it responds to the very essence of human beings, which is to seek better ways of life. It is precisely when these great migratory movements are not supported by national and international measures, that the ideal environment for crime develops. Human trafficking is an issue of great magnitude because it provokes devastating effects on its victims, because it involves important crime networks and generates high levels of corruption to survive.

Estimates state that between 700.000 and 2.000.000 people are victims of this crime each year. Human trafficking isn't new, but what can be considered as a change is its extent in critical contexts that facilitate its growth, make its detection difficult and generate big profits for the dealers.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking has emerged as a major global issue and has reached epidemic proportions,

“there is not one single country free from it”. The alarm should be stronger in those countries located in regions with weak economies, because people cross borders seeking better opportunities. Countries with vulnerable institutions should worry too, it is in these countries that human trafficking is on the rise because public authorities-due to political and economic reasons- haven’t been able to initiate strategies to counter the problem.

It is important to take into account that human trafficking is a problem difficult to address. “It is very difficult to convince the victims to testify against their captors, even when the trafficking webs have been identified and surrounded. They are afraid of possible revenge against their families. They are ashamed of coming back and not having witness protection”.²

The international community has reacted against this crime creating new laws and making a call to every government to renovate their legislation on the matter and sign international agreements.

In May 2002, the Social and Economic Council, on behalf of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued the document “Principles and Guidelines recommended on Human Rights and Human Trafficking” that was to become an indispensable paper for governments and NGOs for the protection of human rights. Other documents and international agreements followed worldwide. The most inspiring and essential of them was the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its additional protocols.

Keeping in mind the evolution in legislation among the international community, we can describe a migration as irregular when the crossing of borders is performed without complying with the migration policies established in the countries of origin, transit or destination. This kind of migration generally is breach o states s sovereignty.

It is necessary to make a conceptual distinction between smuggling and trafficking. Distinction that has taken a long time to establish. Both crimes have elements in common, similar causes and even a same context. However, nowadays there is a consensus that both differ. Since the Palermo Protocol, this distinction has allowed to elaborate specific programs to combat each matter.

Smuggling is a crime or violation of the migratory law that entails facilitating irregular migration. Well built organizations or one single person offer this “service”, not only by overlooking the migratory law, but also committing other crimes such as document falsification, in order to cross the border. In this case there is no violation of the migrants’ human rights. In this scenario, the migrants willingly decide and get involved in the irregular entrance to the destination country. In this case, at least for the definition instance, it does not matter what they are going to do as a job and which is their socio economic situation. The smuggler provides the means to make sure the migrant jump over a border that, following the legal procedures, would be impossible to cross.

On the other hand, trafficking is a serious crime, it is a violation of human rights, based on coercion not on will. The migrant doesn’t decide to leave his or her country and cross a border, illegally if necessary. Or if he does so, he has never thought in the final situation the trafficker is going to involve him. Trafficking includes deception, force, violence and abuse in order to obtain sexual or economic profits.

There are, of course, situations that can’t be characterized as pure trafficking or smuggling, but are positioned right in the middle of both crimes. At times the distinction is blurred. Smugglers can, at any moment, turn violent and abuse migrant and even with the use of violence in any of its forms transform the situation into a case of trafficking.

During the eighties, after a long time of waiting to be considered in international forums, the world community at last decided to include this issue in the day to day agenda. For instance, the United Nations Convention against Organized

Transnational Crime was held and two protocols were created. One to combat smuggling migrants by land, sea and air and the other protocol to prevent, suppress and punish human trafficking, especially women and children.

In its third article, the first protocol mentioned above defines illicit migrant traffic or smuggling in migrants as follows:

The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, or illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Trafficking Protocol reads as follows to define the trafficking in persons:

- a. *“Trafficking in Persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.*
- b. *The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.*
- c. *The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring and receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered trafficking in person if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article.*

d. Child shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Even though smuggling and human trafficking may develop in the same context, have same related reasons and involve the same institutions, it is essential to bear in mind the distinction between both concepts. For this research this last point is of the biggest importance because its principal aim is to determine the extent of the human trafficking in Belize.

So as to clarify the perspective, it's good to have always in mind the guidelines proposed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that, that among other matters, highlights the fact that the violations against human rights are a cause as much as a consequence of human trafficking and that it is necessary to include the protection of human rights in the list of measures to be undertaken to repress, but also to prevent, this crime.

That's why these measures must be especially careful with human rights, especially of those people who have suffered human trafficking. They are the victims - no matter their administrative situation at the moment they are detected- not the criminals.

These UN's documents outline a key element in the matter. Human trafficking cannot be defined as the transit of people across borders in order to make profits. That's not enough. There must be a coercive ingredient in this equation. Deceit must play a role in the process in order to lure the people into the trap. Coercion and deceit are both used for exploitation.

II.1. Central America

Central America is an apt place for the increase of human trafficking. Weak economies, few job opportunities, increasing and long lasting poverty, a high number of political conflicts, all conspire against well being, provoking population flaws and unstable institutions. In addition to this, nature plays his part on the drama. Earthquakes and hurricanes wiped out many authorities'

efforts to improve the situation. But that's not all. Having the contemporary version of "El Dorado"- that is the United States- so near, doesn't help. Mexico is also a desirable destiny for many migrants.

In such conditions, being a key region for constant migratory flows, it is no miracle that human trafficking, with sexual or working exploitation purposes, is on the rise in Central America.

A study outlined at the International Human Rights Institute of the De Paul University, published on 2003, said that "women and children trafficking in Central America and the Caribbean is a daily fact. It affects each country in a unique way, challenging in different manners the governments, the NGOs and the entire community"³.

This document from the De Paul University described with perfect starkness the phenomenon: "the traffickers in this area are experts in deceit. They build fake promises of decent and well paid job at the "maquiladoras" (large scale assembly lines of different products), at restaurants, bars, hotels and houses, among other locations. Pursuing these fantasies, women and children are forced into sexual slavery so as to pay their travelling costs and many additional debts. The traffickers have everything under control using violence, threats, fines, physical restrictions, presence of armed guards and impunity demonstrations due to the collaboration with the local authorities. Women and children have no options left after using the little money they had to pay their travelling expenses and they have nowhere or no one to turn to. The risk of being deported or institutionalized (in the case of minors) persuades the victims to keep a long lasting silence".

The paper acknowledged the efforts various countries were undertaking in order to counter the problem. But it also acknowledged that corruption and lack of coordination between high impact programmes, have attempted against the improvement of the situation. The weakness gets real when the time for statistic data arrives. "There are no available figures. Quantification is complicated due

to many causes: lack of coincidence when defining the crime, absence of indicators focused on this special issue, the extremely low number of prosecutions due to the scarce research resources and the absence of reports and law suits related to this kind of trafficking. And the difficulty in identifying the victims".⁴

The document also underlines that trafficking isn't just the outcome of a relationship between the trafficker and the victim; it also involves a social context that develops certain kind of economic and trade relations that favour the situation. Taxi and lorry drivers, hotels, bars and pubs, even legal practice and accountants participate in the crime. Corruption also plays a key role in this process with the participation of migratory employees, custom and police officers. Borders are left without surveillance, controls are not properly done, creating environments where impunity is the rule. And those spaces with lack of legislation are quickly and quietly occupied by crime.

Researchers and experts on human trafficking and smuggling have repeatedly alerted that a large proportion of this phenomenon is due to the sexual services demand located mainly in tourists spots, ports, crossroads, small communities and near industrial areas or agricultural exploitation zones. All this is possible because national authorities tolerate it, because they cannot do anything about it or they do not imagine how to proceed against it.

Another study, made in various Central American countries and Mexico, by Casa Alianza and Ecpat Internacional, concluded that human trafficking, especially of women and children, had reached alarming levels and demanded the implementation of urgent measures to tackle the situation. The research underlined certain trends that can be identified in human trafficking situations: extreme poverty, lack of hope (that produces migration flow), deep vulnerability of poor families that become violent and disintegrated and the formation of a difficult to detect groups of people, organizations and companies in close contact with smuggling and human trafficking. The study- that included Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua y Mexico- also

underlined the fact that the ways of exploitation vary from place to place. “The task of attempting to describe, gain knowledge of and understand the way these trafficking networks operate suggests the complexity of the situation. To the extent that we became clearly aware of the plurality of the people involved in the trafficking and of the existence of several forms of networks –some more organized and some more informal- explains the phenomenon. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude that there is a prototypical organization with a determined logic. To the contrary, the investigation shows that the multiplicity of organisms and situations, in one way or another, are all related to the subject. Being warned by the complexity of the problem suggests the urgent necessity of seeking out integral responses”.⁵

The research also dealt with the lack of adequate border controls, many times due to corruptive behavior that violates law enforcement. The permeability of frontier towns is alarming. The traffic of persons through Central America is an undeniable reality that deserves the creation of instruments for rescue and reinsertion at the regional level. Stories are told of the chilling transfers that demonstrate a great inefficiency in the customs controls and the corruption of the same. It is often said that “on the border everything has a price”. This is a cruel reality when addressing the trafficking of persons...”⁶

The De Paul University research draws the main routs that smuggling and human trafficking use. “Trafficking activity has been detected at all levels. In network terms, the Central American region can be divided following a north-south line, with Nicaragua as a departure point for migratory flow in both directions. A trafficking case that starts in Nicaragua will probably follow a path that includes Honduras, possibly El Salvador and will finish in Guatemala, Belize or the south of Mexico. Women and children are recruited in Honduras to work in El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. El Salvador is a supplier spot for Guatemala, Mexico and Belize. And Guatemala is a supplier for southern Mexico and Belize. From the testimonies and cases that have been collected, we can conclude that the trafficking from Nicaragua towards Mexico is done mainly by road. The flow towards the north is supported by the free transit treaty

signed between Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala and by the relatively weak custom controls. Due to the economic development and the growing sensation of wellbeing at the countries located north of Nicaragua, recruiters are able to offer working opportunities easy to believe. Lorry drivers that travel along the Pan- American motorway, increase the demand of human trafficking and help by providing transport; two “contributions” also made by ports situated along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Prostitution near borders and in big cities also increases the demand from mail clients, workers migrating towards north and the population of working emigrants”⁷.

II.2. A regional instrument

As a result of the Presidents’ meeting on February 1996, the Regional Conference on Migration was created. Many countries participated in that multinational forum on migratory matters analyzing smuggling and human trafficking items. Canadian and United States authorities assisted from the very beginning of the Regional Conference, in its first edition at Puebla, the location in Mexico where the meeting took place, that’s why it was named the Puebla Process. The presence of these officers highlighted the fact that the countries they represented are considered poles of attraction for southern regions, generating migratory flows that had great social, cultural, economic and political impact in their own situation.

Belize, Canadá, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic (and some observing countries) are nowadays members of the Regional Conference. They count with the support of many international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC).

The spirit of the Regional Conference is to “protect and respect the migrant’s human rights, no matter their migratory situation, to support proper and secure migrations, to generate dialogue and cooperation between countries with the

active participation of the social community”. Its recommendations aren’t obligatory for the country members, but they have become fundamental guidelines for the formulation of public policies that the different countries are undertaking.

The Regional Conference has annual meetings with the participation of all the Vice Foreign Secretaries and a country occupies pre tempore the place of the President of the Conference. To attend technical and practical matters, a Counselling Regional Group on Migration was created.

Due to its open spirit and wide support of group of technicians from different migration institutions, the Puebla Process, has granted the international community an ideal space to generate guidelines and practical recommendations for governments. It has also increased the awareness on human trafficking and the facts that hide behind this crime and improved the coordination of efforts to counter it.

III. BELIZE

Belize is, without doubts, a singular country in the Center American context. In spite of being so near Guatemala, Honduras and other Central American countries, its mountains and poor road connections have isolated it, allowing Belize’s economy, culture and political processes to make a difference. Other ingredients also play a role in this story. The country remained a British Crown Colony up to the 21 September 1981 and it still has strong bonds with its former colonizer having inherited the British institutional structure that reflects on the day to day life, for example the language.

Social trends also make Belize different. **235.000** people live on a **235.000** square metres area⁸. It is the less populated country of the region, it has available land and there have been no violent episodes during the last decades and no dictatorships. This rather peaceful picture takes place in a country where

the diversity of the population is very wide: during some years the majority of the population spoke English and their ancestors came from Africa; later on and until now an important Spanish speaking mixed races group has emerged; there are native Mayas, garifunas and minorities from Europe, India, China and Arabic countries.

Belize is a multi-ethnic society that, as such, has a prolific and mixed culture where surprising differences can be appreciated in its language, music and gastronomy. The diversity isn't only cultural, it is also geographical, with an extended plain full of rivers and marshy waters in the north and, in the south, the Maya mountains and a coast protected by one of the longest reefs in the world. This diverse landscape brings infinite productive and trade opportunities. Tourism, of course, is one of the main activities in the country.

With such a multi-ethnic population living in a country that got its independence not so long ago, it is no miracle that one of the books used at school is called "Belize: a nation in the making". And it is true that they are building up their identity. It's not an easy task considering that only some years ago they were part of the United Kingdom and, last but not least, they are very near the United States, an economic and cultural giant that is very attractive for the population. Brain drain is an increasing issue because young professionals seeking for better salaries leave their country towards the United States, the main commerce partner of Belize. Estimates state that 65.000 Belizeans live in the States. What does it mean to be a Belizean? It is an open question that must be addressed from that diverse reality that includes migration flow and population on the move. "Defining what it means to be a Belizean is not easy, and it can tend to increase social tensions. The debate still continues over whether Belize is a Central American or a Caribbean nation. But even more immediate has been the question of who is the true Belizean –the English or the Spanish speaker, the Belize City resident or the immigrant orange picker in Stann Creek? In a multi-ethnic, multilingual nation, however, there can be no single unifying culture, Belize is a potpourri. There can be a national bird or plant, but

not a national food, music or dress. Rice and beans with the stewed chicken is part of the national identity, but so are tamales and garnaches”.⁹

It looks clear, as some local academics point out, that all the social process and the nowadays challenges and problems, are in some way influenced by people on the move. “The demographic changes that are taking place are part of a historical pattern of immigration; this is not the first time, and it probably will not be the last, that Belize’s population structure undergoes changes. How people react to changes, however, is critical for determining the kind of society that will emerge. How to define the nation, and who defines it? The increasingly obvious gap between the rich and the poor is a painful reality. This is not to say it has not existed before, the majorities have always been exploited and they have to struggle for every extra crumb they have won over the years. What is new is that the gap is widening more quickly and that people are more aware of these differences and less prepared to accept them”.¹⁰

III.1. Society today

Belize isn’t a welfare country for everyone yet, but indicators show that there are very good reasons to believe they will be able to build it in the future.

At the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 and at the Millennium Summit in 2000, guidelines were set for different countries. Social Watch, taking into account that Belize has made good progress towards reaching the goals proposed in these two international meetings, maintains the indicators on alphabetization, nutrition and reproductive health are good. Nevertheless, Social Watch also alerted that there are very weak issues related to basic services and children policies.¹¹

Belize has a young population that grows fast. The annual growth is 2,4 %, the life expectancy is around the 75 years of age, and infant mortality has been progressively descending (a 50% between 1987 and 1997) and is now on 19.7 per thousand. The mortality in children below five years old is 23.8 per thousand, a figure well bellow the regional average (34 per thousand).

Childhood immunization of preventable illness is high (90%), especially if we compare it with regional figures.

It is important to underline that the infant mortality rate in children below five years of age was reduced an 18% since 1990. The global fecundity rate (shows the number of expected births a woman lives through her reproductive period, having children at the prevailing rate for each age) is now 3,2; between 1990 and 2002 it descended a 2.8%.

The educative system has its lights and shadows. The primary education is widespread showing a 100% matriculation due to a joint system between the State (that contributes with salaries and locations) and private organizations (mainly religious ones), that take care of the educational issues.

The quality of educational services and the chances of using them are clearly higher than the region's average. There are also more teachers per pupil: 25 pupils for every teacher in primary school and 13 in secondary school. The alphabetization rate, in women and men, is 93%, a good figure that favours the social development.

Nevertheless the educational system has its problems. The National Selection Examination- an entrance exam to secondary education- is approved by 50% of the pupils. The rural area has even lower percentages of success. A number of sources underline that the school level is a reasonable one, but that the school facilities aren't good enough. They also added that parents are not there for their children to help with homework and that books and reference materials are rare at home.

We must mention that only 55% of the children enrolled in primary school finish their studies. Added to this, pre-school coverage is low, making it hard for women to fulfil their selves by participating in the labour market and, of course, the possibilities of increasing the family income, are less.

One of the main issues of the educational system is absenteeism and the high rates of school desertion. The Human Rights Commission of Belize conducted a research on this matter in 2003. By performing 1471 interviews to pupils, teachers and parents, the Commission confirmed that many children miss classes because families aren't really motivated or because the child is working; both reasons obviously interfere with the pupil's education. Absenteeism affects children in the classroom as well as the absentees. It legitimizes compulsory education as optional, part-time and not top priority. Just over half of the children interviewed lived with absenteeism, their own or another's. Nearly a third of the 7 to 14 years old interviewed did not attend school regularly at all. Absentees went to school 3,5 day a week on average, over half of them were working, some as young as 9. Ten was the peak age for absenteeism. Most children wanted to be in school and clearly identified their parents' responsibility for their absence. Almost 20% of parents interviewed had children regularly absent. A third of parents who sought help received none. Teachers interviewed reported an overall absentee rate of 8.48%. Few schools initiated action to address absenteeism.¹²

Other sources were coincident in highlighting the fact that secondary school had a very low coverage rate in comparison to primary school. Even though the education is free, families are used to pay one or more voluntary fees to cover for educational costs. There are many areas where families aren't able to make these payments and can't cover other expenses that school activities demand, so desertion is high.

Finally, the national University offers just a few degrees. This lack of higher levels in education is a real handicap for those who are interested in continuing their studies and staying in Belize. Hence, many young up-and-coming Belizeans, are forced to emigrate.

Although health has improved in many cities, rural areas still suffer disadvantages in this area¹³. A 76% of births take place in hospitals, but only a 15.5% of women receive prenatal care. There are many sources that confirm that the number of children born to adolescent mothers is very high. In addition to this, Belize has the highest prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Central America and is fifth in the Caribbean region.

The efforts performed by the Health Care Reform Project can't be ignored. During these last years, health centers, clinics and a private hospital have been settled in Belize City, as well as a pilot plan, the National Health Insurance.

Many sources pointed out that the services for families at social risk and for disabled children are scarce and that the abusive and violent situations are increasing inside the family environment. Some underline that these phenomena aren't new, what is really new is the fact that –as worldwide- people are daring to speak out about these situations.

Addressing social politics needs to tackle a serious problem that consists in processing social data so as to build a trustworthy image of Belize. The very beginning of this process starts with the relationship between public authorities and citizens and continues with information network and data systems available in Belize. It is of fundamental importance that those who work with data are qualified enough to do so, that the informatic facilities are adequate, that the coordination between organisms is precise and that the information has the widest circulation possible.

The scarce registration of births in the country is an example of the difficulties that exist in this area. The rate of birth registration in Belize is not good. Some studies asses 30% of the births aren't registered.

Even though drinking water is quite extended in Belize's homes, there are some difficulties in the water supply system. A 2002 national research on poverty indicated that a 29.5% got water from wells, a 25.5% had piped water and a

24.3% used filtered water. To sum up, a 49.8% of Belizean houses has an adequate access to drinking water.¹⁴

Another distinctive character of this country's context is the development of a social security system. Every legal resident must be registered in the Social Security and anyone who pretends to get a job must have a social security card. The following is the list of those who can obtain the card: born Belizeans and holder of permanent resident and amnesty cards, holder of work permits, holders of amnesty temporary documents, holders of dependants' permits, holders of refugee cards, holders of student permits.¹⁵ The card offers a wide range of benefits: maternity allowance (this benefit is paid to an insured woman when on maternity leave), maternity grant, sickness benefit (it is paid for a maximum of 39 weeks once the person is medically certified as unable to work), invalidity grant, injury benefit, medical care (if the person suffers and employment injury), disablement pension (if you are injured on the job or while going from home to work or from work to home), disablement grant, constant attendance allowance (following and employment injury or work related prescribed diseases if the insured person is 100% disabled), retirement pension, retirement grant, funeral grant, survivor pension, survivors grant, funeral grant and death benefit (this benefit is payable for a death of an insured person caused by employment injury)¹⁶.

The above indicators are closely related with the main issues of this study: human trafficking and migratory flows.

The mentioned data takes place in a small, open and up-and-coming economy, especially in the service sector related to tourism in the last ten years. We must add the classic economic source of Belize: agriculture and its industries.

The country has had a long term growth in its economy, the Gross Domestic Product grew **3.5%** between 1999 and 2000. After the increase rhythm of GDP was interrupted by, among other factors, natural disasters, in the last years it regained its strength.

Services, bolstered by the booming tourist industry contribute more to the GDP than either primary or secondary productive traditional activities. Primary activities, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining, account for about 18 % of the GDP, while the secondary sector of manufacturing, electricity and water, and construction represents about a quarter of the GDP. When combined with the country's agro industries, agriculture clearly still represents the most important economic activity in Belize.¹⁷

IV. BELIZE, A COUNTRY OF MIGRATIONS

There have been a number of studies on the impacts of refugees and immigrants on the Belize society. However, most tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, and many cover exactly the same ground. They outline the situation in broad terms, but do not go into how these immigrants got to Belize in the first place and if there were problems relating to arrival into the country. There is no existing or previous studies done on Human Trafficking in Belize, which may reflect the lack of relevant literature and the difficulty in obtaining information on the subject. In addition to this we must consider that Human Trafficking is an explosive situation with dangerous criminal connotations, such as sexual abuse and child prostitution, matters that are difficult to address openly worldwide.

None of the available studies have worked within a specific migration paradigm to explain the phenomenon and its effects on the Belizean society, political and economical structures. Contemporary migration literature can be used to understand the basic "push" and "pull" factors affecting migration in and out of Belize.

One of the pioneer studies on refugees in Belize is Montgomery's study. This study¹⁸ focuses on delimiting the refugee population within the broader immigration population. It is useful as it establishes mobility patterns and spatial distribution of refugees within Belize. It offers a broad view of the areas of

insertion within the major industries as well as social issues affecting refugees, such as human rights and living conditions.

One author that has published several studies on immigrants and refugees is Joseph Palacio. His earliest study, in 1990, focuses on the socio-economic integration of Central American immigrants into Belize. Palacio conducted qualitative (non representative) surveys in six case study settlements where Central American immigrants are concentrated. He concludes that the immigrants have integrated into Belize society to a considerable extent through personal relationships. However, the integration process has been overwhelmingly driven by the immigrants themselves and there have been few official programs to facilitate the process. The government has ignored the needs of immigrant communities in terms of infrastructure, sanitation or education, particularly in rural areas, so that the standard of living in immigrants is significantly lower than in Belizeans. Palacio argues that this neglect stems from the prevailing “anti Central American ideology” that is fostered by the media and a big proportion of the ruling decision makers. He shows that this ideology originated in colonial times when Belize was constructed as different from Central America, belonging more to the other British colonies in the Caribbean, and Hispanic people were constructed as inferior to English-speaking Creoles. He argues that although Belize is now more integrated into the Central American region, the ideology remains and gives rise to anti-Central American feeling and stereotypes.

Palacio’s second study in 1992 deals more specifically with refugees. It looks at human rights conditions of Central American refugees and undocumented immigrants in Belize. Although its focus is on human rights in particular, it is useful in outlining the characteristics of the immigrants and the legal and juridical framework under which they entered and settled in Belize. Palacio discusses stereotypes of Central American immigrants as criminals and a burden to society as one reason for widespread human rights abuses.

Palacio, in 1993 works, also tackles the issue of social and cultural implications of immigration and emigration more directly. His comments appear in the transcript of a lecture and not in a full study and so is restricted in scope. Palacio uses some census data as well as his own qualitative observations to argue that migration patterns have led to an “almost complete cultural transformation of the population”. He shows that the emigration of skilled Belizeans combined with the immigration of unskilled Central American has put an economic burden on Belizean society and has led to social problems, but at the same time he points out that immigration is beneficial as it establishes the population size and that “without the labor of foreigners our agro-industries, the main source of the nation’s foreign exchange, would be non existent”. In terms of cultural impacts of Central American immigration, Palacio emphasizes the positive while acknowledging he is being optimistic. He shows how humanitarian support for refugees has been a matter of national pride and has significantly enhanced Belize’s standing in the international community. He argues that immigration has enlarged the idea of cultural pluralism at the same time as bringing Belize’s ethnic groups together in contrast to the immigrants, leading to a renewed appreciation of what it means to be a Belizean. He also thinks that increased contact with Central Americans can reduce prejudices, which can pave the way for better integration of Belize in the Central American region, from which it has been “artificially separated”.

The most relevant precedent to this study is Plaisier’s study of 1996 on the impact of Central American on the political, socio-cultural and economic sectors of Belize. Plaisier uses official statistics, a large number of secondary studies and expert interviews to paint a comprehensive picture of the situation. He shows that Central American immigrants have a widespread and continuing impact on virtually every sector of Belize society. In terms of demographics, immigrants have influenced fertility rates, the sex ratio, the age distribution, the rural-urban population balance and different growth rates in the districts. Immigrants have also altered the ethnic composition of Belize, making Mestizos the dominant group and increasing the importance of Spanish as a language. Plaisier argues that the influx of immigrants from Central America has put a strain on the provision of services, particularly education and health. However,

he also shows that immigrants have greatly benefited the economy overall and that without them, Belize's recent expansion in the agro-export industries and related development would have been impossible. Plaisiers' main argument is that there is the potential for ethnic conflict and a deterioration of the social situation due to a segmentation of society, as divisions of class increasingly coincide with ethnicity. This could lead to a more ethnically based politics and tension between Creoles Garifuna and Mestizos Mayas. Certainly, immigrants have been used to reach political goals and Belize's two main parties are increasingly taking different approaches to immigration, says Plaisier.

Woods and others in 1997 discuss the change in the composition of distribution of ethnic groups in Belize as a result of immigration and emigration patterns in Belize between 1980 and 1991. The studies data is mainly taken from de 1980 and 1991 censuses, but the authors also draw on existing literature to discuss Belize's historical migration patterns. The study examines the changing composition in each district in detail. The author's main conclusion in terms of immigration is similar to that of Plaisier in 1996. They argue that the process has led to "latinization" of Belize, which has slowed down the development of a cohesive Belizean national identity and has created the potential for ethnic conflict, although this is forestalled by the relative location and occupational separation between the various ethnic groups and Central American immigrants, which has avoided direct competition.

A study on international migration in Belize made in 1998 by the Population Unit of the Ministry of Human Resources describes the characteristics of immigrants in Belize and analyses the demographic changes occurring in Belizean society due to immigrant incorporation. This study is based purely on official statistics. This study focuses on certain impacts immigrants have had on the labor force.¹⁹

Another study was conducted by the Arias Foundation in 2000. This is a very general study beginning with an overview of Belize's population composition and distribution and how this has changed during the period of mass migration, before looking at the impacts of immigration from Central America on the

territorial, ethnic cultural and socio-economic levels. The study looks mainly at the negative impacts and the problems that Belize faces as a result of immigration. It shows how immigration has put a strain on basic services such as water and sanitation, education, health and housing. It argues that mass immigration has disturbed the ethnic balance of the population leading to “latinisation” of the country and a growing importance of the Spanish language as well as a decrease in educational levels. Furthermore, the Arias Foundation argues that immigrant settlements in rural areas are a threat to biodiversity and to land ownership rules. The study does briefly touch on two contributions that Central American immigrants have made, namely stabilizing population growth rates and supplying manual labor for export industries, but does not discuss them in any detail. Finally, the existence of stereotypes and anti-foreigner sentiments within the native population are highlighted as a problem for Belize. However, it is argued that to a large extent these feelings are justified due to the strains put on society as discussed above. The study concludes with a discussion of responses to the migratory phenomenon by the government, international agencies and local agencies.

The most up to date quantitative study is the one done by Elizabeth Talbert of the Central Statistical Office in the year 2000. This is the Belize section of a much larger study which analyses census information on migration in the entire Central American region. The study is not theoretically based and uses almost exclusively official statistics mainly the 2000 and 1991 censuses. Although this approach makes it very general and the findings are similar to those of the studies focused above, this is the most comprehensive overview of the findings of the 2000 census available. It deals with all aspects of immigration as well as emigration that are covered by government studies and the census, and it singles out the characteristics, demographic and socio-economic impacts of each immigrant group, and Central American immigrants in particular.

A recent study that takes an immigrant perspective is SPEAR NTUBC in 2001. It looks specifically at immigrant workers in the banana industry. It is based on qualitative interviews with banana-workers themselves, and not on a

scientifically controlled representative sample. The findings therefore can not be generalized, however, they provide a deeper understanding of the working conditions in the banana industry.

Everywhere we find indicators that Belize is in the middle of a very intense immigration wave.

A research made by Elizabeth Talbert shows that the number and proportion of immigrants in Belize have been increasing for the past three decades. The 1980 census recorded 12.940 immigrants representing 9% of the population. These figures increased to 26.204 and 13.8% respectively, in 1991. By 2000 the total immigrant population had reached 34.279 and represented 14.7% of the total population.²⁰ Almost one third of the Central Americans immigrants have settled in the Cayo district in 2000. This district has been most attractive to Central American immigrants because it is the only district that has established refugee settlements that have access to arable land for agriculture. The distribution of Central American immigrants in the districts ranges from 6.5% in Corozal to 17.6% in Belize district. The 1991 figures show that Cayo district had a bigger share (35,8%) compared to 2000 and distribution in the other districts ranged from 9.1% in Corozal to 15.3% in Stann Creek. These figures indicate that Cayo's share of the Central American immigrants is much higher compared to the other districts even though that share has decreased in the 1990s. Corozal district also experienced a decrease in share. However all the other districts experienced an increase in their share of the Central American immigration population.²¹

Some of the conclusions of the study of Talbert, point out the big impact that immigration is producing in the society of Belize, particularly in the coverage of social matters. These effects are very important for our study, because they show an increase of social risk situations. This means lack of resources for family needs, difficulties in school coverage and no responses for the starting up of social deterioration in which family violence, prostitution at young ages and lack of socialization possibilities, became the first step to trafficking cases.

Because trafficking develops when vulnerable populations exist and state and private programs and institutions are not strong enough to fight it or prevent it.

The exceptional growth of the immigrant population since the late 1970s has placed some challenges on the educational system. Some of these challenges include the provision of additional infrastructure. Belize has always boasted 95% literacy. However, data from 1980 and 1991 censuses indicate that adult literacy was 74.3% and 70.3% respectively. The result of a literacy survey conducted in 1996 show that adult literacy increased to 75%. Literacy among the Belizean born population was higher compared to that among the Central American immigrants and lower compared to immigrants born in Asia, the USA and the Caribbean. The health sector has also been impacted by immigration. Most of the Central American immigrants have settled in areas that are breeding grounds for vectors and the incidence of malaria is highest among this group. These immigrants do not always follow the full treatment. The Vector Control Unit of the Ministry of Health reported that in many cases it was difficult to track those infected and give follow up treatment. Data on HIV/AIDS from the Medical statistics indicate that 15% of HIV cases are immigrants. Those from Honduras reported the highest incidence. This country, along with Belize, had the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS compared to the other Central American countries.

Central American immigrants have contributed to the work in the agriculture sector, mainly in the banana and citrus industries. In a study on the immigrant workers in the Belize banana industry, Moberg states when large-scale commercial farming was established in 1971 the majority of banana workers were Belizean immigrants. However in 1982, the farm managers began to lay off the Belizean workers who were unionized. This was in an effort to extricate themselves from contracts with the union. Moberg claims that since then, “the ethnical and national composition of the banana work force has been radically altered”. Moberg further asserts that the “industry’s heavy reliance on impoverished and often undocumented Central Americans has allowed owners

to bid down wages and eliminate benefits...”. Also, the Chinese immigrants have filled a niche for fast food and small shops in Belize.²²

V. HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN BELICE

The people of Belize always were well aware of the high impact that immigration had in their daily and cultural life. Good part of the population has some kind of familiar relation with immigrants. These last years, the media and the public debate have frequently addressed the issues of migration flows and the increasing influence of Latin culture from countries of the region. People also know that Belize is a transit country towards México or the United States. All this means that the issue has been addressed from different environments: daily public debates, mass media coverage, politic speeches and in the public services projects.

Nevertheless, human trafficking as a subject has appeared not so long ago. Two years ago, it would have been very difficult to guess that Belize could be used as a transit country for people who had been previously deceived.

Some people point out that the first time human trafficking was brought up as a real problem was with the well known, although not published, study of George Heusner for Unicef. The research concluded that, although prostitution is legally forbidden, it is widely spread in Belize, that a great number of minors participate in it and that there is an absolute lack of social programs aimed at preventing this situation. The study, that took notice of every single place dedicated to prostitution in the country, concluded that “there are many minors involved in the sex industry in Belize and there exists trafficking of persons for purposes of sexual exploitation between Belize and other countries, specifically the fellow Central American Republics. There also exists a population of native/local persons who are involved in the industry in some form. There also exist those persons who provide sexual services over a long-term period to a single person,

generally older male, in exchange for luxuries that might be obtained in exchange for sex”.

This research is one of the first ones to approach the issue of human trafficking in order to provide the prostitution trade and it also highlights the fact that there are “middlemen” who are in charge of bringing immigrants for this special purpose. The study points out that “the role of intermediaries or middlemen is an important one as they link the sex providers to both owners and clients. These intermediaries facilitate the trafficking of women and girls into Belize and others as the go-between clients seeking these personas and the persons themselves. Those intermediaries who traffic these persons into the country, note that they do so every three to four months and receive cash payments for doing so. The persons brought into the country are given the promise of higher earnings than in their respective home countries”.

The concern on human trafficking reached its peak in 2003 when the United States’ department declared Belize as a major trafficking country and put it on a Tier 3 list.

This was a surprise for many people and officials in Belize. The process started when the United States Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (or TVPA) in the year 2000. This new law requires the Secretary of State to submit a report in June of each year. In it, countries believed to have a significant trafficking problem are evaluated on the report and are classified into one of three “tiers”. Countries assessed as meeting the “minimum standards” for the elimination of human trafficking are classified as Tier One. Countries assessed as making significant efforts to meet those minimum standards, though not yet fully compliant, are classified as Tier Two. Countries assessed as neither complying with the minimum standards, nor making significant efforts to do so, are classified as Tier Three. These last countries are subject to statutory restrictions on non-humanitarian and non-trade-related U.S. Government assistance or, in some circumstances, retaining funding for educational and cultural exchanges. In addition to this, the President could

oppose loans or other utilization of funds (other than for humanitarian, trade-related or certain types of development assistance) with respect to countries on Tier Three only.

Countries classified as Tier Three that take “immediate action” (i.e. within 60 days of the report’s release) to show significant efforts against trafficking may be able to avoid such sanctions.

In December 2003, an amendment to the TVPA was made. It added three new criteria and revised two existing criteria that “should be considered” in evaluating whether a country is making “serious and sustained effort” to eliminate trafficking (the fourth “minimum standard”). Most significant of these revised criteria are the requirement that governments provide to the State Department with anti-trafficking law enforcement statistics and the emphasis on “appreciable progress” made annually by countries.

A “Special Watch List” was created by the 2003 Amendment. This “Special Watch List” must be provided by the Secretary of State to Congress later in the year. Anti-trafficking efforts of the countries on this list are to be evaluated again in a new “Interim assessment” that the Secretary of State must provide to Congress by February 1, 2005. In addition to tracking countries that move up in the “Tier” rankings, the “Special Watch List” also effectively creates a fourth new tier, the Tier Two Watch List, which consists of Tier Two countries determined in this way: 1.- The ones that not have made “increasing efforts” over the past year. 2.- The countries to have improved from Tier Three status based on commitments of near-term anti-trafficking reforms. 3.- The countries that have a very significant number of trafficking victims or a significant increasing victim population.

Belize’s government rapidly reacted to the first classification of the United States State Department. They where well aware of the difficult economic and diplomatic situation they would have to overcome if they didn’t do so. The relation between both countries had grown in a steady way in the last few years;

the United States was the main trade partner and they had strong cultural and political bonds due to their nearness. To be part of that Tier Three list put Belize in an uncomfortable position worldwide because it revealed a weak protection of human rights.

Belize's government implemented administrative measures to tackle this situation and approved a new law to reflect its commitment against human trafficking. The Executive Power created a "Task Force" made up by members of institutions that worked in the prevention and combat against human trafficking, such as social services, the Police, the Migration Department, among others. Controls on borders were increased and the Migration Department started to check on foreign's papers. Some sources pointed out that, as a part of this new strategy, the Police increased the controls in night clubs and places that had been reported as related to "sexual industry".

In this context, the Parliament passed the "Trafficking in persons (prohibition) act". As it is officially explained,²³ the objective is to give effect in Belize to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, which is a United Nations administered Protocol. The Act requires the Director of Public Prosecutions to inform victims of trafficking of their criminal cases in court, provides that the Immigration and Nationality Services shall issue temporary residency permits authorizing a victim of trafficking in persons and dependant children accompanying them to remain in Belize for the duration the criminal proceedings against the traffickers, establishes that the Department of Immigration must develop plans for the safe return of victims of trafficking and that this office must collect and publish, once every year in the month of December, statistical data on trafficking in persons in Belize.

This law as well as the mentioned measures put the human trafficking issue on the public agenda. The awareness of the matter- not only in institutions directly related to it, but in the general public- increased significantly. And this wasn't ignored by the United States. In June 2004, in the fourth annual Trafficking in

Persons (TIP) Report made public, it was established that Belize was placed on the Tier 2 Watch List. An official letter²⁴ made clear that “Belize’s anti-TIP efforts were reassessed to have met the requirements of Tier Two (absent the existence of a Tier Two Watch List at the time) in September 2003, as a result of several government initiatives, including the enactment of a comprehensive anti-TIP law, the creation of a national task force, and stepped-up law enforcement efforts”. Also it said that “Government may expand its law enforcement approach to trafficking by arresting and prosecuting traffickers who are active in illegal migration for trafficking purposes and sexual exploitation, to include holding accountable and government officials or employees who may profit from illegal migration or patronize brothels with trafficking victims”.

Although considering “impressive” the efforts of Belize to combat trafficking, the report stated that “Belize is a transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and debt bondage. Belizean brothel operators contract with traffickers to bring women and girls from Central America into Belize for sex trade. Belizean girls are also trafficked internally for sexual exploitation in the prostitution and pornography. Because of Belize’s lax border controls, illegal migrants, notably from China and India, enter and transit the country. Bound for Mexico and the U.S., many illegal migrants perform labor in Belize to pay off their huge smuggling debts, they may be forced to do this work”. “The Government of Belize does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Belize’s efforts were reassessed to have met the requirements of Tier Two in September 2003 as a result of several government initiatives: the enactment of a comprehensive anti-trafficking law, the creation of a national task force, and stepped-up law enforcement efforts against brothel owners and operators. The government needs to sustain these efforts by arresting and prosecuting the many traffickers who are active in illegal migration and sexual exploitation. The government also needs to address government corruption by removing and prosecuting officials who patronize brothels with trafficking victims or profit from illegal migration. For these reasons Belize is placed on the Tier 2 Watch List”.

In reference to Prosecution, the U.S. government stated that²⁵: “The government’s law enforcement efforts are guided by the anti-trafficking statute enacted in the summer of 2003. Police made 11 trafficking-related arrests. There have been no prosecutions or convictions. Of four sex traffickers arrested in the summer of 2003, one defendant was released on a technicality; three others are out on bail and no trial dates have been set. Police arrested several migrant smugglers (who are often transporting trafficking victims) and should redouble these efforts. Prosecuting corrupt government officials should remain a priority”. “The national anti-trafficking law contains commendable victim protection policies, but implementation is hindered by a lack of resources. The government does not treat victims as criminals, and foreign victims may claim residency status. The government lacks the resources to provide victims with adequate services; the victims are referred to NGO’s for this purpose”. “Belize’s anti-trafficking strategy is set by the national Task Force, which has made considerable progress in coordinating government actions, but has yet to release a national plan. The government conducted a brief multimedia public awareness campaign. The government carried out training of public officials, but needs to devote more resources to protecting the border and devise an aggressive anti-trafficking border policy”.

VI. THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to verify human trafficking in Belize, assess its magnitude and- taking into account its institutional and sociocultural frame- formulate a number of measures to face the situation.

In accordance to this setting, we identified the social risk areas that presented special conditions for human trafficking. We were also especially alert to those social issues that surround human trafficking, such as prostitution, abuse and exploitation.

We defined the profile of the eventual victims and of the possible traffickers, the geographical routes used to perform this crime, the legislation on migration flow and we took a deep look at the public policies on this matter.

The methodology employed in this study included the following steps:

- a) A first round of institutional basic contacts including the Task Force on Human Trafficking created by Belize's government (May 2004)
- b) Adapting to the specific requests of this study the forms used by the OIM in the region, a questionnaire was designed for a second round of contacts and meetings with information sources.
- c) Bibliographic survey of similar studies performed in Belize and the region, including media periodical and occasional reports. The results of this particular phase showed that - as mentioned previously - human trafficking has recently entered Belize's public agenda and only occasionally, specially when isolated cases happen. On the other hand, it is very clear that migration and cross border human flow are issues that matter a lot in the public debate as well as in the collective imaginary of the country.
- d) Second row of institutional meetings going more deeply into the subjects for this study. These contacts included authorities of the three powers of the State. Some of these interviews were open and others stucked to the questionnaire already mentioned. Interviews to confidential sources where also done, they supplied information and preferred to maintain anonymity. Other people such as doctors, social workers, policemen and civil servants from the visited areas (July 2004) had information to add to this research.
- e) Final meeting with Task Force members and other authorities in a workshop where the primary conclusions of this study were analyzed.

- f) Formulation of the general report with its conclusions and final recommendations.

The following instruments were used during this last process:

- a) Interviews with key sources. As this research is mainly qualitative, special care was taken in the selection of sources. Many of them were identified during the second round of meetings or pointed out by trustworthy sources during the study. As it was already mentioned many of the interviews followed the questionnaire previously designed.
- b) Survey of social interventions. Very valuable “inside-the-system” data was obtained from educational programs and community organizations. Their experience and the way they relate to other public or private organizations reveals issues such as the scope for social innovation, level of coordination between public sectors, extent of cooperation and confrontation between public and private areas and the flexibility (or lack of it) of today’s policy features when facing emerging situations (July and August 2004).
- c) Observation. (Ethnographic observation). The study included a trip all around the different zones of Belize, interviewing diverse key sources, especially in social risk areas, conflictive border points and migration or trafficking routes. Border crossing areas, reported as not registered by the local authorities, were also explored. The performance in customs service and migration controls was also addressed. The geography as a propitiating factor for migration flows or economic trade, the similarities and differences between border zones and the impressions of the local population were also taken into account.
- d) Participative observation. In some occasions, researchers mixed with the local population, in order to obtain first hand information not contaminated with other interests that might distort the results. This strategy improved the understanding of each community and allowed the research to

disentangle situations that, at first sight, seemed confusing. The collected data, even though very specific, was very significant for the final result of the study as can be checked on the following pages.

This field-work research demanded the visit to the six districts Belize is divided in: Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo. The visits included the following cities: Belize, Corozal, Santa Elena, Consejo, Benque Viejo, Orange Walk, Belmopan, San Ignacio, Dangriga, Placencia, Punta Gorda and San Pedro. The following villages were also visited: Chen Chen, Blue Creek, Arenal, San Antonio, Jalacté and Hopkins. Up to 30 interviews with key informants using structured questionnaires and around 60 contacts with diverse sources in free interviews were done in order to obtain data for different aspects of the matter.

VI.1. On the field

Human trafficking is part of human migration flow, in this particular case one of the participants in this action is forced, deceived or seduced. On many occasions, human trafficking goes unnoticed and traffickers take advantage of wider migration movements. Hence, trafficking and migration have strong bonds; they both occur in a specific geographical area, in this case, an international region. It is thereafter important to clearly identify the physical and human geography in which this phenomenon develops.

To answer the questions on the extent and magnitude of human trafficking in Belize, it is necessary to get to know its physical and human geography. That is to go around the whole territory, the real stage on which the events take place.

In order to work in a more effective way the study divided the country in three zones: a) West and South (Cayo district and Toledo district), b) the coast and creek regions (Stann Creek district and Belize district) and c) north area (Corozal district and Orange Walk district).

There are various ways to legally enter Belize as a tourist or a visitor. A work permit can also be solicited and eventually obtained after six months permanence in the country. The residence can be obtained after a year of being in Belize, married women get a dependant permit and children a student permit.

A) West and South zone

Cayo district has reached high development due to the multiplication of services for tourists. Hotels, restaurants, craft products and eco-tourism have made good progress in a geographical setting that has every natural advantage: rivers, cascades, hills, caves and vestiges of the Maya culture.

Two miles away from the border with Guatemala and a 100 miles away from Belize City, is Benque Viejo del Carmen. Across the other side of the border line is the Guatemalan city of Melchor de Mencos. The distance between Benque and the building of the Immigration and Nationality Service (that depends on the Ministry of Home Affairs) can be done either by walking or on a cab. The migration offices of Belize's border are modern, they are well equipped with comfortable entrances and exits for those who arrive or leave the building. There are also windows for those who have to declare something. This building is a few meters away from the Guatemalan border post, a very modest construction in high contrast with the Belize's post. On one side of this Guatemalan post, only two meters away, runs a river surrounded by heavy vegetation. While a lot of people go through the border controls, many others walk across the river and, when reaching Belize, they walk to Benque or simply ride some kind of vehicle.

Sources from this post of the Immigration and Nationality Services said that they don't have enough means to control the border line with Guatemala, a strip of land that spreads by the Maya Mountain surrounded by heavy vegetation and rivers. Officers in charge explained that many times they could arrest some immigrants, but never the people that brought them. The immigrants arrive with

a list of contacts that will help them on their way to the United States, crossing border lines between Guatemala-Belize-México-United States.

Days before the visit for this study arrived, three Taiwanese and five persons from Myanmar had been arrested. The first ones had tried to enter Belize on a canoe from Guatemala, they were charged with “illegal entering”, a minor misdemeanor, they had a family member leaving in Belize and had arrived after going through Taiwan, Paraguay, Bolivia, Honduras and Guatemala. A Belizean faked the passports with the photos.

The border is also surveyed by the Police that collaborate with the migration officers. If they find someone entering irregularly to the territory, they take him or her to the migration post.

The “coyotes” are the ones that guide the victims from contact to contact or through the border- legal or illegally- and they assure them that the way they are going through goes directly to the United States.

Migration officers are specially trained to detect those people that try to enter legally but not fully meeting the conditions they declare. A large quantity of people say they are on holidays or visiting the family, but they are really going to take a job or are in transit towards the north of the continent. But the controls aren't easy, the officers assure. They must be done in very few minutes and, if there is a minor delay, the impatience of the people generates an uneasy environment. So, in a too short period of time, passports, labor documentation and other papers must be checked and some questions can be formulated. If doubts persist after this first contact, a secondary inspection is made, including the luggage. What officers look for are suspects of using Belize as a transit country towards other countries.

On the previous days of the researcher's visit, besides the Taiwanese and the Myanmar people already mentioned, five Guyanese were detected, one of them- the one who guided the group- was also a United States citizen; there

was also a man born in Armenia, but with United States papers that came with a group of five Armenians. He couldn't explain what brought them to Belize during the secondary inspection. He had traveled all the way from Armenia, through Moscow, Honduras and Guatemala.

It is common for a group to have someone with United States papers to guide them in order to keep free from suspicions.

Officers said that they checked very closely those situations that could be hiding human trafficking. "If I see a very young woman with somebody older or with a strange appearance, we try to investigate", said one officer. Nevertheless there are no guidelines or protocols to detect these situations, neither a list of clues or signs that officers should watch out for, in order to prevent human trafficking.

Officers from the migration post said it loud and clear: "They cross illegally from Guatemala every single day, but we don't catch them always". There are cases, every day, of people pretending to cross the legal border posts while others just go across it, by foot or crossing the river because there isn't enough surveillance. The means are scarce- there are not boats to control the river, no watching points, radios, warlike talkies or rapid response equipments- to watch such a difficult and permeable geography.

Any way, we were told that 15 arrests are made weekly, of persons that pretend to enter the country without even going through the migration office. If this is the number of detected cases, it's clear that there are much more that occur without being detained. "Human trafficking doesn't go through formal migration posts, it doesn't need to. We need training and a computerized system to process data. If somebody lets us know that 40 miles from here there is a group of people crossing the border, we can't do a thing, we can't reach that spot. We need to have an adequate equipment to face these situations", said an officer.

In accordance to the data, it is very clear that Benque's Migration post is an entering point in Belize. In January 2004, 20.396 people entered and 13.268 left

the country, in February 16.677 entered and only 11.927 left. On March 2004, 16.677 entered and 11.958 left. The pattern is the same every month: the number of people that enter Belize is many thousands more than the ones that leave it.

Another interesting aspect of these phenomena is the nationality of those who enter Belize. If we take January 2004, we have that 291 people came from the United Kingdom, 66 from Belgium, 20 from the Czech Republic, 52 from Denmark, 222 from France, 218 from Hungary, 341 from Holland, 5 from China, 32 from Japan and 14 from Taiwan, among others.

At first sight it would be unthinkable that this small border post- that isn't the only way to enter Belize- could have such an international transit. This fact also calls the attention of migration officers. Even though there are many people that are tourists or excursionists that choose this precise border spot because it is near the jungle region and tropical weather, it is also true that the arrival of people from the remotest places is constant. This could indicate that this place is a busy spot for certain people or organizations in search for alternative routes to the United States. Supporting this possibility is the fact that there are constant arrests or registrations of citizens from Asiatic or Eastern Europe. The researcher for this study was a witness to this last situation.

Periodically, migration officers check people's work permits (given out by the Labor Ministry, valid for one year) and residential cards (with no temporary limits) in bars and night clubs.

In addition to this, due to border conflicts between Guatemala and Belize, Belize's soldiers keep a considerable distance of the frontier line to avoid diplomatic troubles. This is another advantage for those who pretend to enter the country illegally.

Both sides of the border have high interchange. Three hundred children from Guatemala cross the border daily to go to school. Taking a six mile gravel road,

just outside Benque, there's a small town called Arenal, part of its houses are in Guatemala and the rest, in Belize. There's a football pitch that is "cut" by the border line between both countries. Right there, Maya, Guatemalan and Belicean children play together mixing cultures, languages and needs. The researchers for this study could prove that there are Belizean Police patrols covering the byroads that go between Arenal and Benque, controlling the documents of those that aren't locals. The same kind of controls can be seen in checkpoints along the busiest roads of the country. Many of them are not permanent and they check on the vehicles or persons that generate suspicions.

Belize's check post works efficiently. Anyhow, it is notorious that its protection level is low. It has only one armed police for surveillance and the migration officers – even though they could- don't use weapons. If a violent situation arises, the possibilities of intervention are scarce. In fact, some migration officers have suffered aggressions. Arriving to a checkpoint generates a very complex emotional situation for those who do so, that is something to keep in mind.

Migration officers and administrative personnel consider they need to have more training and more detailed guidelines to manage any kind of situation that might arise. There have been courses on fake papers detection, but criminals are permanently developing new techniques to produce illegal documents, so it is really necessary to give this kind of courses on a regular basis.

B) Coast and creek zone.

Belize City isn't the capital city but it is the most important one in the country. Although the central government offices are not in this area, it is without doubt the reference point for the financial activities and a "must" transit spot for tourists heading towards the islands or other regions. It is a special city where the architectural style maintains its colonial constructions: houses built on wooden beams, with verandas and many windows. The city has good

communications and service facilities. The most up and coming sector is tourism and all the activities related to it.

Although the geographical distribution of the population responds to economical levels, there is quite a good social integration between the different socioeconomic and ethnical groups. It is a reasonably safe city and there are no high marginality areas that could be dangerous for those entering them. Nevertheless, people from Belize city have a list of complains: the city isn't as safe as it used to be, criminality has risen as well as the use of drugs, the streets are full of young people that don't work or study.

Even though prostitution is considered a crime, the researcher for this study could verify that it takes places in various places. The observation of these "hot spots" can be especially enlightening for the purpose of this study. Most prostitutes aren't Belizean, some are very young and the place where they are located could be a possible destiny point of trafficking. Many information sources corroborated that night clubs where prostitutes can be found prefer to have foreigner sex workers. The reasons seem to be clear in accordance to one of these mentioned sources: "Belize is a very small country. Everybody knows everybody. Nobody is going to pay for a prostitute that could be run into at the mall the day after. The presence of foreign women assures the anonymity, at least for the local clients".

It must be underlined that the visits for this study were made during July and August, hence the affluence of tourists wasn't at its peak. Nevertheless, the existence of various night clubs where it is possible to find prostitutes was verified. Most of them are called "clubs" or "lounges" and- as prostitution is illegal- they seem to be precisely that, some offer electronic games and, in some cases, a dance floor. When the moment of a Police inspection arises, prostitutes declare that they are just having a drink. If they are chatting with somebody, they say it's a friend and they deny being prostitutes. It is common for these pubs to be attended by women that serve drinks and get paid for them. What usually occurs, it that clients meet women in this places and then

go elsewhere: nearby flats, hotels or the client's own house, because very few of them have their own bedrooms.

There are many of these places in the south zone of the city- Copacabana, A touch of class, Las Gemelas- that with only looking at them it is easy to say that they are not just pubs or restaurants, even though in some of them food is served.

Sources pointed out that recently the number of these locals has diminished. As prostitution is illegal, sanitary authorities don't control the women that work in them. However, everybody knows that prostitution takes place there. Estimations point out that in July the city had twenty of these locations, many of them with very modest facilities.

There are also other kind of prostitution services aimed at higher class tourism and wealthier Belizeans. The Garden Rose, for example, is a big wooden house built up on the Northern Highway that connects the city with the airport. From early in the afternoon until dawn, twenty women participate in nude-shows. The bar and the tables are also there and they can also be used as a place of make contact.

Sources said that women live there, where there are bedrooms for their encounters with clients and that most of them are foreigners, fundamentally from Central America. Many of them stay for a while and, when they go away, they leave their place to a just arrived friend. It is said that there are no children working there and that women working there do so at their own will and are free to leave whenever they wish.

Another place considered as "risky" in relation to human trafficking is the Hotel Princess, a huge resort hotel with casino, movie center and shopping located at the sea side. In a meeting that took place in August²⁶, many people that are related to migratory matters and work against human trafficking, pointed out that there have been reports on prostitution and on foreign women that were kept

isolated in this hotel. The Hotel Princess offers the “Russian dancers show”, performed entirely by women that come from eastern countries. Some versions point out that these women can’t move freely along the country and that their passports remains in the power of the employer that brought them. Sources from the hotel deny this reports and assured that what they offer is a dance show.

With the exception of the cases already mentioned, the “sex industry” doesn’t seem to be massive, or at least it can’t be clearly seen. The usual brochures and classified ads offering escort services and diverse massages usually seen in many world cities aren’t seen. This, of course, doesn’t mean that they don’t exist; some sources pointed out that there are very subtle and discreet ways to offer these services to tourists.

An area that should be specially taken into account is the route that comes just after the Southern Highway up to the border with Guatemala. Turning south, coming from this highway, the road leads to Punta Gorda, from there many roads lead to Maya villages such as Aguacate, Pueblo Viejo, Río Blanco, San Antonio and Blue Creek. At a certain stage the gravel route turns out to be a “long and winding road” full of ups and downs. Finally, it all ends in Jalacté, a small town that doesn’t exist in many maps and has two overland connections with Guatemala. One that is full of cattle tracks marked on the mud and the other one a two mile winding gravel path, that after crossing a barely deep river, leads directly to Guatemala.

The researcher for this study went through this path and could corroborate that the people traffic from one country to the other is constant. Many of them are residents that need to cross daily because they work on the other side or they buy some products.

Within Guatemalan land there’s a town that- as Jalacté- can’t be found in some maps. Santa Cruz has no more than a thousand inhabitants, but has a high trade activity. It has a bank and over twenty shops and stores. For U\$ 100, taxis

can take anyone near the capital city of Guatemala. There are no visible custom, migratory or police controls in the zone. On the top of a hill, nearby, there's a Belizean Defense Forces detachment that mostly plays a symbolic role because they are near the sensitive border area, but they aren't specifically focused on avoiding the illegal flows.

It's obvious that the connection Jalacté-Santa Cruz is an open door within the border line between Belize and Guatemala. It is true that many people must cross it because they live and work in the area, but it is also true that it is an easy way to enter both countries illegally. There are other weak spots along the border within this area.

One of Belize's peculiarities is the barrier reef that runs all along the Caribbean coast, generating a very calm inner sea, easy to sail. It's a sea that also offers excellent opportunities to land on any of the great quantity of beaches along the coast.

Central American people working on the southern plantations of Toledo District and Stann Creek District use speedboats that work on a regular basis to connect from Dangriga with Puerto Barrios and Puerto Cortez in Honduras. Passengers must show their papers when they arrive to the migration posts in Dangriga and Punta Gorda. The researcher visited both posts during the investigation and verified that every formality is accomplished. The migration officers check that every entrance has a residence or a work permit. Tourists must have a visa, fifteen dollars for each day they are planning to stay and they also must provide the address of the place they are heading to. If that place is México, the respective visa is also required.

In accordance to migration officers, many people arrive to work in citrus, banana and sugar cane plantations. The Farmer's Association of Banana and Citrus also communicate to the authorities the landing of workers in order to avoid migration problems. "We study each case when they arrive. If they don't have a single recommendation from the place they are supposedly going to, we

have to evaluate very carefully whether what they are saying is true or not. If they are searching for a job, they have two weeks to do so. No pressure is put on them because we need workers on citrus and banana plantations, Belizeans don't want to work there", explained a Dangriga migration post source. The Immigration Department has scarce human resources to inspect the area and demands employers to clearly state when they employ immigrants so as to have the situation under control. Sometimes, neighbors report foreigners that, they assume, aren't in a regular situation. In order to provide an incentive for plantation workers, the work permits can be given out by the Migration Department, but in other areas it is the Labor Department who is in charge of this task.

The Punta Gorda port has been surrounded by a wire fence to provide more security and speedboats must stay within that area. However, in Dangriga, the Migration post is in the city, a few blocks from the coast and speedboats tie up at a wharf from which passengers arrive walking. A single ticket from Dangriga to Barrios costs 50 dollars and a return one, 35.

Migration officers from Dangriga port, assured that irregular situations don't happen at these ports because controls are a daily practice. Illegal crossovers are common on land. "The Melchor zone is very open, they cross from Guatemala and Honduras", they say.

One fact is clear: those who wish to enter to or transit illegally through Belize taking with them voluntary or forced migrants, have multiple options: there are many landing spots for speedboats coming from south on the coast between Dangriga and Punta Gorda. The sea is calm and safe and the traffic is so high due to tourism and fishing that no movement arouses suspicions. The Migration Department has no boats and the ones that belong to the Fisheries Department don't control passengers' documents because their job is to keep an eye on illegal fishing and depredation. The pair of boats that belong to the Defense Forces aren't enough to control such a vast extension of sea.

Once on the coast, the connections with the main highways of Belize are easy to reach. Illegal migrants can then circulate freely toward north, with the exception of some road controls. In many of the coast towns that this researcher visited during the study, stories of ships coming from Honduras that land illegally are very frequent.

However, it is probable that some of them have the only purpose of transporting those people that want to pay a lower fee than the required at a regular speedboat service and that are heading back to their plantation jobs. But, it is also true that this route can also be used by human traffickers. Different sources said that every week small boats arrive from Honduras and land on desolated beaches or small bays near Hopkins, Seebite and Placencia.

C) The north, Corozal District and Orange Walk District.

Orange Walk grew a decade ago due to the sugar cane boom. It was in that context that it attracted immigrants, night clubs and, hence, became one of the cities with more brothels in the country, there were around forty of them. Today, less than half of these “pubs”, “clubs” and “lounges” survive.

In the north, bordering Mexico, there is a migration post in Santa Elena, a Belizean town next to a Free Zone protected by a wire fence. It offers very good facilities and procedures are very strict. Anyhow, as in other places of the country, migration officers pointed out that the territory has multiple vulnerable points that can be taken advantage of by those who wish to avoid controls. Some sources mentioned the route that goes through Belize, Chetumal (in Mexico), Calderitas, Casa Cualcos, Soto La Marina, Tampico, Matamoros and arrives to Raymondville in the United States; a route that avoids several controls in Mexican land.

It is easy to enter illegally from Belize to Mexico in this area. On one hand, the controls of land posts located near and in the Free Zone to reach the Mexican city of Chetumal, are scarce. But if people don't want to risk their transit by

going through these few controls, they can take a boat from Consejo, a small and discreet village on the other side of the Chetumal bay. Chetumal is very near, it can even be seen from Consejo's beaches and wharfs. Crossing this calm bay is a quick, cheap and safe adventure. In addition to this, from Consejo you can head towards Calderitas or land on lonely beaches of the area. You only need a small speedboat. The researcher spoke with some locals that naively explained how easy it is to reach Mexico and remembered that only a few days ago, a group of documentalists had gone through this same route.

And there are more possibilities to enter Mexico. The researcher was coming back from Santa Elena towards Corozal, when he reached the Chen Chen town. There he took a long gravel road for about 15 miles, going through many plantations areas with no population at all. He finally arrived to a deserted town called Santa Rosa: no houses, no stores, no nothing, but with a path that ends on the shore of a tributary of the Río Hondo. This river is not more than 10 meters wide and has a number of "clues" that would lead anyone to think that it is used as a discreet route into Mexico: drink cans, rests of fuel tanks, food, papers, clothes and places where it is clear a fire was lit. The other side of the river is very near the Mexican towns of Juan Sarabia and Ucum and of the 186 route that connects with Chetumal eastside and with Nicolás Bravo Westside.

Blue Creek is another example that illustrates how easy it is to enter Mexico. This town is in the Orange Walk District, just where a rice valley ends near a foothill, near La Unión, the Mexican town nearby. Blue Creek has a small migration post with a police in charge and an officer from the Customs and Excise Department. There are many spots where anyone can cross the border without going through controls. The Belizean border post is a few miles before reaching Blue Creek and, although there is a small river that separates the town from La Union, that isn't an obstacle because it can be crossed on a small boat, a car or simply walking. La Unión is a small town that grew around a military detachment, it has a central street with stores on both sides.

So it is easy to reach La Unión from Belize. Weak points are many, Mexican custom office is usually unattended and the Belizean post, as mentioned, has scarce staff.

These vulnerable spots are called “landings” and are used as transit areas with no controls; they are also used by smugglers and drug traffickers. In 2004, a light aircraft, full of drugs, got stuck in the area because it broke down. Blue Creek and the nearby town of San Felipe have only one Policeman that doesn't have a car. This is one of the many open spots between this border line. This opening is used by neighbors that come and go to work or to buy some products depending on the most convenient prices.

These weak spots are easy to reach, they connect to important Mexican highways from Belizean roads with scarce or no controls. From this context we can't assume that human trafficking is taking place, but what we can conclude is that, if it really is happening, human traffickers have a great deal of geographical advantages to work.

VII. INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The key institution for migration control in Belize is the Immigration and Nationality Department. It has been under many ministries: the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the National Security Ministry and nowadays it is under the Finance and Home Affairs Ministry.

Efforts are being undertaken so as to offer an adequate training for the migration officers, as well as a career and hierarchical structure within the Department.

During a long time, the direction of the Department was a political post. What employees want is that a full career employee occupies that position. And this is what happens nowadays. On the other hand, political authorities argue that this

position is extremely vulnerable to pressures. It is, hence, not always possible to find the right person within the civil servants.

Nowadays, the department has 60 immigration officers and around 37 administrative and supporting posts. This is not near enough if we take into account that this staff is in charge of seven entrance posts (Belize Airport, San Pedro, Belize City Seaport, Santa Elena, Punta Gorda, Dangriga and Benque) and two immigration desks in Orange Walk and Corozal. In addition to this, they must control border areas, passport issue and travel permits to nearby cities such as Chetumal and Bacalar in Mexico.

When situations of human trafficking occur they are also dealt with by the same staff, there isn't a tactical unit specialized in land control and able to respond quickly to irregularity reports. Highway controls on unusual geographical spots, generated the arrest of over 40 daily arrests; however these procedures have been interrupted due to lack of staff to perform them.

Actions in coordination with the Police have been undertaken as well as with the Department of Customs and Excise that is under the Finance area of the Ministry.

Authorities from the Immigration Department say that "the geographical characteristics of the landscape make it very easy to reach the United States from Belize. It's an open and depopulated land, difficult to control and with not enough human and material resources".

Most of the reported illegal migrants come from Guatemala and Honduras to work in the northern plantations of Belize and in the bananas and citrus plantations of the southern region.

The Immigration Department also informed that a visa is required from those who come from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, work permits are given out for a number of industries and it is possible that many people enter the

country legally and leave to an unknown destiny (towards North) from the different ports of the country.

When residents are reported to be in an irregular situation, their case is looked into so as to determine if they can legalize it or, if on the contrary, the person must leave Belize.

Since the United States critically evaluated Belize on human trafficking- the Department assures- inspections in night clubs and brothels grew, making it more difficult for foreign women to become sex workers. Due to this, Department sources allege, many of these places had to close down or diminish their activity.

The Commissioner of Police says that one of the main actions against human trafficking that they undertake is coordinated with the Immigration Department. They detect illegal residents that work at brothels, plantations or in the construction sector.

Police authorities highlight that prostitution is illegal but difficult to prove. The Commissioner of Police, Carmen Zetina says that “there is almost no prostitution in our country. Strip tease in night clubs is also prohibited, if this happens to occur, then the criminals would be arrested for illegal exposure. But the main Police job is to combat crime. Controlling the situation of illegal persons isn’t our fundamental activity”.

Another key organism to face human trafficking is the Department of Human Services that works on prevention, family support, assistance on cases of child abuse and neglect and child placement, attending foster homes, institutions and adoptions. Taking into account that they take care of social emergencies and vulnerable population, this institution could be the first contact that people in an irregular situation have. This Department has a first hand view of what is really happening in the Belizean community. Its authorities say that “there is a passage through Belize to the United States”. In the human trafficking cases

that have been detected, the Department interviews the victim and provides him or her with a safe place to live in, while their situation is being solved. They are usually people that bring a friend's telephone number in the United States or transit countries. Adults traveling with children are usually called "uncles" (even though they are not really relatives) and take them with their families that have already emigrated to the United States. Illegal immigrants seldom report them as "coyotes" because- unless human trafficking is taking place- they are family friends or, in fact, an uncle. These people often guide more than one family.

When the Immigration Department and the Police detect that they are facing a social risk case, the Department of Human Services is called to intervene. They investigate so as to establish if the people are victims of human trafficking or if they are traveling at their own will. On some occasions they are taken to "safe houses" or institutions and the respective embassies are contacted so as to repatriate them, because they usually don't have money or a place to stay in Belize.

Technicians say that human trafficking is difficult to prove. It is generally presumed that illegal migration webs- in which human trafficking cases could be found- are very well structured and have a rapid response system, even better than the justice or public services' one. The moment a person is arrested their family is calling from the country of origin, wherever it may be.

Since the approval of the Anti Trafficking Act in 2003, six or seven yearly cases of human trafficking have been detected, performed by groups from five to twelve persons, according to sources from the Department of Human Services.

Members of this social agency say that "prostitution is practiced in a very sophisticated way. There's an agreement between the owner of the pub where they are and their pimp doesn't let them down if they are caught, on the contrary, he hires an expensive lawyer that acts quickly". Sources point out that prostitutes may work on their own or may have a strong dependency bond with their pimp. It is very difficult to prove exploitation, without accusatory statements

from the victim, because prostitution, being an illegal practice takes place in pubs and night clubs. Pimping, loitering for prostitution, managing a brothel is illegal, but it is perfectly legal to have a pub or sublet rooms for couples. The margin to avoid the law is so wide that other kind of controls- sanitary and social- is also left out.

Sources also say that it is very rare to see minors in these pubs practicing prostitution. They also admit having seen some situations that could be human trafficking, but these situations are so disguised in other contexts that it is very difficult to intervene and define that specific case as trafficking.

Social services confirm that they have faces very few human trafficking cases. On the other hand, there is a large number of illegal immigrants that cross the border in transit or with the wish to stay in Belize, they have very little money, few personal effects and a confusing destiny. They carry serious social troubles: lack of education, family difficulties and lack of labor training. Many times, social services can't cope with these situations.

When detected, human trafficking cases, produce a strong commotion in the society. This researcher received first hand information on a kidnapping case of a 13 year old girl from the Estor municipality in the Guatemala district of Izabal. She was taken to work in Moho River Boon Cree, in Belize's Toledo District. According to the official files "on the 22nd July, the minor was selling "tortillas" at the market. Around 12:00, a woman called NN approached her and asked where she was working and if she would like to work with her. The minor answered that she had to ask her parents. They went to the girl's house where they found the mother- the father was working. NN offered to pay 700.00 quetzales per month for taking the girl with her to Morales. The mother agreed under one condition: that she and her husband could go and check on the place their daughter would go. They made arrangements to meet on the 25th at 8:30. They finally met at 9:00, NN arrived in a taxi and said that the parents couldn't go, that just the girl was to accompany her and promised to call the moment they arrived.

When the case was reported nothing could be said about NN, only that everything was a lie, that she wasn't in Morales, she was in Belize, possibly in Moho River Boon Check, Toledo District. A request for information to Belize's Interpol was sent. On the telephone, they asked a picture of the girl. A photograph was sent via e-mail (a copy is attached to this file).

Belize's Interpol sent a written report where they informed that on the 29th January 2004, the Police arrested a 67 years old man, with residence in Punta Gorda, South of Belize, charging him with sexual abuse against a minor named NN that was taken to a Hope house for children in Belmopan city. After the girl spoke with the woman in charge of the children's home, it was determined that her real name is NN. As the crime was committed in Belize by a Belizean, the girl will stay at the mentioned place until the case is concluded".

This case, that fortunately ended when the girl was found by authorities, illustrates the high vulnerability some social sectors suffer, they can be easily deceived due to their lack of emotional sources, information and with the disadvantage of having to fight for survival every single day. This case also shows that crossing the border wasn't a problem for those who kidnapped and abused her.

Sources also pointed out another case of an old man that lived with seven girls and teenagers from remotes sites of the country, which had no family ties between them. The situation was highly suspicious but the girls didn't report the man and he said that he simply wanted to help them get on with their studies and that, in that way, he had someone to keep him company.

This year the case of a Belizean boy that was sold to a Guatemalan family was registered. This story reached the embassy of Belize in Guatemala but no one was looking for the minor in Belize. Again, the case shows how from one side or the other of the border line, social vulnerability is fertile land for human trafficking and trade in minors.

Social services also had to work in a case of a pregnant woman that arrived to Belize in exchange of house and food. But when she gave birth, those who had brought her demanded the baby as well. Authorities have now taken child away from the woman that had manipulated the mother, but they haven't found her because she escaped to her country of origin, El Salvador.

According to social service's members, Asiatic communities that arrive to the country keep to themselves and marry within their group in order to maintain their culture and traditions living up to very strict rules. Their language also keeps them at a distance. Sources underlined that there are stores, restaurants and plantations managed by groups that came from Taiwan and China. They don't have any kind of contact with the locals, they hold on to their language and use to it communicates between them. And that there are many situations that could be catalogued as exploitation. As an example, there are small businessmen that bring people from their country and, in exchange for paying for their tickets, house and food, these people work for free. The social and cultural isolation of this population makes it very difficult for them to reach the authorities and report the situation. And if they did, they'd probably wouldn't do it because they are better off now than in their country of origin.

At the Director of Public Prosecutions offices, they maintain that migratory traffic in Belize is very high and that locals at Central America still resist and fear the new comers. Legislation on human trafficking is still new, in accordance to the head of this desk, and, to the moment, has been applied on five cases. He stated that it isn't easy to enter illegally to Belize and head towards the United States, without the help of well organized groups. Everything leads to think that there is a route along Belize heading north. He pointed out that, although prostitution is a crime, it's unthinkable to put every women who practice it in jail. In addition to this it is very difficult to prove it.

A key element of human trafficking is that, according to the Director of Public Prosecutions, illegal immigrants are quickly restored to their countries of origin because there are no facilities to house them while each case is investigated. It

wouldn't be logic to keep them in Police premises. Hence, the Public Prosecutions office never gets the opportunity to look into the cases and can't have the elements to evaluate whether an illegal immigration hides a human trafficking scheme or not. Taking into account these elements, the head of this office and other judicial sources consider that the extent of human trafficking is understated because every case is catalogued as illegal migration.

Other sources from different institutions and agencies involved in social work said that it mustn't be forgotten that for many years Belize has been an attraction pole for women of diverse ages from Central American countries that come to work as prostitutes. This usual and free movement of women may include cases of deceit and trafficking.

There are no joint efforts between social organisms in order to intervene in trafficking, exploitation and high vulnerability cases. There are no global intervention systems for critical situations, no prevention programs, no assistance programs for sexually exploited people, no rehabilitation or reinsertion centers. There are very few programs dedicated to prevention on the streets. As prostitution is illegal, those who practice it remain in a "black hole" where prevention and sanitary and educational programs don't exist. There is a lack of well trained technicians- social educators, specialized psychologists, family therapists, social workers, etc- to face problems of great extent that could be the introduction, the consequence or an indicator of human trafficking, such as family violence, child abuse, children's or teenagers' prostitution and educational desertion.

Social workers also pointed out that during a long time it was common for foreigners to come to Belize in the banana, sugar cane and citrus industries. Work conditions were bad and exploitation was a common practice in these plantations. Nevertheless, the salary was by far better than any Honduran or Guatemalan might even dare to dream, and that explains the high affluence of many family groups from neighbor countries.

Although workers received, in addition to their salary, a place to live in, stores and canteens nearby where also owned by the land owners, so they generated a never ending debt that increased the dependency on their employers.

There are well-founded suspicions that workers from Central America were deceived; when they reached the plantations the working conditions weren't the same they had previously arranged and they had to put up with the new situation. Those who dared to show some resistance or had the initiative of organizing a workers' union were fired or even taken before justice.

However, many sources agree that working conditions have improved in the last years due to European Union -one of the main consumers of these products- claims on the matter. European labor unions threatened to stop receiving and discharging goods coming from countries that didn't comply with certain working and social conditions. The Belizean government also compromised to improve these conditions and increase inspections. During this year, a corporation of banana and citrus plantations stated that they wouldn't interfere with union forming. The claim for better working conditions has been a long lasting goal for some social organizations and some studies on the matter have been financed by European countries. All these initiatives have improved the working and life conditions in plantations: the facilities, electric and water services and the access to school have developed in a very positive way. However, this isn't enough. These zones need more supporting programs for those people that come from abroad to work in plantations.

Members from different agencies pointed out that one of the most disturbing issues are "sugar daddies", a hidden and silenced matter that shows a cultural pattern that happens all over the country. A "Sugar daddy" is an adult man that starts a relationship with a 14 to 18 year girl. This specific relation is more or less permanent and is not hidden, it includes sexual intercourse and the price is goods for the girls' family or money that she can use to finish her studies. The girls' families are usually aware of this situation and they put up with it either because they can't avoid it or because they depend on Sugar Daddy's income.

Sometimes the girl can even have a boy friend and “Sugar Daddy” is considered a “family friend” that has a special affection for her. That would “explain” the presents and the occasions he goes to fetch her at high school. This matter has been also approached by primary and secondary school teachers; they say that it is a negative influence for the affective and psychological girls’ evolution, that it isn’t a healthy relation ship and that it can turn out to be a source of conflicts difficult to manage by these teenagers.

The National Committee for Families and Children has launched some campaigns against this practice but there’s a lot to do yet. Some even consider that the “sugar daddy” issue- with its explosive mixture of sex, affection and money- can be related to future situations of prostitution and human trafficking.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

- 1) **Geography.** Belize’s geography encourages free transit and connection towards other destinies, because it has a wide land border and the sea-protected by a barrier reef- is easy to navigate.
- 2) **Migratory flow.** There’s a large amount of information that proves that Belize is nowadays an attractive place for migratory flows. Not only for those who wish to stay in the country because it offers working opportunities, available land, social security and educational services, but also for those who use Belize as a transit country.
- 3) **Direct Route.** There’s a migrants route that comes from Central America, fundamentally with people from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, with connections from other countries as well, that runs all along Belize directly to the United States.
- 4) **Permanent residence.** There are also illegal immigrants that pretend to stay in Belize. Many times, thanks to family, friends or government’s

actions efforts to legalize these kind of situations, people are able to settle in the country and develop productive and commercial activities.

- 5) **Towards the United States.** It is reasonable to think that most of the illegal immigrants in Belize are sooner or later going to the United States. It is well known in countries of the region that Belize offers working opportunities in plantations. Companies seek for these workers and Belizeans have assumed that these kind of activities are undertaken by foreigners.
- 6) **Very easy.** The illegal transit within Belize towards the United States is very easy because there is a large number of weak entering spots from Guatemala, by land or sea and from Honduras, by sea. In addition to these, and continuing the same circuit, there are many entering places into Mexico, discreet and with no controls. Once in Mexican land, the north way has many options.
- 7) **Walking.** As an example of the above, the field research undertaken for this investigation, allowed to categorically conclude that it is perfectly possible to walk across the border from Santa Cruz (Guatemala) to Jalacté (Toledo District, Belize) and, after crossing the whole country, leave Belize- always walking- going from Blue Creek (Orange Walk District) to La Unión (México). And then continue towards the United States.
- 8) **On the boat.** The investigation could also prove that it is possible to enter Mexico remaining anonymous, going from Santa Rosa (Corozal District of Belize) to Consejo (Corozal District) by simply crossing a 10 meter river. It can also be done starting in Consejo (Corozal District), then crossing the Chetumal bay and landing in beaches of that city or other nearby areas.
- 9) **Many places.** The above conclusions are just some examples that illustrates that there are many places from which anyone can enter Belizean or Mexican land. There's no need to avoid great geographical

obstacles or sail dangerous seas to cross them. Belize's geography is particularly attractive for migration flows and it is no wonder that even before being a colony, the population movements to the south and to the north were an historical constant that has influenced the country from a political, social and cultural point of view.

10) **Organizations and Webs.** The testimonies for this research all agreed in the fact that there are webs or organizations dedicated to facilitate the entrance and transit of illegal people in Belize. These groups have strong local contacts- from important lawyers to middle management public authorities- that if something happens, act very quickly to avoid the consequences for their clients.

11) **Illegal residents.** Although foreigners have the possibility of obtaining their legal residence and working permits in Belize, these papers aren't given out on every opportunity. That's why many illegal immigrants enter Belize trying to avoid controls so as to be able to work in citrus, banana and sugar cane plantations or in tourism or construction area.

12) **Prostitution.** It has been a long term tendency for women to come to Belize, from other Central America countries, in order to be prostitutes. There are also other women that come from more distant countries. There are a large number of foreigner prostitutes because the local users of their "services" consider that this is a way to maintain anonymous. Thereafter, there is always an opportunity in the "sex industry" for foreign women and there is always an informal web ready to "contact" more women when the number of tourists increase or when there is a "vacant" in some of the places related to this practice.

13) **Attractive facts.** According to key informants and various sources, most of the people that enter illegally to Belize to stay, do so because they are having serious trouble at their country of origin. The lack of social

opportunities lead people to leave their country and seek a place where they can make a living.

14) **Prostitution.** Information sources also point out that women coming to Belize to work as prostitutes, are in the great majority adults and come at their own will. But there are also minors and some cases of trafficking reported by the sources. The lack of state runned interventions to prevent and give assistance to prostitutes, the lack of regular controls and studies on the issue, and the non existance of a specially trained police squad to work with women in this circumstances, makes it very difficult to define the percentage of trafficking cases. Probably it is not massive and not worse than the regional average, but anyway demanding a bigger prescence of social services. The women involved and damaged are very young, they have had very hard lives that lead them to this life and they had to make some contacts to enter the country illegally or suffer of pressures or false offerings.

15) **Transit.** Data collected by border posts of the Immigration Department are very clear: every week many people illegally enter Belize with the idea of following their way to the north. It isn't possible to know how this transit is made, but it is also clear that there are organizations dedicated to it.

16) **Hidden reality.** It is a fact that Belize is a transit country for hundreds of people. Hints of this reality appear daily when authorities arrest on of them or when the weak spots are checked out and obvious signs of people in transit can be found. As this researcher could prove at Santa Rosa where empty cans and food boxes told about the river crossing in that spot. It isn't possible to determine how these people are able to go through Belize using it as a "bridge" towards the north. The conditions are given for potential traffickers to do their job without bringing any notice on them. When "in transit", the victims don't know they are being deceived yet (a reality they will learn when they arrive to the desired country), so violence

and manipulation are more difficult to detect in this stage of the procedure, while de victims are travelling. .

17) Plantations. Living and working conditions have improved in recent times in the sugar and banana belts. But they must continue improving. The Ministry of Labour has an important role to play here. Sources and direct testimonies point out that workers in the sector are formally registered with work permits because of the land owners interest of receiving workers from abroad. In some cases also irregular migrants arrive to work, but all indicates that trafficking is not a reality in this area. Although that, labour inspections must be strengthen to assure this, prevent abuses and continue the social development of the sector.

18) Trafficking risk. There are no elements to consider Belize as a massive destiny country for traffickers. Trafficking is a pandemia and surely Belize is not secure against it, as no country is. But there is a high chance of becoming one due to the weakness of the public policies on the matter, specially in what is related to social preventive services. Prevention policies are not reaching the ones who need them more: poor people that are culturally and geographically isolated, working informally in agricultural or construction activities. This situation is highly risky and could lead to human trafficking cases because the authorities are finding it very difficult to make an early detection of exploitation or abuse.

19) High risk. All the conditions are given for Belize to be used as a transit country for persons that are illegally going to the north. No matter if the victims are traveling at own will or being deceived or seduced or forced.

20) Government's progresses. During the last years the government has taken important steps to avoid human trafficking. Belize's legislation has been updated and many administrative measures have been taken, such as labor inspections, closing up of brothels, installation of surveillance posts on some highways and awareness campaigns. But the lack of a web

of social programs with coordinated efforts is still there. The implementation of such a web would allow taking preventive actions and activating an alarm system, not only for human trafficking, but for many other human right's violation activities. As this phenomena overcomes the Police and the justice system, this webs formed by agencies, programs and organizations could launch effective awareness campaigns so as to involve the social community as a whole. The government has undertaken diverse actions but they need to be deepened and widened. Firstly, by creating a unit with enough material and human resources to coordinate and stimulate the social organizations that fight against trafficking. And secondly, by creating a new plan of integrated social services that can work as an authentic social web of prevention and alarm in the battle against human trafficking and other ways of exploitation.

21)**Trafficking prevention.** Actions against human trafficking don't have to be necessarily labeled as "anti trafficking". Of course they are fundamental, but it is also true that not less fundamental are the actions that focus on making the citizens aware of their rights and motivate them to create new labor, educational and cultural opportunities. Apathy, lack of hope, absence of a personal project for the future and scarce personal resources are all ideal ingredients for those who take advantage of other's weakness. Exploitation, abuse, deceit, trafficking and even putting lives at stake, are practices that can be easily developed in those social sectors at high risk.

22)**Coordinating Unit.** The Task Force against human trafficking could be an excellent place to debate and make propositions of new social integration policies as well as permanently following the country events on the matter. Nowadays it doesn't have enough resources to organize campaigns, make research or coordinate efforts with other organisms, although it has achieved important institutional legitimation in this matter.

23)**Absence of programs.** There are practically no specific programs in Belize that offer education, health or rehabilitation for women dedicated to

prostitution. Hence, prostitutes that have been trafficked or abused have no possibilities of asking for help.

24) **Early risk detection.** There are important deficiencies in the very few primary prevention social programs. Programs that should detect the very first signs of damages and problems in children and teenagers at risk, on the streets or at inconvenient jobs. Programs that should also detect difficulties inside the families such as violence, abuse and school desertion. The accumulation of such damages in one person can also lead him or her to be a victim of human trafficking. In short, the lack of social programs that should detect the very first signs of social deterioration produces the very same consequences of human trafficking inside Belize; that is abuse and coercion.

25) **A risky cultural pattern.** The large number of “sugar daddies” cases we received testimony of, leads us to think that they are not isolated cases, and respond to a long lasting cultural pattern. It reflects poverty. It reflects the incapacity of the educational system to detect these cases and offer the students ways to go on studying without having to sell sex for money. Sugar daddies reveal the emotional deprivation many young girls have to put up with, their lack of opportunities and future perspectives. “Sugar daddies” link sex, affection and money from the beginning and that is a risk factor for the psychological evolution of these adolescents. It generates situations that can lead to abuse, submission and even trafficking.

26) **Resources and training.** The Migration Department’s staff has a good vocational training and is highly committed to their task. However, they must limit themselves to just control the “official” border posts because they have serious material and technological deficiencies. The Migration Department needs more migration officers, more administrative assistants, more equipment (vehicles, computerized information, speedboats, etc.) and permanent training courses.

27) **Guidelines.** There isn't a detailed protocol or guidelines for procedures so as to help migration officers to detect possible human trafficking cases.

28) **Modernization.** Although the Immigration and Nationality Service has a large number of computers, the information processing within the border posts isn't adequate and unified, generating an important obstacle for the collection of data. Without this information it's quite impossible to design policies and budgets for projects in the matter.

29) **Lack of data.** Experts agree in pointing out that statistics aren't enough, that the few ones that do exist are confusing and unreliable. There are not enough periodical reports, or annual statistics from ministries or official agencies.

30) **Unreliable information.** There is no updated and reliable information on migratory legal flow. It hardly needs mentioning that the information on illegal flow is highly inaccurate. The figures given out by the Immigration and Nationality Services of Belize open great interrogations. According to 2003 data, a total of 1.050.418 persons entered the country and 839.270 left it. This would have left 157.148 immigrants in Belize. During the last years the same kind of pattern- there's always more people entering than leaving the country- has went on and on. This data doesn't make sense if we confront it with other statistics. If they were correct, then Belize's population would have grown at an incredible speed in these last few years. And that hasn't been verified neither in other social numeric registrations nor by simply observing Belize's society. What could explain this phenomenon is the fact that many people leave the country illegally and, in that way, are not registered. Another possibility is that the information isn't adequately processed so the results aren't correct.

31) **Social Support.** The lack of social services and facilities to house and protect, during a long time, illegal immigrants while authorities investigate possible human trafficking cases, is another obstacle to effectively support

victims. In very few hours, illegal immigrants are sent back to their country of origin. So, if some time later human trafficking is proved, it is always too late to offer some kind of social intervention because the victims have already left. Sources of the judicial power said they can not tell if there is or not trafficking in the country simply because of the lack of information, “we do not know what happens”.

32) Lack of coordination. The Immigration and Nationality Services, the Police and the Office of Public Prosecutions are three key institutions on the matter of illegal immigration (that could include human trafficking). They have many difficulties in addressing the issue in a global and coordinated manner, difficulties that reach another organism that also intervenes in the area: the social services of the Human Development Ministry.

33) Inspections and controls. The Labor Department has personnel shortage and the staff it actually has, needs training in order to control those working areas where conditions are very tough and could lead to exploitation. As these places (banana, citrus and sugar cane plantations and the construction) are always in need of cheap and not qualified workers, they could be a possible destiny for human trafficking victims.

34) At the sea. Controls at sea are not many and the Fisheries Offices focuses on the protection of species. The controls performed by the Maritime Wing of Belize’s Defense Forces are not enough due to the insufficient sources of the institution.

35) Confusing concepts. People on the streets and many middle management public administrators confuse “trafficking” with “illegal immigrant”.

36) Nobodies land. The Immigration and Nationality Services’ resources are mainly destined to the border posts. The Police dedicate almost all of its

efforts to combat violence and crime. So, the surveillance of land and borders is situated in a kind of “nobodies’ institutional land”, an ideal place for migration flow.

37) **Closed communities.** Indian, Chinese and other Asian communities also suffer situations of abuse. But victims are not able to report them because these groups keep a great cultural distance and don’t even share the same language. Belize is lacking programs that target these communities in order to open them up to the integration with the locals. These hermetic structure (it’s good to recognize that there are a few communities that have been able to integrate adequately with the new social environment) prevents any effort to get to know in what conditions and based on what agreements many Asians bring with them the people that will work for them. Many sources point out that there are workers that keep on working in order to pay the expenses of the trip and are not able to change their situation until the debt is paid. Also there are versions of passports been taken away from some people. State agencies have very poor information about this groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.- General recommendations

1.1 *Policies.* The government must assume that Belize has become a usual spot for international migration and that, thereafter, it is possible that human trafficking may be taking place. Hence, every public policy must specifically address this reality in order to prevent and tackle it so as to comply with the international treaties the country has signed.

1.2 *Communication.* The government should adopt an open communication policy so as to increase the social awareness of the problem making every citizen to feel part of the fight against human trafficking. This is a great opportunity to improve Belize's image in the international community.

1.3 *Social Mobilization.* The State, and its institutional support, the government, must summon those who play a leading role in the social scene and urge them to fight against social problems, in this case, against human trafficking, international migration and the impact these phenomena generates.

1.4 *Civil society.* Civil society in Belize is still too weak. There are very few organizations that make significant contributions to the social welfare and complement the State's role. It is necessary to fortify this sector, summoning those people and groups that have a vocation to take over these responsibilities. Paradoxically, it is the State who must open new participation and management paths to share these tasks. The educational system in Belize has proved that it is possible for the private and public sectors to share the responsibility of developing complex social programs. It is now necessary to create ways to transfer resources that could support social organizations that would develop programs of social prevention, attention to the community, informal education and to work on new possibilities for young people that aren't working nor studying.

1.5 *Human rights.* The government must undertake awareness campaigns on human rights. If the community has a deep knowledge of everyone's rights it will then be possible for each citizen to play a leading role in this area, they will then be able to report each human right violation- such as human trafficking with sexual or labor exploitation purposes- that the government means to fight.

1.6 *Unions and associations.* The government must show clear signs of encouragement towards the formation of unions and workers' associations. They must address this matter not only as a legal right but as a fair way to face the social relations in a market economy too. This is especially important in some labor sectors such as agriculture, construction and tourism because these unions also work as alarm and detection systems in order to report specific situations of exploitation, human trafficking and human rights' violations.

1.7 *International Cooperation.* In order to improve its barriers against human trafficking and illegal migration, Belize's government must find support in the human rights' protection international system and in the agreements of cooperation. The Puebla Process is an example of how the regional agreements can strengthen the country's institutions and also update the ways the actions can be undertaken.

2.- Recommendations in the area of institutional strengthening

2.1 *The task force.* The Task Force against Trafficking created by the government must be supported by material, administrative and technique resources so as to become a specialized unit able to constantly diagnose and survey human trafficking in the country. This unit must make its own research, study data from other organisms and have all the information from public and private organizations that work on this matter. It should also follow closely the illegal migration.

2.2 Coordination and public campaigns. The Task Force against Trafficking and the public and private institutions that work on this area need to plan actions and campaigns together, addressing the matter in a coordinated way. The Task Force should publish an annual report updating all the information and recommendations on human trafficking. It should also be able to ask the organizations to be in charge of different areas of the matter, such as prevention or fight against human trafficking.

2.3 The Social Cabinet. In order to create a real social protection network, able to respond as an alarm system ready to take actions when situations of abuse, exploitation and human trafficking occur, a Social Cabinet or a National Social Policies Commission should be installed. Its job would be to coordinate and reunite the programs and resources that already exist and design new actions to face the outstanding matters. This cabinet should be integrated by representatives from ministries, organisms and agencies that work in the social services (health, education, nutrition, family, work, social security).

2.4 Annual Agenda. The Social Cabinet will work on a Social Agenda that each year should be presented to the Prime Minister. This agenda should include the ways in which organisms and agencies coordinate their job as well as the directives to address the matter globally making a call to the social community (parents' groups, companies, volunteers' associations, social organizations, non governmental organizations, etc). This Social Agenda should be broadcasted by the media.

2.5 Resources and training. The Immigration Department must have the indispensable resources to get on with its work. It needs more personnel, training courses for them and, when the time comes to select new officers, increase the level of the curricular requirements. This can be achieved through international agreements on technical cooperation with similar organisms from regional countries and international agencies.

2.6 *Transparency* In order to avoid the lack of information that prevails in many areas, or unreliable data, the government should ask the National Statistic Office to elaborate and communicate to other public organisms procedure guidelines so as to make a National Statistic Yearbook that will be open to everyone. In addition to this, each department and Ministry will make all the efforts at reach in order to offer an open and reliable information to the public.

3. Recommendations in the operative area

3.1 *Intelligent and joint action.* The coordination between every organism that has some kind of responsibility in the area of security and surveillance of persons and merchandise flows must be improved. The Immigration Department, the Police, the **Customs and Excise**, Fisheries and the Maritime Branch of Belize's Defense Forces must make plans together, meet periodically and make global evaluations so as to get to know their weaknesses and results.

3.2 *Information and technology.* The Immigration Department must have adequate technological resources to fulfill its task. Nowadays, the computerized system must be updated in order to ensure the effective communication between all the country's entrance and exit posts and to process correctly the information on migration flows. The Immigration Department should have a fake passport detection system and a quick communication device with the international organisms that centralize all the information on the matter.

In addition to this, the department needs means (communication systems, cars, patrol boats) to improve the control in the border zones.

3.3 *Quick response.* It consists on the creation of a Quick Response Unit, coordinated by the Immigration Department and integrated by members of the Police and other institutions. It should act as a response to specific reports or situations under suspicion of human trafficking.

3.4 *Territorial research.* A complete survey of the whole Belize's territory in order to point out the weak points where illegal immigration is likely to happen, should be done by a unit coordinated by the Task Force on Trafficking and integrated by staff from different institutions.

This group should make practical recommendations to improve the surveillance of entrance spots and to diminish the risk of illegal immigration and human trafficking. It should include the coast zone.

3.5 *At the sea.* A specific plan for the territorial sea and the islands should be designed in order to preserve this marvelous natural resource from becoming an open path for human trafficking. The Task Force on Trafficking would analyze the system supported with the available resources and it could be executed coordinating actions with the Immigration Department and the Maritime Branch of the Belize Defense Forces.

3.6 *Health controls.* The Health Department will draw up a code of regulations that will apply to night clubs where any kind of corporal exhibition is performed, as well as dances, escort services and any kind of services with sexual connotations. In accordance to this regulation, nightclubs should require periodical health exams to each member of their staff. The Health Department should frequently inspect the premises of these places performing preventive medicine as well as giving out specific information on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.

3.7 *Closed and isolated communities.* Communities far away from urban areas such as Maya groups and plantations, or communities culturally isolated such as Chinese and Indian groups should be addressed globally- with clear guidelines- by inspective organisms, social preventive programs and awareness campaigns. The actions should focus on avoiding exploitation situations or the development of environments that could make human traffic an easy task.

The prevention programs and educative actions should respect the beliefs and the cultural diversity of the different communities. It is then very important to identify the community leaders so as to achieve the highest participation and integration to this initiative.

4. Recommendations in the area of victim protection and assistance.

4.1 *Victims and witnesses protection.* The Department of Human Services must have shelters and safety houses for those possible victims of human trafficking that are waiting for a Police or justice investigation.

4.2 *Prevention of prostitution and exploitation.* The Department of Human Services will set up educative programs for women involved in prostitution. These programs should offer alternatives to the activity they are performing at the moment, displaying cultural, informative and labor elements. These actions have preventive effects as well because women who have been forced and deceived into prostitution should find- in these educative environments- someone to trust in that could help them to escape from their situation.

4.3 *Labor Inspection.* Labor conditions should coincide with the country's legislation and international agreements. In order to check this, the Labor Department needs to increase its human resources, fundamentally in the area of banana, citrus and sugar cane plantations, construction and tourism (hotels, nightclubs, lounges, etc.). Officers should not only be motivated to perform their task, but they should also have frequent training courses in order to detect exploitation and abuse situations that could be linked to human trafficking. When inspectors could be at risk because the area is a difficult one or because the owners of the working places don't agree with inspections, it is recommended to involve Police officers.

4.4 *Reports.* A telephonic service should be created so as to offer every citizen a way to report, for free, any exploitation or abuse situation. Situations that could be related to human trafficking.

4.5 *Helplines.* Advice lines should also be installed in order to offer help and guidelines to those people whose rights are being violated. Although these services are not specifically focused on human trafficking victims, they should target on those preliminary stages that could lead to it. People should be able to use these lines to report any abuse against women inside and outside their homes and violence against children or any situation that affects their wellbeing.

4.6. *Permanent training and shared experiences.* The Task Force should create a training agenda that should permanently update migration and Police officers as well as members of every social services related to the matter. This agenda should include workshops, case analysis and sharing of experiences. These meetings should be held, at least, once every six months so as to ensure the continuity and depth of the process. Experts and members from specialized institutions and from countries of the region should be invited in order to keep up with the strategies each one of them draws up to face these situations and to maintain solid institutional links with them.

4.7 *Sugar daddies.* The fight against a risky institution as “sugar daddies” should be faced in an open way by the government and the educational system. A national commission that should be integrated mainly by educators should analyze this phenomenon and its social, cultural, affective and institutional consequences. This commission would design ways to discuss this matter on school books so as to ensure that the pupils receive wide information that should enable them to take well balanced decisions without accepting economic or emotional pressures. Sugar daddies should be addressed openly in public campaigns in order to increase the social awareness of the matter and make families understand that it is a risky practice.

4.8 *Sexual education.* A Sexual Education Program should be included in the national scholar curriculum. It should include the last educational news on the matter and it should avoid violating the right that each parent has to educate their own children.

5.- Recommendations in the legislative-judicial area

5.1 *Resources for the civil society.* Laws should be passed in order to allow public fund transferences to the private sector that will undertake social and educative programs. This partnership between public and private areas will allow joint efforts in high risk areas. Legislation should also address the evaluation of the obtained results by the organizations that received the mentioned funds.

The number of persons each organization is in charge of, the methods they choose to work with and the seriousness of the matter they are working on, should be factors to take into account when the amount of funds is assigned to each institution. In that way, those organizations that work in more risky and complex areas are rewarded. They have to work with abandonment, juvenile crime, prostitution involving children and areas affected by poverty and deprivation.

5.2 *Legalization* Sexual exploitation shall stay as a crime, but prostitution won't. To legalize prostitution means to regulate its practice by adults and strictly control sexual workers so as to avoid any kind of abuse from the owners of nightclubs and hotels.

5.3 *Protection and assistance.* Laws that determine the arrest of illegal immigrants should be changed. Repatriation through international agreements should be implemented and social assistance should be provided while on Belize's soil.

5.4 *Research.* Every case of illegal migration arrest must be quickly communicated to the Office of Judicial Prosecution in order to ensure that evidence of probable human trafficking doesn't disappear when the migrant is repatriated.

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