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# AFFORDABLE NON-STATE SCHOOLS IN EL SALVADOR

Prepared for the USAID Education in Crisis and Conflict Network by  
Results for Development and Education Development Center

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACPES	<i>Asociación de Colegios Privados de El Salvador</i> (El Salvador Private School Association)
AECID	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation
ANSS	affordable non-state school
BBG	basket of basic goods
CDE	<i>Consejos Directivos Escolares</i> (School Leadership Councils)
CECE	<i>Consejo Educativo Católico Escolar</i> (Catholic Education School Council)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECCN	Education in Conflict and Crisis Network
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme
GNP	gross national product
GREAT	Gang Resistance Education and Training
MINED	Ministry of Education of El Salvador
PESS	<i>Plan El Salvador Seguro</i> (Plan Safe El Salvador)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

El Salvador is affected by widespread gang activity, which affects most facets of daily life, including education, for many of the country's citizens. Government schools are seen by many as unsafe, and many households turn to private schools to provide education for their children. Currently, one in every five students enrolled in basic education attends a non-state school, which are primarily concentrated in urban, violence-affected areas. However, because Salvadorian non-state schools have never been the subject of academic study, little has been known about who attends these schools and why, as well as how non-state schools interact with gangs.

This case study, performed by Results for Development (R4D) with support from USAID Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN), examines the role of affordable non-state schools (ANSS) in El Salvador, with a focus on basic education. In this report, ANSS are defined as formal and non-formal education institutions that are owned or operated by non-state entities, such as private citizens, faith-based organizations, or NGOs, and that target lower-income or marginalized populations. The case study is part of a broader research engagement with USAID around the role of non-state education in conflict and crisis contexts that also includes (1) a global review of literature on non-state education and conflict and crisis, (2) the development of a conceptual framework, and (3) a case study of Kaduna State, Nigeria.

El Salvador was selected for in-depth study by USAID because experiences from the country can be compared with those of other countries with high levels of crime, decentralized violence, and erosion of state control. This study represents the first examination of non-state schools in El Salvador and contains valuable lessons for the region regarding the drivers of school choice in contexts of violence.

This case study explores (1) the context of conflict and crisis in El Salvador; (2) the modalities of non-state education provision targeting lower-income populations; and (3) the capacity of these non-state schools to provide quality, accessible, affordable, and sustainable education to low-income groups. Findings from the study informed the formulation of recommendations for donor and government engagement with non-state schools in El Salvador.

### CONTEXT

El Salvador has the highest homicide rate in the world, which peaked at 102 homicides per 100,000 residents in 2015 (UNODC, 2017). Gang activity is closely tied to territorial control, and gang members see themselves as having authority over their neighborhood and its residents, as well as institutions such as schools. Individuals living in areas under gang control are subjected to harassment, threats of violence, extortion, and abuse (ICG, 2017). Territorial gang activity deeply affects community life. In 2014, 54 percent of Salvadorian households felt that their freedom of movement was restricted by insecurity caused by gangs (Cuéllar-Marchelli and Góchez, 2017).

Over a quarter of schools report that their internal security is compromised by gangs, while 63 percent of establishments report being affected by a gang presence in their communities (MINED, 2016a). The territorial nature of gangs severely affects students, particularly when school boundaries are not aligned with gang boundaries. Some students live in areas where they are unable to reach a school without crossing into an area controlled by another gang, and they drop out rather than risk crossing boundaries. For many students, schooling is also interrupted by internal displacement or international

migration, both driven by threats of violence. For those students who remain in school, violence and insecurity have a detrimental impact on the quality of education. Within schools, students face bullying, sexual violence, assault, and physical abuse (Cuéllar-Marchelli & Góchez, 2017). Teachers are rarely equipped to address the needs of students facing psychosocial distress. They themselves are also often subject to threats while in class and in transit to school (UNDP, 2013; USAID/ECCN 2016).

## MAPPING

ANSS account for 21 percent of basic and upper secondary enrollment nationally, with 90 percent of non-state schools operating in urban areas. However, in the urban municipalities most heavily affected by violence, non-state schools account for 30 to 60 percent of enrollment. In these areas, enrollment in private schools is increasing, even as enrollment is dropping in public schools. ANSS fall into two primary groups: fully private and subsidized Catholic.

Roughly 16 percent of students are enrolled in private schools that receive no government support. These may be owned by individual proprietors, churches, foundations, or businesses, and they are principally or entirely funded by school fees. Interactions between government and private schools are largely limited to accreditation. Stringent registration requirements make the up-front investment required to open a school very costly, meaning that few ANSS enter the market, while schools exit the market due to financial insolvency or gang threats. School growth is below the replacement rate.

A group of schools owned and operated by Catholic parishes and pertaining to the Catholic Education School Council (*Consejo Educativo Catolico Escolar*, or CECE) accounts for five percent of basic and upper secondary enrollment. CECE schools enjoy the unique support of the Ministry of Education (MINED). Roughly half of the teaching positions in CECE schools are paid by MINED. CECE schools also receive a per-student subsidy, and students attending CECE schools are provided with the same food, uniforms, books, and shoes that students in government schools receive. None of these benefits are offered to other private schools. CECE schools maintain their original social mission of providing education with a religious orientation to low-income populations.

## FINDINGS

Our analysis finds that **governments, donors, and NGOs are largely unaware of an ANSS sector**. The general perception is that non-state schools serve middle- and upper-class students, are profitable, and are profit-driven. As a consequence, **schools rarely access NGO, donor, or government assistance**. In actuality, **a large number of non-state schools are driven by social missions and serve low-income households**. These schools are largely self-funding, primarily through low fees, which cover operational expenses and are affordable to many, although not all, low-income urban households. However, **some schools have entry requirements that exclude students who are low-performing, present behavioral problems, or do not have committed parents**.

While existing schools maintain financial solvency by relying on community support and by paying teachers at or below minimum wage, **very few new non-state schools are able to open because the demanding infrastructure requirements and safety, health, and sanitation certifications necessary to establish a private school make the cost of opening a new school prohibitive**. MINED subsidization of CECE schools enables these schools to offer fees lower than comparable

private schools while providing greater access to resources. However, **this subsidization gives them a market-distorting competitive edge over other private schools.**

**Families are attracted to ANSS principally because they offer environments that are seen as safer than those of government schools.** In some cases, non-state schools are the only schools that children can reach without crossing gang lines. **Parents are also strongly attracted to the values education, additional education programming, sense of community, and perceived teacher quality offered by non-state schools. These schools effectively create a strong sense of community, engendering commitment to safety and quality education from school directors, teachers, and parents.** Non-state teachers are generally paid less than their public-school counterparts. Notwithstanding, they are perceived as being more dedicated, responsible, and hard-working, which is at least in part attributable to the differences in incentive structures between public and non-state schools.

Non-state schools located within gang territories take measures to protect students and teachers from violence and insecurity, which contributes to **school environments that are seen as safer than those in government schools. Schools associated with congregations or faith-based organizations are also more respected by gangs than secular schools, affording them additional protection.** Sampled non-state schools did not experience problems with gang members within schools. Some schools effectively excluded gang members from enrollment, while in others, students who were affiliated with gangs were well behaved and not problematic.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

MINED, donors, affordable non-state school advocates, researchers, and non-state schools themselves can institute many low- or no-cost, common-sense reforms and activities that could improve the quality of education offered by non-state schools without necessarily diverting resources from public schools to private. Additionally, there are modalities through which investment in non-state schools could augment resilience to violence and access to education.

**MINED should adopt a greater recognition of the size, role, and needs of the non-state sector.** One way this could be done in practice is to **integrate the private sector into sector documents and plans.** Private schools should be seen as occupying an important role in the education sector, rather than existing as separate entities. Including private schools in sector plans would better enable private schools to support MINED goals and support future collaboration between public and private actors. Particularly in the case of *Plan El Salvador Seguro* (Plan Safe El Salvador, or PESS), the government should recognize that families respond to insecurity through private school enrollment and incorporate this understanding into official analyses, policy, and planning.

MINED could also improve the sustainability and efficient operation of non-state schools by **harmonizing the requirements for initial accreditation with re-accreditation requirements and by facilitating the process of registering non-state schools as not-for-profit organizations.** Furthermore, MINED could **investigate expanding the subsidies offered to CECE schools to other socially motivated, not-for-profit private schools.** For example, the same food, uniforms, books, and shoes currently provided to public and CECE schools could be

expanded to more or all students, regardless of the type of schools they attend, as an affirmation of the right to education.

**Donors should ensure that sector engagement strategies incorporate, or at least consider, non-state schools,** given the significant proportion of students enrolled in non-state schools, particularly in violence-affected urban areas. Additionally, donors could consider providing technical assistance to MINED to support the reform of accreditation requirements, support collaboration with non-state schools, improve data collection practices, and develop standardized testing.

**Affordable non-state school advocates should dedicate efforts to changing the popular perception that all private schools are well-resourced, have high-fees, and target high- and middle-income populations.** Correcting the perception that private schools are elite, rent-seeking, and not in need of assistance could result in greater inter-sectoral cooperation and assistance to the sector.

**Researchers should expand on the findings of this report by exploring in greater depth topics such as violence as a driver for enrollment in non-state schools, private school financial models, and non-state pedagogy and educational outcomes.** For example, rigorous quantitative methodology should be employed to better understand the relationship between non-state school enrollment and violence.

Finally, **ANSS should seek out engagements with government services and NGOs.** While NGOs and representatives of government services show initial hesitancy toward working with private schools, this study found that these perceptions often change when actors understand that many private schools are low-resource, operate in violent areas, and serve low-income populations at affordable fees. Sharing this information with service providers could increase the probability of non-state schools accessing NGO or government services and funding. Organizing and advocacy groups, such as the El Salvador Private School Association (*Asociación de Colegios Privados de El Salvador*, or ACPES), could assist in systemic outreach efforts as a service to their member schools.

## II. INTRODUCTION

For many students in El Salvador, education is fundamentally affected by the pervasive gang conflict occurring throughout the country. Although gang violence adversely affects education quality, access, and financing, the intersection between violence and education has not been studied in great depth.<sup>1</sup> This deficit is even more pronounced in non-state schools, as no study has specifically examined non-state schools in the Salvadorian context,<sup>2</sup> much less the interaction between non-state education and conflict. Even as one in five students enrolled in basic education attends a non-state school, little is known about the well-being of students in the sector, including the degree to which non-state education is affected by gang conflict.

This dearth of information may, in part, be fueled by the conceptualization that non-state schools are predominantly elite and do not serve marginalized communities. In actuality, the non-state sector is heterogeneous, as many schools are parochial, foundation-operated, or low-fee. These school types have been studied in depth in other countries (see, for example, Day Ashley et al, 2014; Aslam, Rawal, & Saeed, 2017; Barrera-Osorio, Patrinos, & Wodon, 2009; DeStefano & Schuh-Moore, 2010), but little research has been done in the contexts of crisis and conflict, and never in El Salvador.

Improving our understanding of existing modalities of non-state school provision and public-private partnership (PPP) is a prerequisite to shaping government and donor policy toward non-state schools and to informing the actions of private and nongovernmental actors.

To this end, the USAID Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN) contracted with Results for Development (R4D) to study the role of affordable non-state schools (ANSS) in El Salvador and to provide recommendations on when and how governments and donors might engage with these schools. In this report, ANSS are defined as formal and non-formal education institutions that are owned or operated by non-state entities, such as private citizens, faith-based organizations, or NGOs, and that target lower-income or marginalized populations.

Beyond identifying lessons specific to the Salvadorian context, this study may suggest principles for non-state education provision in other countries and regions facing high levels of gang violence. Findings from this study could be used as starting points into investigations of drivers of school choice, relationships between gangs and faith-based organizations, and government interaction with non-state schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies on this subject are primarily limited to UNDP (2013), Savenije & Van der Borgh (2014), and Cuéllar-Marchelli & Góchez (2017).

<sup>2</sup> The one notable exception is a series of studies on EDUCO, the community-led, publicly financed schools that are now defunct.

This case study is part of a broader research engagement with USAID around the role of non-state education in conflict and crisis contexts that also includes (1) a global review of literature on non-state education<sup>3</sup> and conflict and crisis, (2) the development of a conceptual framework, and (2) a second case study in Kaduna State, Nigeria. This broader research engagement is focused around eight key research questions:

1. What are the unique features of a crisis and conflict context that might impact the education sector and, within that, the ANSS sector in particular?
2. What is a conceptual framework that describes the key considerations regarding whether and how ANSS can play a viable role within the education sector in situations of crisis and conflict?<sup>4</sup>
3. What are the major constraints and opportunities that ANSS face in contexts of crisis and conflict?
4. What role could ANSS play in conflict and crisis contexts, particularly in rebuilding the country's education system?
5. What role must the host-country government play in ANSS in crisis and conflict-affected countries?
6. To what extent do ANSS promote equitable access, holistic well-being, sustainability, and social cohesion relative to public schools within the context of crisis and conflict?
7. What are the prerequisites that must be in place within the crisis and conflict-affected countries to ensure sustainable investments in ANSS?
8. Are there exemplary ANSS models that provide insight on how donors and governments can best leverage and capitalize on ANSS in crisis and conflict-affected countries?

The objectives of the El Salvador case study are to (1) map the non-state education sector in El Salvador; (2) identify and develop profiles of select affordable non-state school types; (3) investigate the degree to which non-state schools provide quality, accessible, affordable, and sustainable education in a context of pervasive local conflict; and (4) propose considerations for the government and donors on how they might engage with the non-state sector to deliver conflict-sensitive, quality education services to poor, marginalized, and hard-to-reach populations.

This report is organized as follows: (1) a summary of the study's methodology; (2) a discussion of system context, including the situation of gang violence in El Salvador and background on the country's education system; (3) results from the mapping exercise that details the primary affordable non-state school types; and (4) a discussion of the major findings and recommendations for system actors.

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<sup>3</sup> Focusing on primary and lower secondary schools. Some sampled schools include upper secondary instruction. Pre-primary and tertiary education were not included in the study.

<sup>4</sup> The conceptual framework developed for this study is included in the main report, "Affordable Non-State Schools in Contexts of Crisis and Conflict."

### III. METHODOLOGY

This case study's methodology centered around two primary tasks. The first task was to map the non-state education sector, which involved identifying primary actors, including the various types of non-state education providers in the formal and non-formal sectors, as well as organizations such as donors, NGOs, and ANSS-support organizations that interact with non-state education providers. The second task was to study non-state school quality, financing, access, and accountability, as well as the relationship between non-state schools and gangs. To complete these primary tasks, data were collected through document reviews, school visits, and key informant interviews.

#### A. ANSS SELECTION

Schools in El Salvador's formal education sector fall into three broad categories of ownership and administration, namely public, private, and *Consejo Educativo Católico Escolar*<sup>5</sup> (CECE). Public schools are administered by School Leadership Councils (*Consejos Directivos Escolares*, or CDE),<sup>6</sup> and they make up the vast majority of the formal educational offering, accounting for 79.2 percent of enrollment in 2016. Private schools are owned and operated by private actors, are funded primarily through school fees, function largely independently from the Ministry of Education (MINED), and enroll 15.7 percent of students. CECE schools, which enroll the remaining 5.1 percent of students, are a PPP between Catholic schools and MINED. These schools are owned and operated by Catholic congregations, parishes, or dioceses, but they receive some funding from MINED and charge fees. While MINED classifies CECE schools as public,<sup>7</sup> they are privately owned and operated and are partially self-financed. For the purposes of this study, they are considered non-state.

#### **Box I: A note on terminology: Public, non-state, and private**

For the sake of clarity in this case study, the term *public* will only be used to refer to CDE schools. *Non-state* refers collectively to CECE schools and privately managed schools that do not receive MINED support. *Private* will be used to refer specifically to privately owned and privately managed schools that do not receive MINED support. Unless otherwise specified, *private* only refers to schools within the study's scope, meaning that elite schools are also excluded. While CECE schools could be broadly defined as *private*, this semantic distinction will be made for greater clarity.

Given the study's time and resource constraints, it was not feasible to conduct a fully representative sample of violence-affected ANSS in El Salvador. Instead, purposive sampling was conducted in line with several guiding principles:

- **Schools should be affordable to low-income families.** Based on the assumption that a family can affordably spend 4 percent of its household income to educate one child without making significant sacrifices in other areas (Barakat et al., 2012), we find that a family at the poverty line

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Education School Council

<sup>6</sup> A second modality of public school administration exists in prisons, juvenile detention centers, and public shelters. Only 28 Institutional Education Councils (*Consejo Institucional Educativo*, or CIE) existed in 2016. Because of their small number and for the sake of simplicity, these schools are aggregated into CDE totals, even though they are in fact administered differently.

<sup>7</sup> Consequently, CECE schools are aggregated with CDE schools in many MINED statistics. To the extent possible, statistics for public schools have been disaggregated into CDE and CECE. Wherever this is not the case, it is noted.

(earning \$380 per month) could reasonably afford a monthly fee of \$15 per child.<sup>8</sup> While schools were sampled to include a range of monthly fees to provide greater representativeness of the sector, the majority of sampled schools have monthly fees below or near the \$15 per month threshold. Elite and high-fee schools were not included in the sample.

- **Schools should be located in violence-affected areas.** Schools were sampled from the 10 highest-priority municipalities under *Plan El Salvador Seguro* (PESS),<sup>9</sup> which prioritizes government attention on municipalities with the highest rates of violence. PESS focuses its attention on 107 schools within these high-priority municipalities, including several non-state schools. Four schools were sampled from the list of PESS priority schools.
- **Schools should represent a range of the most important provider types.** Schools were sampled from provider types that are most widespread or have the greatest potential to positively impact the sector. Schools were also sampled from organizations with an explicit focus on serving low-income or marginalized populations.

In line with these principles, seven schools were selected from the 2016 School Census (MINED, 2017b). The process for narrowing down the selection of schools is presented in Figure I. Table I provides a brief description of the seven selected schools.

**FIGURE I: SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS**

Number of schools	Private	CECE
...in El Salvador	897	167
...in the 10 highest-priority PESS municipalities	441	59
...on the PESS priority school list	5	6
...selected for study	4	3

*Other considerations included diversity in provider type, size, fee range, and geography; cost; availability of contact information; and safety of the researchers.*

<sup>8</sup> See Annex I for a complete methodology and discussion of this threshold.

<sup>9</sup> PESS is an inter-sectoral plan, drawn up by the National Council for Citizen Security and Well-being, that focuses on dialogue and consensus to combat violence. Fifty prioritized municipalities were named to implement five central intervention strategies: violence prevention, crime control, rehabilitation, victim care and protection, and institutional strengthening. The 10 highest priority municipalities under PESS include Colón, Santa Ana, Ciudad Delgado, Mejicanos, Soyapango, San Salvador, Sonsonate, Zacatecoluca, Cojutepeque, and Jiquilisco.

**TABLE 1: DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLED SCHOOLS**

	OWNERSHIP	ENROLLMENT	FEES	LOCATION	NOTES
1	CECE	1,670	Monthly: \$6–\$13 Registration: \$10	Soyapango	Fe y Alegría
2	CECE	440	Monthly: \$10 Registration: \$10	Ciudad Delgado	PESS priority school
3	CECE	800	K–9 monthly: \$25 K–9 registration: \$40 High school monthly: \$0 High school registration: \$50	Santa Ana	PESS priority school
4	Liceo Cristiano Reverendo (LCR) Juan Bueno	1,400	Monthly: \$26–\$45 <sup>10</sup> Registration: \$41–\$186	Soyapango	PESS priority school; cross-subsidization
5	Independent, for-profit association	630	Monthly: \$20–24 Registration: \$32–\$35	Colón	PESS priority school
6	Independent, for-profit individual	150	Monthly: \$15 Registration: \$18	Ciudad Delgado	
7	Independent, for-profit individual	70	Monthly: \$20 Registration: \$40	Mejicanos	Multi-grade classrooms

Source: Authors' analysis

## INTERVIEWS

Each school visit consisted of an interview with the school director, a focus group of two to six teachers, and a focus group of five to seven parents.<sup>11</sup> School directors selected parent and teacher participants, meaning that selection was non-random and potentially not representative. A total of 64 individuals participated in interviews or focus groups held during school visits over the course of the study. During the school visits, general school conditions were also observed.

Individual or group interviews were held with individuals from a wide variety of organizations that work directly with non-state schools in particular or with the education sector in general. In total, 32 informants were included in the individual or group interviews. A description of informant groups is located in Annex I.

<sup>10</sup> While the sampled LCR Juan Bueno school had higher fees, these fees are used in the cross-subsidization of other LCR Juan Bueno schools, which charge as little as \$2 per month.

<sup>11</sup> The visit to school 4 consisted of a director interview and teacher focus group. The visit to school 7 only consisted of a director interview.

## LIMITATIONS

The following limitations should be taken into account when considering this study's findings:

- The study's scope primarily focused on basic education.<sup>12</sup> Several sampled schools offered upper secondary levels, and some findings relevant to secondary schooling emerged as a result. Findings from this study may not be applicable to early childhood or tertiary education.
- The sample is heavily weighted toward medium- and larger-sized schools. Roughly half of all private schools have an enrollment with less than 150, but only one school with less than 150 students was included in the sample. Several such schools with appropriately low fees exist in the municipalities of interest, but they were unavailable or unsafe for visits at the time of the study.
- Selection of participants in teacher and parent focus groups was not random and likely not fully representative. Participants were chosen by school directors. In more than one case, the parents selected were also teachers or volunteers at the school, meaning that they likely had higher-than-average levels of commitment, participation, and approval of the school.
- Students were not interviewed as a part of school visits. The study focused on parent decisionmaking, school management, and the relationship between education ministries and the non-state education system. Student perspectives on gangs and violence were incorporated from the recent Rapid Education and Risk Analysis report (USAID/ECCN, 2016).
- Because of time and resource constraints, comparable public schools were not visited as part of the study. Therefore, any comparison between private and public schools is based on the perceptions of participants, views of experts, or existing data and literature. Furthermore, as parents who do not send their children to private schools were not included in the interview sample, the study does not include outside parental perceptions of private schools.
- No truly lay schools were sampled. Four of the seven sampled schools belong to religious associations. The remaining three were not affiliated with a church or faith-based organization, but they did include religious instruction or practices. The study was unable to identify what proportion of private schools—if any—does not incorporate religious instruction.

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<sup>12</sup> Encompassing grades one through nine. Grades one through six are considered primary, and grades seven through nine are considered lower secondary.

## IV. CONTEXT

El Salvador is a relatively small but densely populated country, with a population of 6.6 million within its territory of 8,123 square miles (DIGESTYC, 2017). Approximately 37.3 percent of the population lives in rural areas. The country’s population is very young, with 37 percent under 18 years of age and 22.6 percent between the ages of 10 and 19 (UNICEF, 2014).

Household poverty is measured based on the cost of a basket of basic goods (BBG). Households with total monthly incomes below the cost of the BBG are considered to be in extreme poverty; those earning less than twice the cost of the BBG are considered to be in relative poverty. Table 2 presents extreme and relative poverty lines for average-sized households in urban and rural areas of El Salvador, as well as the proportion of households living below those rates.

TABLE 2: POVERTY IN EL SALVADOR		
	RURAL	URBAN
Average household size	3.85	3.54
Extreme poverty line	\$128.78	\$189.85
Percent living in extreme poverty	10.4%	6.4%
Relative poverty line	\$257.57	\$379.70
Percent living in relative poverty	27.1%	23.5%
Average household income	\$368.61	\$646.99

Source: DIGESTYC, 2017

The following sections outline the context in which non-state schools operate, including the education system, the context of gang violence, and the way in which gangs and insecurity adversely affect the education system.

### EDUCATION SYSTEM

Formal education is regulated by the MINED and has five levels: early childhood, preschool, elementary, secondary, and higher education. Both public and private providers exist for all of these levels. Table 3 describes characteristics of each level of formal education.

**TABLE 3: DESCRIPTION OF FORMAL EDUCATION LEVELS**

LEVELS	NORMATIVE ATTENDANCE AGE	GRADES	SCOPE
Early Childhood	0–3	–	Family and community-based care and education (nutrition, stimulation, socialization, socioemotional development, language and cognitive development, etc.)
Preschool	4–6	<i>Kinder 4, kinder 5, and kinder 6.</i>	School-culture preparation, early literacy and math awareness, social and natural environment awareness
Basic	7–15	1 <sup>st</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> divided in three, 3-year cycles. 1 <sup>st</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup> composed primary education, and 7 <sup>th</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> composed lower secondary.	National curriculum (core subjects), social values
Upper secondary	16–17	First and second year of high school (10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> grades); a third year for technical diplomas.	National curriculum (core and specialized subjects), social and democratic values
Higher Education	18+	Technical and university degrees (undergraduate and graduate) provided by universities and technical schools.	Professional-oriented education: technical two-year degrees; three-year teaching degree; licentiate five-year degrees; and some specialized graduate programs

Source: Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 1996; Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2004; MINED, 1994; MINED, 2013.

## EDUCATION FINANCE

Important advances have been made in expanding the education budget, which doubled between 2005 and 2015, reaching \$914.3 million and representing 3.5 percent of the GNP (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2015). In the 2001–2011 period, 93.75 percent of funds came from the central government, while 5.81 percent from loans and 0.44 percent from donations (Rivas, 2013). Between 2001 and 2011, MINED allocated on average 58 percent of spending to salaries and remunerations, while 20 percent was assigned directly to schools for expenses, 13 percent to goods and services, and the remaining on capital investments and fixed assets (Rivas, 2013). Following a teacher pay increase, this allocation shifted significantly in the 2014–2015 school year, where salaries of teachers and administrators consumed 73 percent of the operating budget (MINED, 2015c). An additional \$80 million, provided as part of the President’s Universal Social Protection System, was invested annually in uniforms, shoes, books, and supplies for students in public schools to encourage enrollment and lower household educational costs (MINED, 2015c).

## TEACHER WORKFORCE

A total of 57,761 teachers are working in the national education system, of which 77 percent work in the public sector and 20 percent in the private sector. An additional 3 percent work in both private and public schools (MINED, 2017c).

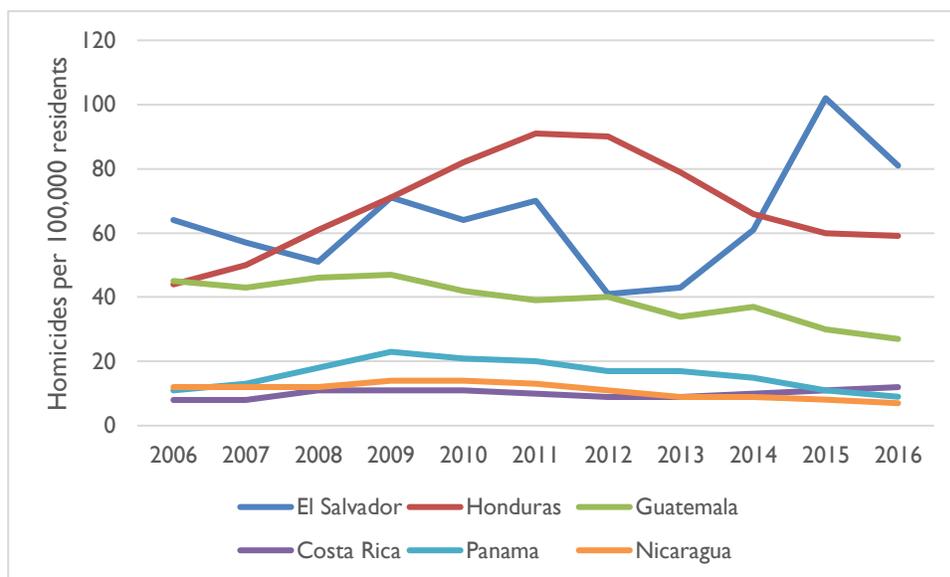
Teacher training is an exclusive responsibility of the state, according to the Constitution, but it has been largely delegated to private institutions. Although the Teaching Career Law demands that the MINED plan and prepare a sufficient and necessary number of teachers to cover educational needs, supply and demand have not been successfully harmonized, leading to an oversupply of teachers. There are 16 different pre-service training institutions which offer a choice of either a three- or a five-year degree. A MINED-compiled list of individuals with teaching certification includes 94,529 individuals (MINED, 2017d), 39 percent of whom are not currently employed as teachers. This figure suggests a large oversupply in the teacher workforce.

Teachers are granted posts in public schools through a centralized process managed by the national selection board, which assigns teachers to schools (Hernández, 2014). Upon graduation, recently trained teachers may have to wait as long as 10 years to be assigned to a position in a public school, as the law gives priority to those who graduated first. In 2013, 57,787 applications were received for a total of 890 teaching positions on a national level (Hernández, 2014). Once a government teaching position is obtained, however, the teacher is guaranteed a stable salary and lifelong job security—by law, teachers are very difficult to fire.

## GANG VIOLENCE

Gang violence has become endemic in El Salvador in the post-civil war period. Following the breakdown of the 2012-2014 gang truce, homicide rates spiked, reaching a peak of 102 homicides per 100,000 residents—the highest rate of any country. Beyond the alarmingly high homicide rate, insecurity caused by gangs permeates every element of society and profoundly affects social processes, including education.

**FIGURE 2: HOMICIDES PER 100,000 RESIDENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES**



Source: UNODC, 2017

The roots of the current gang crisis can be traced to the extensive immigration to the United States during the civil war years from 1980 to 1992, which fostered gang formation in the United States and weakened family and social structures in El Salvador (USAID, 2006b). In the post-war period, historical youth street gangs and school rivalries were nurtured by a weakening social fabric, scarce economic opportunities, and new gang models resulting from mass deportation from the United States in the 1990s (Cruz, 2007; Savenije, 2009). Among the characteristics of this new generation of gangs was their settlement in marginalized, urban communities, extreme violence, access to arms, and participation in other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking (USAID, 2006b). Currently, the primary driver of insecurity and violence is the ongoing warfare between the two predominant gangs, Barrio-18 and Mara Salvatrucha 13, with several other, smaller factions also contributing to the conflict.

The activities and impacts of gangs are inseparable from local geography. Gang identity is closely tied to territorial control, and gang members see themselves as having authority over both their neighborhood and its residents. Gangs consequently see themselves as controlling the schools within their territories and may seek to use them as a source for new recruits (USAID/ECCN 2016). Individuals living in areas under gang control are subjected to harassment, threats of violence, extortion, and abuse (ICG, 2017). Gang members demand respect and deference from neighbors and youth who are not gang members and who are seen as potential recruits. (Cruz, Rosen, Amaya, & Vorobyeva, 2017; Savenije, 2009). Gangs are deeply woven into the fabric of society. For many individuals, gang members are neighbors, cousins, children, or siblings (USAID/ECCN 2016). The estimated 70,000 gang members in El Salvador (out of a total population of 6.5 million) support over 400,000 family and community members with their income (ICG, 2017).

Territorial gang activity deeply affects community life, not only for youth but for families and neighbors as well. The control of public spaces by groups associated with violence forces families to seek refuge in their homes and makes venturing into another gang-controlled territory a potentially life-threatening endeavor (INCIDE, 2016; Savenije & Andrade-Eekhoff, 2003). Gang members are also involved in violent conflict outside of their areas of control, which contributes to a general environment of insecurity (USAID/ECCN 2016). In 2014, 54 percent of Salvadorian households felt that their freedom of movement was restricted by the insecurity caused by gangs (Cuéllar-Marchelli & Góchez, 2017).



Aerial view of San Salvador

EDFUENTESG/ISTOCKPHOTO

## **EFFECTS OF GANG VIOLENCE ON EDUCATION**

Given the pervasiveness of gang activity and the desire for territorial control, it is impossible to fully separate gangs from schools and society. In a systemwide survey of public schools, over 63 percent of establishments report being affected by a gang presence in their communities, while nearly 28 percent of schools report that their internal security is compromised by gangs (MINED, 2016a). Between 2010 and 2015, 466 students and 23 teachers, including five school directors, were killed by gangs (Cuéllar-Marchelli & Góchez, 2017).

The territorial nature of gang activity severely affects students, particularly when school boundaries are not aligned with gang boundaries, and it can be dangerous for students to cross boundaries between gangs to reach school. If the school is located within one established gang's territory, violence is generally less of a problem. If it is in an area disputed by multiple gangs, the threat of violence is greater (USAID/ ECCN, 2016). Some students live in areas where they are unable to reach a school without crossing into an area controlled by another gang, and they drop out rather than risk crossing boundaries. Even if students do not drop out of school, they may stop attending temporarily because of violence in their communities, interrupting the education cycle. Furthermore, some students are perceived as a risk to a school merely because they are from certain neighborhoods. There are reports that schools may be pressured by gangs to refuse enrollment to students because they live in a certain neighborhood, even though they are not affiliated with a gang.

In 2016, 24 percent of schools reported<sup>13</sup> that students dropped out due to gang violence, the third most frequent cause next to internal migration (63 percent) and emigration (55.9 percent) (MINED, 2016a). These reasons are not mutually exclusive, as emigration and internal migration are driven by threats of violence. The influence of gangs in causing dropout could be considerably higher than reported, as these data are self-reported and have not been externally verified. Indeed, schools in municipalities with the highest levels of violence are also those with the highest rates of dropout (USAID/ECCN 2016).

In recent years, progress in expanding education access has been reversed. The primary net enrollment rate increased from 86 to 95 percent between 2000 and 2009 (Rivas, 2013) but had fallen back to 86 percent by 2015. This decline in enrollment can at least in part be attributed to the collapse of the 2012-2014 truce between gangs, which included an agreement to not affect schools (ICG, 2017). Although MINED has been successful in maintaining the operation of schools in gang-controlled territories, the decline in enrollment has been driven by family-level decisions regarding the safety and well-being of children (USAID/ECCN, 2016).<sup>14</sup> Other factors that contribute significantly to dropout include lack of interest on the part of the student, disability, cost of or distance to school, and a student's need to enter the labor market (DIGESTYC, 2017).

Families are left with few options when confronted by threats of violence in their communities and schools. Some households relocate as an attempt to escape the violence, which may disrupt education continuity. They may also elect to send their children to schools that are closer to home, or that do not involve crossing gang boundaries in order to attend. Families may contract private transportation to ensure safety for their children to and from school, rather than risking transportation by foot or by public bus. However, some of these options require the availability of extra income, excluding much of the population. When faced with the real threat of violence, many parents, especially those with limited means, may choose instead to withdraw their children from school.

For those students who remain in school, violence and insecurity have a detrimental impact on the quality of education received. Within violence-affected public and CECE schools, students face bullying, sexual violence, assault, and physical abuse (Cuéllar-Marchelli & Góchez, 2017). No data are available regarding the nature and prevalence of violence in private schools. Violence affects students' psychosocial well-being, and teachers are rarely equipped to meet the needs of students who have undergone trauma.

The presence of gangs makes schools a place of risk and weakens teacher authority (UNDP, 2013). In some cases, teachers cannot exert authority over students who are gang members, as they are afraid of reprisals. Teachers also must confront the threat of violence within and in transit to school and sometimes miss class as a consequence (USAID/ECCN 2016).

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<sup>13</sup> These figures represent perspectives of school leadership and indicate the proportion of schools experiencing a certain type of dropout, rather than the proportion of students dropping out for a given reason. As student-level tracking is not in place, it is impossible to tell what proportion of students classified as dropping out are actually changing schools or transferring to a private school rather than leaving the school system altogether.

<sup>14</sup> The degree to which demographic trends are also contributing to the decline in enrollment is unclear, as a national population census has not been conducted since 2007.

## V. MAPPING

The education system of El Salvador is organized on three levels: (1) the central Ministry of Education (MINED), (2) departmental offices in each of the 14 departments, and (3) 5,132 individual public and 897 private schools. Decisions on general guidelines for administrative, curricular, and financial issues are determined at the central level and passed down to schools via the departmental structure. The departmental offices house the technical-pedagogical assistants, who are responsible for visiting public schools and conveying information from the central MINED offices. Departmental offices conduct the annual school census and respond to complaints about private schools. Interactions with private schools rarely extend beyond this, although there is some variation between departments. Private schools are accredited, supervised, and coordinated by the central MINED's Institutional Accreditation Office. They do not necessarily receive MINED pedagogical or management support, and there are no clear guidelines on the department-level relationship with the private sector.

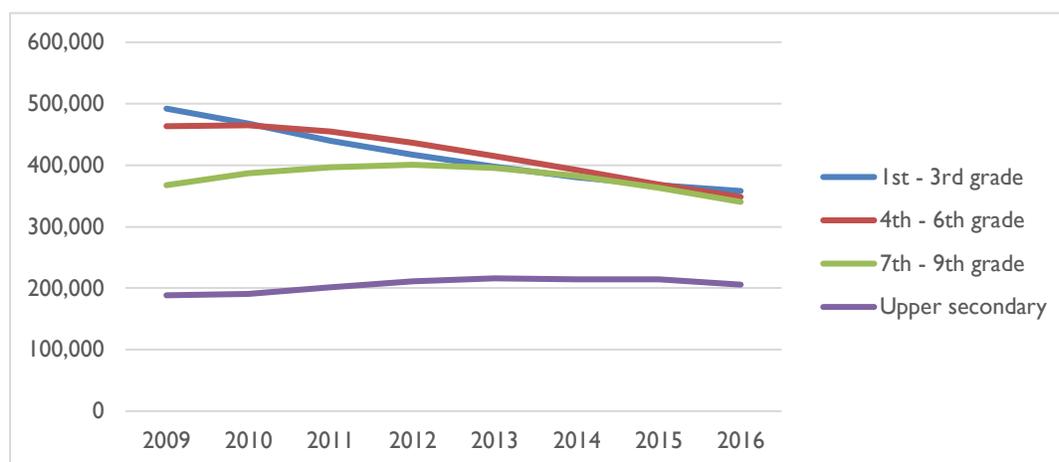
The Constitution designates that the state has responsibility for education provision but allows caregivers to choose the type of education they desire for their children. Consequently, a variety of education modalities beyond strictly MINED-provided formal schools have proliferated, in both the formal and non-formal sectors.

[Section A](#) describes the universe of non-state education providers within the formal education system. [Section B](#) describes other relevant non-state actors that collaborate with formal public schools or operate in the non-formal education sector.

### **SECTION A: AFFORDABLE NON-STATE SCHOOLS**

Over the last decade, the formal education system has seen a continual decline in total enrollment, as demonstrated in Figure 3. Much of this decline can be attributed to demographic trends, as the country's fertility rate has steadily fallen from 4.0 in 1990 to 2.1 in 2015 (World Bank, 2017). Since 2014, the proportion of enrollment in private schools has seen only marginal growth (Table 4).

**FIGURE 3: TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY LEVEL, ALL SECTORS 2009–2016**



Source: MINED, 2015a; MINED, 2015b; MINED, 2016b

**TABLE 4: TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY SECTOR<sup>15</sup>**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Public	1,586,448	1,611,094	1,583,737	1,551,691	1,516,311	1,395,585	1,249,242	1,184,661
(%)	82.8%	83.4%	82.6%	81.7%	81.1%	84.7%	80.2%	79.2%
CECE	-	-	-	-	-	-	68,429	76,396
(%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.4%	5.1%
Private	328,972	321,512	333,969	346,573	354,319	251,798	239,039	234,495
(%)	17.2%	16.6%	17.4%	18.3%	18.9%	15.3%	15.4%	15.7%
Total	1,915,420	1,932,606	1,917,706	1,898,264	1,870,630	1,647,383	1,556,710	1,495,552

Source: MINED, 2015a; MINED, 2015b; MINED, 2016b

Aggregated statistics obscure underlying trends, however. Specifically examining changes in enrollment in non-state schools in the 10 highest-priority PESS municipalities,<sup>16</sup> all of which are severely violence-affected, indicates that non-state enrollment is not only much higher in these municipalities, but that it is growing. In 8 of the 10 municipalities, the proportion of enrollment in non-state schools in 2016 ranged from 28.4 percent to 61.2 percent, which was one-and-a-half to three times the national average. In 8 of the 10 municipalities, the proportion of enrollment in non-state schools increased between 2015 and 2016—in two cases, by roughly 4 percent. Nine of the 10 municipalities saw a decrease in total public enrollment—consistent with national trends—but 6 municipalities saw an increase in the total number

<sup>15</sup> Prior to 2015, school census data did not disaggregate CECE from purely public schools. Consequently, enrollment figures from 2009 to 2015 include CECE in public totals.

<sup>16</sup> See Annex I for a breakdown of 2015-2016 enrollment by municipality.

of students enrolled in non-state schools, suggesting a transfer between public and non-state, with gang violence being a potential driver.

An overview of the three main groups of formal-sector education providers is displayed in Table 5, following which private and CECE schools are described in greater detail.

<b>TABLE 5: OVERVIEW OF FORMAL-SECTOR SCHOOL PROVIDERS</b>			
	CDE	CECE	PRIVATE
Ownership	MINED	Catholic church (parish, diocese, or congregation)	Individual, association, business, faith-based organization
Funding	MINED	Partly MINED (teacher pay, per-student subsidy), partly school fees and donations	School fees; some receive donations
Household cost	No registration or monthly fees, but schools occasionally request contributions. Uniforms, shoes, books, and some food are provided. Students must pay for transportation.	Generally requires registration and monthly fees, but lower than most private schools. Uniforms, shoes, books, and some food are provided by MINED. Students must pay for transportation.	Registration and monthly fees. Students must purchase uniforms, shoes, books, food, and pay for transportation.
Teacher pay	Monthly salary ranges from \$652 to \$1,173, depending on degree and years of experience. Benefits provided. Permanent contracts.	Roughly half receive MINED salary and benefits. Non-MINED teachers receive salaries ranging from below minimum wage (\$300) to being comparable to MINED.	Salaries are generally at or below minimum wage and may not include benefits.
Management	School leadership councils, made up of principal, teachers, parents, and students.	School leadership councils as a consulting body, under the direction of a Catholic priest, bishop, or congregation.	Leadership varies by owner.
Regulation and oversight	MINED, through directives from the central office via departmental offices. Technical-pedagogical advisers make periodic visits.	Accredited by MINED, guidance from Episcopal Conference, with decentralized management. Technical-pedagogical advisers make periodic visits.	MINED accredits every 2 to 5 years, but other contact with MINED is minimal.

Source: Authors' interviews

## PRIVATE SCHOOLS

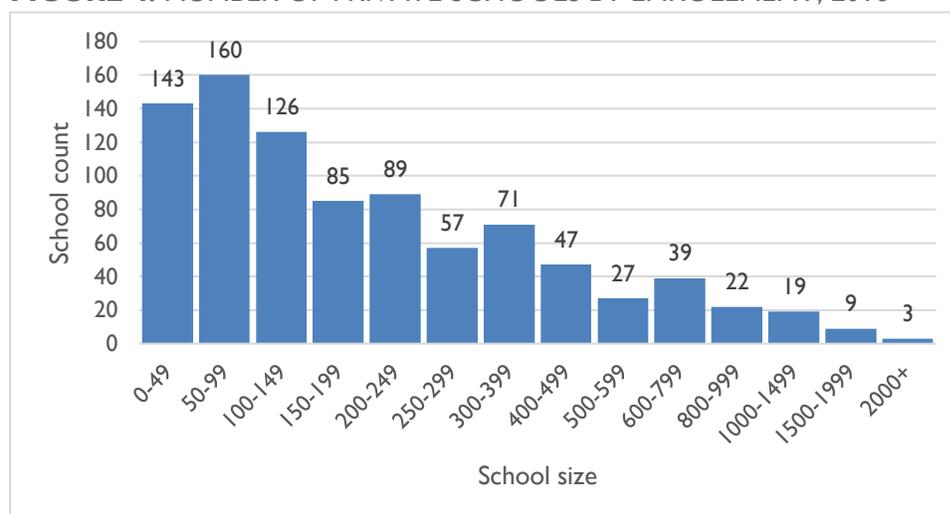
According to the 2016 El Salvador school census (MINED, 2017b), 897 private schools operate in El Salvador, equivalent to 14.9 percent of all schools operating in the formal sector. These schools collectively enroll 234,495 students, equivalent to 15.7 percent of all formal-sector enrollment. The number of private schools in operation has fallen steadily since 2009 (Table 6), with the exception of a jump in private school numbers between 2013 and 2014.<sup>17</sup> Interviews conducted through this study indicated that closure of private schools was driven by financial insolvency or threats by gangs, and that the up-front cost and bureaucratic difficulty of opening a new school limited the number of new schools each year to two or three, a rate well below replacement.

**TABLE 6: NUMBER OF SCHOOLS BY TYPE**

	2009	2010	2011	2012 <sup>18</sup>	2013	2014	2015 <sup>19</sup>	2016
Public	5,008	4,998	5,003	5,185	4,990	4,956	4,977	4,969
CECE	171	180	169	-	182	181	157	167
Private	983	951	923	898	890	925	915	897
Total	6,162	6,129	6,095	6,083	6,062	6,062	6,049	6,033

Source: MINED, 2015a; MINED, 2015b; MINED, 2016d

**FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS BY ENROLLMENT, 2016**



Source: MINED, 2017b

<sup>17</sup> Representatives of the Institutional Accreditation Office theorize that this jump may have been precipitated by the publication of new regulations in 2012, which clarified rules and may have made more schools willing to open, or may represent a backlog in new school openings pending the publication of the regulations. The true cause of this jump is unknown.

<sup>18</sup> MINED did not disaggregate schools by administrative organization in 2012. It is consequently unclear how many of the 5,185 public schools were actually CECE, given that CECE schools were aggregated into the public total.

<sup>19</sup> It is likely that some CECE schools were erroneously coded as public in 2015, making the 2015 count of CECE schools artificially low.

MINED classifies private schools as small (fewer than 250 students), medium (250–599 students), or large (600 students or more). As of 2017, 603 private schools are small, 202 are medium, and 92 are large (MINED, 2017b).

The vast majority of private schools are located in urban areas. In 2014, 34.4 percent of all schools in El Salvador were urban.<sup>20</sup> However, 90.2 percent of private schools operate in urban areas. Most of El Salvador’s private schools (51 percent) are located in the department of San Salvador, with another 17 percent in La Libertad (MINED, 2017a).

### *Ownership*

The majority of private schools are owned by individuals, small associations, or businesses and are not part of chains or networks. Commonly, smaller schools will be established by an individual or small group of teachers seeking to create schools that address problems seen in the public sector and targeting students living in the neighborhood. While these schools are not necessarily affiliated with a church or congregation, they often incorporate some sort of religious instruction. Many congregations or faith-based organizations also own and operate their own private schools, which vary in size, fee level, and target population. In general, these schools admit any student who is willing to abide by the school’s code of conduct, irrespective of religion.

Several school groups or networks do exist, most of which are associated with churches. The largest such group, affiliated with the Assemblies of God church, is the *Liceos Cristianos Reverendo Juan Bueno*, which operates 37 schools. The Seventh Day Adventist church operates approximately 24 schools using a model similar to that of Liceo Cristiano Reverendo (LCR) Juan Bueno. Several other school networks or chains are in operation, although they are not necessarily low-fee. These include at least 22 schools run by Baptist churches, several Salesian and Marist congregations, and the Oasis bilingual school chain.

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<sup>20</sup> However, roughly half of all students are enrolled in urban areas (50.4 percent in 2016; MINED, 2017a). A multitude of small schools operate in rural areas, hundreds of which have only one or two teachers. Urban schools, by contrast, are generally larger.

## Box 2: Liceo Cristiano Reverendo Juan Bueno

The LCR Juan Bueno network of schools was established in 1963, and by 2003, the number schools had grown to 37. Each school is attached to a congregation of the Assemblies of God church, but the schools are both administrated and financed centrally. The school network has a charitable orientation, maintaining its vision of helping the poor by employing a cross-subsidization model.

LCR Juan Bueno schools fall into three general categories:

1. Four to five schools charge higher fees, serve a more affluent population, and offer a higher quality of education. These schools generate a profit, which is used to subsidize schools serving lower-income populations.
2. Roughly 15 schools are self-funding, or come close to it.
3. Seventeen schools serve lower-income populations and receive subsidization. In addition to being funded through profits from schools with higher fees, between 3,000 and 4,000 low-income students have their education subsidized by domestic or international sponsors. Students attending subsidized schools are charged a symbolic fee of \$1 to \$2 per month.

Roughly 15,000 students are enrolled across the network's 37 schools, which have a total of about 900 employees, including 540 teachers and 60 staff in central offices.

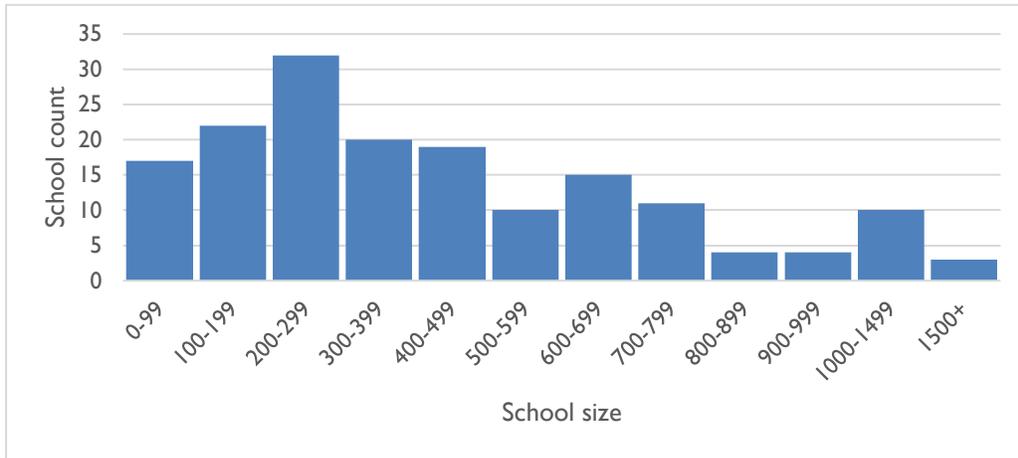
## CECE SCHOOLS

CECE schools are owned and operated by Catholic parishes and are members of the Catholic Education School Council. They enjoy a unique collaboration with MINED. In 1964, the Catholic church in El Salvador began establishing parish schools with the purpose of expanding access to education. In 1966, these schools received official government recognition, and since 1976, MINED has paid the salaries of a portion of the teachers in CECE schools. Currently, MINED assigns a specific number of teaching positions to CECE schools collectively, and these are apportioned to individual CECE schools at the archdiocese level. Individual CECE schools are then responsible for hiring teachers for each of the MINED positions. Teachers in those positions are paid by MINED rather than by the CECE school and receive MINED salaries. CECE schools receive a per-student subsidy, and students attending these schools are granted the same food, uniforms, books, and shoes as students who attend government schools. CECE schools are the only private schools to receive this kind of government support and subsidization. CECE schools maintain their original social mission of providing education with a religious orientation to low-income populations, and they operate in many of the most violence-affected regions of the country.

In 2016, 76,396 students enrolled in CECE schools, equivalent to roughly 5.1 percent of El Salvador's total basic and secondary enrollment. These students were distributed across 167 schools in 2016. The number of schools pertaining to CECE fluctuates year to year, as Catholic schools independently elect to participate or withdraw from the association. CECE schools are on average larger than fully public or

fully private schools—their average enrollment is 457, compared to 238 in public schools and 261 in private schools.

**FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF CECE SCHOOLS BY ENROLLMENT, 2016**



Source: MINED, 2017b

### Ownership and Administration

CECE schools are organized on a parish, diocese, or congregational level and are run by a priest, bishop, or religious congregation, respectively. Usually, the church owns the infrastructure and is managed with a model similar to public CDE schools, per MINED requirement. This form of management includes mechanisms for parent, teacher, and student participation in decisionmaking. Nevertheless, the church hierarchy has decision-making power to place and remove both principals and teachers and to decide how MINED teacher positions are distributed to the CECE schools. A central structure exists across CECE schools to give guidance, but not funds. MINED officially classifies CECE schools as public, although they are in reality a PPP.

### **Box 3: Fe y Alegría in El Salvador**

*Fe y Alegría* has been the subject of extensive study throughout Latin America for its ability to provide quality education to low-income populations at a low cost. *Fe y Alegría's* activities have not been studied in El Salvador, nor through a conflict lens.

In El Salvador, *Fe y Alegría* operates two formal schools, which form part of the CECE network, as well as four vocational training centers. In addition, *Fe y Alegría* has made individual arrangements with 14 government schools to provide support through a collective leadership model, teacher training, violence prevention and community strengthening programs, and pedagogical support.

One *Fe y Alegría* school was visited as a part of this study. The school is quite large, enrolling over 1,600 students. Its fees range from \$6 to \$13 per month, depending on the grade. While much of the school's enrollment is drawn from lower-income households, many of which subsist below the minimum wage, the school is seen as offering a very high quality of education.

While this school is located in an area under gang control, it is respected by gang leaders and members, partially because many gang leaders attended the school as students. Because of this respected status, students and teachers are not threatened by gangs within or near the school.

## **SECTION B: OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS**

Government, donor, and NGO support of formal schools in the private sector is rare or nonexistent. However, a multitude of models of PPPs exist in the education system, primarily through donor, NGO, and private-sector support for public schools, but also through government partnership with private actors for the provision of alternative models of education. Examples of these partnerships are presented below. Note that these examples are illustrative rather than comprehensive.

### **DONORS AND NGOS**

Many bi- and multilateral donor organizations, both large and small, provide support directly to public schools or support the MINED with technical or financial assistance. Both GIZ (Germany) and AECID (Spain) provide support to violence prevention and employability activities within public schools. The Millennium Challenge Corporation has invested heavily in education infrastructure and provides support for teacher training, learning assessment, vocational training, and education quality. UNICEF's work focuses primarily on technical assistance to MINED and support to early childhood development. Finally, USAID supports MINED's expansion of full-time inclusive schools, gang prevention activities in schools, and centers for out-of-school youth. In 2014, 25.6 percent of public schools reported receiving support from donor organizations (MINED, 2015c). In 2016 (MINED, 2016a), 41.1 percent of public schools reported receiving donations from individuals or institutions. NGOs provide interventions at all levels of the educational cycle in the formal sector. Types of interventions include teacher training, support for holistic child development, violence prevention, life skills training, and technical and vocational training. Examples of NGOs that support public schools include FUSALMO, Glasswing, *Fundación Educo*, *Servicio Social Pasionista*, FUNPRES, Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, CIDE, and Compassion International.

## PRIVATE SECTOR

Public schools also receive support from private-sector actors, primarily through matching programs, complementary education, and scholarships. Examples of matching programs include Adopt a School, which focuses on improving infrastructure, providing teaching and learning materials, and financing teachers or school psychologists, and FESA (the Salvadorian Education Foundation), which offers physical education and sports programs. Additionally, complementary education programs, such as *Supérate* (managed by *Fundación Sagrera Palomo*) and *Oportunidades* (managed by *Fundación Kreite*), identify high-achieving public-school students from marginalized communities and provide supplemental education in English, computer skills, and life skills. These programs have linkages to the labor market and are designed to help students prepare for employment in fields that require use of technology and a knowledge of English. Finally, NGOs and businesses provide scholarships to high-achieving public-school students. These efforts are often linked to violence prevention (MINED, 2015c).

## EDUCAME

One of the most extensive examples of public-private collaboration in education is MINED's EDUCAME program. EDUCAME is a free accelerated or alternative education program offering six modalities to adults and youth over the age of 15 who did not finish secondary education or the third cycle of basic education. Three of these modalities are provided through PPPs:

1. Accelerated education, in which students can complete the third cycle of basic education in 18 months, or lower secondary education in 12 months, rather than the normal three or two years, respectively. Accelerated courses use a condensed curriculum, providing instruction five days a week with eight-hour school days.
2. Semi-present education, in which students must attend eight hours of class per week, adapted to the student's schedule. Often, this takes the form of night classes. This modality is designed to accommodate youth or adults who participate in the labor market. Under this modality, third cycle basic or secondary education could be completed in two years.
3. Virtual education, in which upper secondary education can be completed online.

The three additional modalities are provided directly by MINED and include traditional distance education with weekend classes, night school, and a sufficiency test. MINED implements each of these three modalities and certifies student achievement. The private providers hire and supervise teachers and identify sites for instruction, including churches, community centers, or public or private schools. In 2016, a total of 50,203 students were enrolled in EDUCAME modalities, with their distribution across programs presented in Table 7.

**TABLE 7: ENROLLMENT IN EDUCAME MODALITIES**

MODALITY	ENROLLMENT
Accelerated	888
Distance education	15,645
Semi-present education	5,650
Night school	23,606
Sufficiency test	3,951
Virtual education	463
Total	50,203

Source: MINED, 2017e

## VI. FINDINGS

The findings that emerged from interviews, focus groups, and document review are presented in the following four categories, which were developed through this study's conceptual framework. These categories represent four traditional domains of analysis of non-state schools: (1) accountability and social cohesion; (2) access and inclusion; (3) quality, security, and student well-being; and (4) education financing and sustainability.

### ACCOUNTABILITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

#### **I. Government actors, NGOs, and donors are largely unaware of the low-fee private school sector and have widely assumed that private schools are profitable, profit-driven, and cater to the elite and middle class. As a consequence, private schools do not access government services and are ignored by donors and NGOs.**

The opinion that all private schools are profit-driven is present among high-level education ministers as well as in regional education offices. Government actors were surprised to hear that a significant number of private schools charge fees below \$15 per month. Outside of the Accreditation Department, current or former MINED officials did not believe that private schools should receive government support, as these schools were perceived to have sufficient resources generated by high fees. Apart from CECE schools, all other private schools receive no systematic support from MINED and little support from other government departments. While the policy arrangement for supporting CECE schools has survived over time, it was criticized by some government actors, who see it as unnecessary or excessive based upon the perception of private school profitability and elite status. One expert stated that MINED sees the private sector as an island, separate and disconnected from the offering of public education.

Representatives from donor organizations espouse similar views. While some donors, such as USAID, support alternative or non-formal education activities, no donor provides targeted support to formal private schools. The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) provides some support to Fe y Alegría through Spanish NGOs, but this support is not substantive. Most donors see their role as directly supporting the MINED, the MINED's priorities, and public schools. One representative from a donor organization saw the relationship between public and private as zero-sum—supporting private schools would draw away enrollment from public schools and weaken the public offering. It is notable that a recent education sector assessment by USAID did not include the private sector (Gavin, Kellum, Ochoa, & Pozas, 2017).

Similarly, NGOs rarely interact with the private sector. CECE school directors stated that NGOs see CECE schools as private and are consequently not interested in working with them. Broadly, NGOs see public schools as having a greater need and wish to focus their investments in the most vulnerable schools. Representatives from NGOs expressed that they have constrained resources and want to invest where the greatest results will be seen. They also note their desire to focus on public schools because these schools enroll the vast majority of students. Finally, they see private schools as having more resources and consequently lesser need. The few NGOs that engage with private schools charge those schools for their services, meaning that NGO services may be out of reach for low-resource schools.

External support to schools is even less likely in gang-controlled areas. One CECE school hosted a nearby university's psychology student teachers, who provided valuable services to students. When gang conflict in the area intensified, the student teachers were unable to safely travel to the school. This phenomenon is not necessarily unique to non-state schools, however.

**2. The demanding infrastructure requirements and the safety, health, and sanitation certifications necessary to establish a private school make the cost of opening a new school prohibitive. These stringent initial requirements are at odds with permissive re-accreditation requirements.**

In order to operate legally, private schools must be accredited by the Department of Institutional Accreditation, which sits within the National Directorate of School Management. Accreditation involves, first, receiving proper legal and operational recognition in the form of certifications from the mayor and the fire department, as well as health and sanitation certifications; second, certifying that the school director meets certain requirements; and third, receiving accreditation from MINED's Institutional Accreditation Office. The accreditation process involves an evaluation on a 10-point scale that assesses each school in terms of its complementary educational services, institutional planning and organization, curricular development, evaluation of learning, infrastructure and resources, and teacher workforce (MINED, 2010). Schools applying for re-accreditation are evaluated on the same criteria as those applying for initial accreditation.

The accreditation process has three possible outcomes:

1. Schools that reach the minimum standards in each evaluation category receive a five-year accreditation.
2. Schools that fall below the minimum requirements in *some* categories are considered "accredited with observations," and they must be reviewed again in three years.
3. Schools whose evaluation yields a score below the minimum standards are not considered accredited and may not operate if applying for initial accreditation. If the school already exists, they are granted a two-year period in which to make improvements before passing through the accreditation process.

All existing schools that do not receive the full five-year accreditation must submit school improvement plans detailing the reforms that will take place prior to the next accreditation cycle. Officially, schools that do not make the necessary improvements in this period will be closed by MINED, but this does not seem to occur in practice. A common complaint by representatives of private schools is that public schools are not required to meet, and do not meet in practice, the same high standards set for private schools.

While these regulations understandably serve to ensure a minimum quality of education in the private sector, they also vastly decrease the ability of the sector to respond to changes in gang territory, which can happen frequently. Ideally, if changes in gang territory make travel dangerous from a neighborhood to the nearest public school, a private school would open to serve the emergent need for education. The demanding requirements make it difficult to establish small, local, low-fee schools and instead favor well-resourced entrepreneurs who establish large schools and charge higher fees to recoup the sizeable

initial investment. The total number of private schools in El Salvador has fallen by nearly 100 in the last eight years. The high rate of school closure, driven at least in part by financial insolvency and threats of violence, far outstrips the number of new schools established each year, which is usually around two or three.

The exigent initial requirements for starting a school are at odds with the flexible re-accreditation practices. Rather than close schools that repeatedly fall short of MINED standards, the Accreditation Department takes a flexible approach, taking into account the school's context and suggesting reasonable improvements given the resources available. For example, schools are required to have a school psychologist. For small, low-resource schools, hiring an additional trained professional is unrealistic. The accreditation department may instead recommend that the school partners with a group of other schools to receive part-time services of a psychologist.

Many older schools that have been grandfathered into the system would not be permitted to operate if they were seeking initial accreditation. This situation is paradoxical and has consequences for existing schools. For example, the director of a small, family-owned private school wished to financially reconstitute the organization as a nonprofit to improve its financial sustainability. However, she was unable to do so because it would involve registering as a new school. The school would not qualify for accreditation, even though it has not had difficulty in obtaining re-accreditation.

### **3. The difficulty of the process of registering as a not-for-profit organization pushes many schools that would qualify as nonprofits to instead register as for-profit organizations. Restrictions on for-profit schools encumber private school responsiveness and sustainability.**

At the time of their establishment, schools must register as either a for-profit or not-for-profit legal entity. Not-for-profit schools must be owned and operated by a church, a foundation, an NGO, or an association with not-for-profit designation. Not-for-profit designation, which must be obtained from the Interior Ministry, allows schools to be tax-exempt, receive donations, and freely adjust school fees without parental approval. However, obtaining this designation can be a difficult and lengthy process. Alternatively, schools may register as for-profit legal entities, a process that is both faster and simpler. Consequently, individuals who establish schools that could possibly be registered as not-for-profit opt for registering the school as a for-profit entity. Currently, roughly 20 percent of schools are registered as not-for-profit, with the remainder registered as for-profit. Legal designation does not necessarily correlate with purpose, fee levels, or financial status. Many for-profit schools are mission-driven, are not profitable, and have very high or very low fees.

The MINED mandates that for-profit private schools (approximately 80 percent of private schools) may only increase fees at most once every two years. To raise fees, schools must convene over half of the parents of students who attend the school, and 75 percent of the parents in this group must agree to the fee increase. This fee increase must then be approved by the MINED. This process is time-sensitive and bureaucratically difficult, meaning schools are often unable to increase fees. This policy serves the understandable purpose of protecting families from large, rapid, or exploitative price hikes in private schools. However, one sampled private school had not been able to raise fees in over eight years, even as other expenses have increased. This limitation prevents schools from responding to changing economic conditions through price increases and instead forces them to cut costs in other areas. At the

same time, many schools are hesitant to increase fees, as that could mean losing revenue from students whose families are unwilling or unable to pay higher fees.

**4. MINED data on many small private schools is not up to date, suggesting infrequent contact and minimal interaction.**

In the process of contacting schools, the researchers found that many of the small private schools listed in the 2016 school census could not be contacted because the contact information listed on MINED websites was inaccurate or missing. When this information was requested from MINED, officials likewise did not have accurate contact information, suggesting that communication between the MINED and many private schools is irregular or nonexistent and that information is often outdated. One factor that may contribute to this inaccuracy is that ministry officials are sometimes unwilling or unable to travel to violence-affected areas and rely on second-hand information given by other private schools. Additionally, schools may frequently change telephone numbers and not answer emails from unknown senders for security reasons.

**5. Non-state schools effectively create a strong sense of community, engendering commitment to safety and quality education from school directors, teachers, and parents.**

Parents, teachers, and school directors across all sampled schools expressed a high degree of commitment to their schools and an appreciation for the community that the schools created. Several schools offer additional programming for parents and families on the weekends, which helped promote the school as a community center. While most sampled schools faced moderate or severe resource shortages, parents frequently made additional contributions to the schools, such as their time, carrying out fundraising activities, and material donations. Parents sometimes took it upon themselves to make repairs or infrastructure improvements.

It was not uncommon for teachers to be teaching at the same school they attended as children. In one school, teachers said that their school feels like a family. Teachers express a high level of commitment to students' needs and work to build friendship and trust with their students. In some schools, students continue to engage with their school after graduation, for example through volunteering with the school band. This sense of community extends to gang members. Gang leaders who attended one school as children send their own children to that school. They maintain respect for the school and wish to see it protected.

## **ACCESS AND INCLUSION**

**6. Entry requirements in some non-state schools create exclusive student bodies, favoring students who are higher-performing and disciplined and have committed parents.**

While public schools are legally required to accept all students who wish to enroll, private schools have no such obligation. Private schools employ a range of entry requirements consistent with their missions and with the goal of developing a specific school environment.

First, some schools require students to achieve a minimum score on an entry exam or maintain at least a minimum grade throughout the school year. If enrolled students do not maintain a certain grade level,

they are unable to re-enroll the following year. While public schools have MINED-established standards for minimum passing grades,<sup>21</sup> several schools included in this study had higher minimum grade standards than public schools.

Second, students are required to submit an application to attend private schools. These applications sometimes require a recommendation from former teachers and community members, for example from a pastor. Schools may interview the student's parents and require students to take psychological tests or evaluations. These requirements have the effect of filtering out students who do not meet the desired student profile. Screening of student background and home environment is not necessarily only initial. Some schools continually stay aware of a student's family situation. Sometimes this is done to address any needs or challenges that may arise. However, other actors reference that they wish to know if a student changes residence, because occupancy in a different neighborhood could introduce the student and, by association the school, to gang-related threats. In such cases, a school may deny the student enrollment in subsequent years.

Third, all schools included in the sample enforced strict behavior and dress norms. Students are required to behave respectfully, uphold certain values, and wear the school's uniform. Some schools also referenced prohibitions on certain haircuts and items of clothing or coming to school wearing heavy makeup.

Many of the schools included in the study were operated by faith-based organizations. Independently operated private schools also often espouse Christian values and incorporate religious instruction (which is not necessarily denominational). The sampled private schools that were aligned with particular denominations openly accepted students of other faiths and did not, for example, require participation in Catholic mass.

## **7. Sampled non-state schools did not experience problems with gang members within schools. Some schools effectively excluded gang members from enrollment. In schools where gang members remained, they were disciplined and not problematic.**

School directors in sampled schools allege that they would be willing to admit any student willing to work hard and abide by the school's standards. However, in some cases background checks may exclude students affiliated with gangs. Private and public schools have allegedly refused to admit students living in certain areas under heavy gang influence, regardless of student involvement in gang activities, although this was not observed in the selected schools.

Two sampled schools previously had large numbers of students with gang affiliations, but in both cases their numbers were reduced or eliminated. One school participated in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program, and an increased police presence drove gang-affiliated students away. In the other case, the school deliberately eliminated the two grades where gang members were concentrated and reintroduced the grades as students from lower grades advanced.

Other schools readily acknowledged that gang-affiliated students were enrolled, or that gang members or leaders sent their children to the private schools in question. In all cases, school directors and teachers asserted that these children were respectful and did not present internal threats to the school.

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<sup>21</sup> The minimum being a 5.0 on a scale of 1 to 10 in primary schools.

In one case, a director spoke of one student who earned poor grades and sometimes behaved badly, but upon joining a gang, he improved his behavior and school performance. The gang wished him to attend college and become a lawyer for the gang, demonstrating that the gang was professionalizing and disputing the stereotype that gang members are low-achieving and badly behaved. Teachers or directors in several schools stated that, at the behest of gangs, gang-affiliated students are some of the best-behaved children because they do not want to draw attention to themselves.

## QUALITY, SECURITY, AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

### 8. Enrollment in affordable non-state schools is primarily driven by security. Parents are also strongly attracted to the values education, additional education programming, sense of community, and perceived teacher quality offered by non-state schools.

Almost universally, parents who send their children to the sampled non-state schools assert that their primary motivation for doing so is security. Teachers, school directors, and other system-level actors share the belief that demand for non-state schooling is driven by a concern for student safety. Parents assert that the school environment in non-state schools is more controlled due to both infrastructure and school management. Parents claim that anyone can walk into a public school, whereas non-state schools have gates and often guards. Public schools are also required to enroll anyone who wishes to study, while non-state schools are more selective or, in the words of one parent, “exclusive.” Parents see controls on enrollment as creating a safer school environment and ensuring that threats do not enter the school. In some cases, parents send their children to non-state schools because they are the only school they can attend without crossing gang lines.

After listing security, parents frequently list additional course work or complementary programming offered by the school as a reason for sending their children to non-state schools. These additional offerings include English classes, computer classes, and extracurricular activities such as band, dance, folklore, and bread making. Parents are attracted to the “values education” offered by non-state schools, which includes religious instruction and an emphasis in discipline and responsibility, which are not present or are not perceived to be present in the public system. Parents feel that teachers in non-state schools are more dedicated to education, spend more time on task, and treat students better.

The dynamic nature of the demand for non-state education requires further study. There is some evidence that security was not the driving force behind enrollment in non-state schools prior to around 2012, as gang lines were less defined and threats to individual security were less severe in this period. Notably, in aggregate terms, the proportion of total enrollment in non-state schools was higher in 2011



Primary school student in a classroom in El Salvador

EDFUENTESG/STOCKPHOTO

than in 2016, even as private enrollment has increased in the most conflict-affected municipalities in recent years. It is therefore unclear to what degree worsening national security has led to changes in non-state school enrollment, rather than an adjustment in the priorities of parents who already send children to private schools.

**9. While non-state schools are perceived as higher quality than public schools, education outcomes are not measured beyond the secondary school exit exam. School choice is not driven by outcome data.**

The only standardized measure of quality in the Salvadorian education system is the secondary exit exam, the PAES. Only one school director mentioned the school's average PAES score when describing its quality. Parents generally define quality of education using school inputs or other proximate measures rather than educational outcomes.

A general perception among representatives from MINED, NGOs, and donor organizations is that non-state schools are generally of a higher quality than government schools. Many actors referenced heterogeneity in both sectors—there are many high-quality public schools, and similarly, there are many low quality non-state schools. This perception of higher quality is sometimes given as a reason for not seeing the need to support non-state schools. For most of the actors who do not directly work with ANSS, it was unclear how much of their perception of quality stemmed from the smaller lower-fee schools rather than the large elite private schools.

The last standardized tests conducted at basic levels in El Salvador show slightly higher results in the religious private sector followed by the lay private sector, over CECE schools and public schools, respectively (MINED, 2009a).<sup>22</sup> On the high school exit exam (PAES), private institutions consistently score higher than public schools, although when elite private schools are eliminated from the sample, there is not a significant difference between public and private schools' performance (MINED, 2009b). Results in non-state institutions may also be influenced by selection processes in which only high-performing students are accepted. Many non-state schools have a higher minimum passing grade than public schools, ensuring that lower-performing students are unable to enroll or maintain their enrollment, in the process raising the average level of performance of the student body. It is not clear to what degree these aggregate differences in performance are attributable to school pedagogy rather than student background.

**10. Non-state schools located within gang territories take measures to protect students and teachers from violence and insecurity. These measures effectively create a secure environment. A school's religious alignment or affiliation further insulates students and teachers from the threat of violence.**

All sampled schools were located in municipalities with a strong gang presence and a high incidence of violence. All individuals in each sampled school were conscious of gangs and were in some way affected by them. Schools whose catchment areas were entirely within one gang territory were much less affected by gang conflict than those located at or near the intersection of two or more gangs.

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<sup>22</sup> Results from the 2008 test, conducted at third, sixth and ninth grades on a national level.

Non-state schools employ various strategies to promote security within their grounds. Schools may invest in physical security by building walls and gates to control entry, employing armed guards, or installing security cameras. Conversely, one school deliberately chose not to employ armed guards, both as a show of deference to the local gang in power and in recognition that the guard could be attacked and killed in an attempt to steal their gun. One school's increased security was attributed to its small space—close proximity in a small, enclosed area made threats easier to control. Another sampled school was located close to a police department. This school also requested to participate in the GREAT program, and police conducted sporting activities at the school. Both the police department's proximity and its involvement with the school strongly discouraged gang interference at this school.

As with students, teachers expressed gratitude for the security offered in private schools. Sampled teachers mention that teachers in government schools are sometimes subject to threats from students who belong to gangs. They assert that they have not experienced similar problems in the non-state schools where they work. Whereas in public schools, teachers often face discipline issues and sometimes feel that they are unable to discipline students for fear of reprisals, teachers in sampled schools felt confident and in control of their classes. One referenced the ability to cover topics related to gangs in class, even when they knew students belonging to gangs were present. Particularly in religious schools, gang members hold respect for teachers, who reference being able to greet gang members in the street and assert that they are always treated respectfully.

Teachers also express gratitude for security measures employed by non-state schools. In one case, a school director proactively presents new teachers to gang leaders in the area to ensure that the gangs do not threaten the previously unknown individual entering gang territory.

Schools associated with religious organizations enjoyed an added measure of respect and legitimacy in the eyes of gangs. Salvadorian gangs maintain a general reverence for religious institutions, and this respect is applied to educational establishments, affording religious non-state schools greater protection than their public counterparts.

Various levels of contact were observed between schools and nearby gangs. In one case, a small family-owned private school paid a monthly extortion to a gang, and in exchange, they were not bothered. In one CECE school, gangs have a high level of trust and respect for the school—neither the school nor the students are bothered, to the extent that students may arrive from other gang territories without the local gang threatening the arriving students. In the school located near to a police department, there was virtually no contact between gangs and the school.

Three types of relationships between non-state schools and gangs were either observed or described:

- Gangs develop a respect for the school and do not bother or threaten it out of an understanding of its positive mission. Most of the sampled schools had this sort of relationship with gangs.
- Gangs may see the school as resources to be cultivated and so maintain good relationships as a means of fostering future economic rents.
- Gangs may see schools as a threat and respond by extorting the school or threatening teachers or leadership.

**11. Teachers in non-state schools are generally paid less than their public-school counterparts. Notwithstanding, they are perceived as being more dedicated, responsible, and hard-working, which is at least in part attributable to the differences in incentive structures between public and non-state schools.**

Teacher salaries in the public sector are based on education level and years of service. A first-year public school teacher would begin at \$652.23 per month, and then after more than 35 years of service and a five-year university degree, the top salary would be \$1,173.08 per month (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2015). As a comparison, in 2010 unskilled workers earned an average monthly wage of \$157; office employees, \$333; other professionals, \$711; and management-level employees, \$970 (Pacheco, 2013).

Teachers in APS are paid much lower salaries than public school teachers. In some cases, teachers earn less than the minimum wage. An oversupply of teachers in the economy and a shortage of higher-paying government teaching positions enable private schools to hire teachers at or below the minimum wage of \$300 per month and without providing benefits. CECE schools represent an exception to this principle, as roughly half of their teachers receive official MINED salaries. Internal policies dictate that CECE schools are supposed to pay non-MINED teachers the same as their MINED teachers, but this is not the case in practice. At one sampled CECE school, teachers did not receive benefits, and their salaries were as low as those in other private schools. In the other sampled CECE schools, non-MINED teachers received benefits and were paid more than other private-school teachers, but not as much as MINED teachers.

**TABLE 8: PROPORTION OF TEACHERS, BY SECTOR AND AGE GROUP (2013)**

TEACHER AGE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Up to 30 years	5.4	30.1
From 31–40 years	26.8	35.8
From 41–50	41.4	18.8
From 51–60	23.4	8.8
61 or more	3.0	6.4
Total: (number)	100.0 (45,730)	100.0 (12,355)

Source: Hernández, 2014

Teachers in private schools are on average younger and less experienced than those in public schools (Table 8). This is a result of the shortage of higher-paying MINED teaching positions and the requirement that teachers be granted MINED positions in order of graduation date. Teachers often work at private schools until a position at a government school becomes available. Nevertheless, some surveyed teachers in non-state schools had taught in the non-state sector for 15 to 20 years and were exceptions to this trend.

In spite of their lower pay and lack of experience, teachers in non-state schools are perceived as working harder and being more dedicated than teachers in public schools. In one CECE school, teachers are expected to carry out supplemental projects and work longer hours than in public schools. New teachers sometimes quit after a short time because they dislike the demanding schedule. Many teachers interviewed expressed pride in their work, saw their school as a close-knit community of which they were a part, and felt a great deal of commitment to their institution and the students they taught. The nature of teacher contracts in private schools also promotes accountability. Public school teachers, who have high salaries and are difficult to fire, are seen as complacent and lazy. Parents allege that they often miss class or do not teach while in class. Private school teachers risk losing their jobs if they miss class or do not perform adequately.

## **EDUCATION FINANCING AND SUSTAINABILITY**

### **12. The household costs of education in private schools are greater than those in public schools. Private schools are not affordable or accessible to all who might wish to attend.**

The household cost of education in private schools is universally higher than in public schools. Private schools generally charge an annual registration fee, as well as a monthly attendance fee. These fees have been formally eliminated in public schools. Students attending public schools are also provided with a limited food ration, as well as a uniform, school supplies, and shoes. Students in private schools must provide these inputs for themselves. All students must pay for their own transportation.

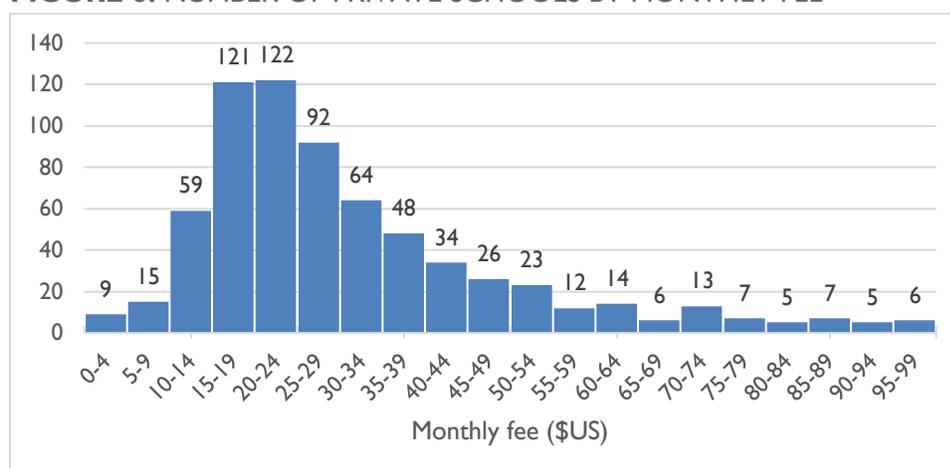
Private schools operate under a wide range of monthly fees. Some charge less than five dollars per month, while many elite schools charge hundreds of dollars per month. Schools toward the higher end of the fee spectrum are considered elite schools and were not included in this study.<sup>23</sup>

The graph in Figure 6 shows the distribution of average monthly fees for a selection of 688 private schools that charge less than \$100 per month and for which data were available.

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<sup>23</sup> Elite, bilingual, or international schools operate on a separate academic calendar, are required to establish associations with schools in other countries, guarantee mastery of a foreign language, and have international curricula. These schools cater to the wealthy and are generally inaccessible to marginalized groups.

**FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS BY MONTHLY FEE<sup>24</sup>**



Source: Authors' analysis of MINED, 2017f

High-fee private schools are not representative of the average Salvadorian private school. In fact, 57 percent of schools have monthly fees that fall below \$30 per month (Figure 6). While only roughly 11 percent of private schools fall below the \$15 threshold of affordability for a family living below the poverty line (\$15 per month), another 17 percent of schools fall within \$5 of this threshold.

Although these schools are seen as a safer, higher-quality option to public schools, they are not accessible to all. And while many schools offer fees that are affordable to households subsisting at or below minimum wage, these schools are not present in all neighborhoods. Non-state schools are concentrated in urban areas, meaning rural households can rarely access them. Many private schools have elevated minimum grade standards, meaning that only high-achieving students can enroll. Private schools may also filter out students affiliated with gangs or even those living in areas controlled by gangs.

The greatest concentration of private schools have monthly fees ranging from \$20 to \$30, which are unaffordable to many low-income families, especially those with multiple school-aged children. Access to private schools is therefore far from universal. At the same time, government schools are not without financial costs. Students must pay for public transportation, and parents are sometimes asked for additional contributions. One parent found that it would cost just as much to pay for daily transportation to a public school as to pay the small monthly fee at the nearby private school.

These equity considerations should certainly be taken into account by actors exploring the possibility of collaborating with non-state schools, but they should also be tempered by the understanding that many parents see private schools as being the best, if not the only, option for providing their children with education in a safe environment.

<sup>24</sup> Histogram shows schools within all municipalities and with monthly fees below \$100, excluding 41 schools with higher fees and 168 schools for which cost data was not available. The monthly fee for each school was calculated using the average monthly fee for all grades offered at the school, excluding pre-school (*pre-maternal*, *maternal* 2 & 3, *parvularia* 4 & 5) and technical grades (*bachillerato vocacional* 1–3).

**13. MINED subsidization of CECE schools enables them to offer lower fees than comparable private schools while providing greater access to resources. However, this subsidization gives them a market-distorting competitive edge over other private schools.**

Similar to government schools, CECE schools receive a per-student subsidy of \$8 per student from MINED (compared to \$13 in government schools). Roughly half of the CECE teachers have their salaries paid by MINED. Students in CECE schools also receive the same food, uniforms, books, and shoes granted to public students. Beyond MINED contributions, CECE schools have decentralized financing and are expected to be entirely self-supporting. Central funds do exist to help schools that run deficits, but these are seldom used. Instead, schools charge enrollment and monthly fees to generate additional revenue. Some schools also receive additional funding through donations from congregations or other sources. The main financial difficulty faced by CECE schools is maintaining school infrastructure. MINED funds cannot be used for repairs, as school buildings are the property of churches or religious congregations.

Because of MINED's subsidization, fees at CECE schools remain universally low. At most, these fees reach \$25 per month but frequently stay below \$15 per month. In one sampled school, secondary education had no monthly fee and only required an annual \$50 registration fee. While some private schools have comparably low fees, families attending those schools also must pay for school inputs such as uniforms and books, decreasing the affordability of the private option. As a consequence of the low fees and government provision of household education inputs, education in most CECE schools is affordable to all but the most destitute families. Many students attending the sampled CECE schools come from families with incomes below \$150 per month and have parents who work in the informal sector or in *maquilas*.

Because of the subsidies they receive from MINED, CECE schools are better-resourced and offer lower fees than other non-state schools targeting lower-income families.<sup>25</sup> This unique advantage granted to CECE schools in effect represents MINED picking a winning model. Schools that are operationally comparable can only compete by cutting costs in other areas such as teacher salaries. A common request among other non-state school operators is that the same subsidies extended to CECE schools be conditionally offered to all private schools. Conversely, it is important to note that some Catholic schools leave the CECE association, subsequently losing the accompanying MINED subsidization, in order to have greater freedom and management over financial operations, enrollment, and religious instruction.

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<sup>25</sup> While CECE schools are generally seen as being high quality, schools exist along a continuum. Some CECE schools are very well resourced and have surplus funds that are invested in school infrastructure. Other schools face serious financial shortages, which lead to dilapidation and underpaying of teachers.

**14. Affordable private schools are generally not profit-driven and are often not particularly profitable. Financial sustainability is jeopardized by low and variable revenue flows and a lack of business management training or experience. Non-state schools respond to constrained finances by minimizing expenses, which adversely impacts quality.**

While roughly 80 percent of private schools have a for-profit legal designation, this is not an indication of their actual profitability nor of the motivations of their directors or owners. Many schools would qualify as nonprofit organizations, but the difficult registration process pushes applicants to the simpler for-profit designation. It is also very time-consuming and costly to switch from a for-profit to a not-for-profit legal organization after the school has been established—only two or three schools have made this transition in recent years.

Many private schools are established by teachers, charitable individuals, or religious groups. The driving motivation for many of these individuals is providing a quality education. While system-level data on school profitability are not available, school directors included in this study stated that their schools are not profitable and that they are perpetually short on funds. Sometimes they delay payment of their teachers because of resource shortages. Consequently, schools are much more likely to shut down because of financial insolvency; they are rarely closed because of quality issues.

Many small private schools are established or directed by former teachers, who often have little or no training in financial or organizational management. They are therefore ill-equipped to sustainably run a small business that depends on irregular financial flows and exists in a precarious financial space. Schools must maintain low fees in order to attract and maintain sufficient enrollment among primarily lower-income individuals. School fees are the primary source of school revenue, and teacher salaries and all other expenses depend on their regular receipt. Schools may be flexible when families are temporarily unable to pay school fees out of a desire to not lose students and a hope that fees will eventually be paid. Missed fees translate into decreased financial liquidity. School sustainability depends on minimizing other costs, including infrastructure investment, staff numbers, and teacher pay. At such low fee levels, schools are vulnerable to financial shocks and are unable to make investments that may allow for or attract additional enrollment.

**15. The context of violence imposes additional costs to schools and households.**

The context of violence makes education more expensive for both non-state schools and households. Schools invest in security infrastructure or personnel, such as security cameras and private security guards. Some schools are subject to extortion from gang members. All of these costs either filter down to school fees or take the place of investments in school quality. Families specifically elect to pay for non-state schools out of a concern for safety, when otherwise they might have sent children to public schools at a much lower cost. Families often also invest in private transportation to ensure that their children reach school safely. Some parents accompany their children on public transportation to and from school to promote their safety, which doubles the cost of transportation and involves an additional time investment on the part of a parent.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study represents the first examination of any depth into non-state schools in El Salvador and disputes many commonly held notions about the accessibility, role, and spread of non-state schools in the Salvadorian education system. In closing, we present recommendations for actions that various system actors could take to support the Salvadorian education system at large through interactions with the non-state sector. These recommendations have at their foundation an understanding that a large proportion of non-state schools serve low-income and violence-affected populations, and the private and public sectors are inexorably related, face the same challenges, and would profit from closer collaboration.

There are many common-sense reforms and interventions that could result in improving the quality of education offered by non-state schools without necessarily diverting resources from public schools to private. Additionally, there are modalities through which investment in non-state schools could augment resilience to violence and access to education. Recommendations are presented by actor type.

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

- 1. The Ministry of Education as a whole should adopt a greater recognition of the size, role, and needs of the non-state sector.** Currently the only ministry department with meaningful interaction with an awareness of the private sector is the Department of Accreditation. As a result, MINED actors miss potentially productive engagements and private schools are stigmatized. Furthermore, this lack of recognition diminishes MINED quality control over ANSS, undermines coordination between state and non-state schools, and prevents students that attend private schools from receiving support.
- 2. MINED should integrate the private sector into sector documents and plans,** such as PESS and *Plan El Salvador Educado*. Private schools should be seen as occupying an important role in the education sector, rather than existing as a separate entity. Including private schools in sector plans would better enable private schools to support MINED goals and support future collaboration between public and private actors. Particularly in the case of PESS, the government should recognize that families respond to insecurity through private school enrollment and incorporate this understanding into official analyses, policy, and planning.
- 3. Provide private school teachers no-cost access to in-service training.** Teachers in some APS do not have access to in-service training, largely because their institution is unable to afford its cost. While admitting non-state teachers to these training would incur a marginal cost to the state, it could be seen as investing in future public-sector teachers, given that many teachers pass from the private to the public sector.
- 4. Harmonize initial accreditation requirements with re-accreditation requirements.** Because of the cost and bureaucratic difficulty of opening a new school, very few new private schools are able to open. As a consequence, private schools are unable to respond to the demand for private education in violence-affected areas, and schools that do open must do so at elevated costs. However, many schools—both public and private—are in operation that do not meet these

initial accreditation requirements. MINED should investigate areas in which accreditation requirements can be relaxed to facilitate school establishment while still ensuring student safety and minimum school quality.

- 5. Facilitate the process of registering as a not-for-profit organization.** Private schools opt for registering as for-profit organizations because of the difficulty of registering as not-for-profit organizations, even when they would qualify for that categorization. Simplifying the registration process and providing assistance to schools looking to register would enable more schools to appropriately benefit from the not-for-profit status.
- 6. Improve data on school performance.** Beyond the PAES test, there is no standardized evaluation of education outcomes at the primary level in private schools. Developing non-invasive formative assessments and disseminating results would help MINED gauge levels of quality in private schools and learn about best practices, as well as provide families a valuable input for school selection. This would also create an additional incentive for schools to promote performance, help direct attention toward underperforming students and schools, and provide an important tool for researchers.

Additionally, MINED could consider investigating an additional recommendation requiring investment in the private sector:

- 7. Investigate expanding the subsidies offered to CECE schools to other socially motivated, not-for-profit private schools.** Some or all of the subsidies provided to CECE schools could be expanded to other private schools in order to make private schooling more accessible to low-income students. For example, the same food, uniforms, books, and shoes currently provided to public and CECE schools could be expanded to more or all students, regardless of the type of schools they attend, as an affirmation of the right to education. MINED could investigate the benefits and costs of expanding per-student subsidization or payment for teacher positions to other schools serving low-income populations or those operating in violence-affected areas. Subsidization could therefore be based on student need and a school's social mission and quality, rather than its religious affiliation.

## **DONORS**

- 8. Sector engagement strategies should incorporate, or at least consider, non-state schools.** Over 20 percent of formal-sector enrollment is in non-state schools. This figure is one-and-a-half to three times as high in urban, violence-affected municipalities. Any strategy that does not acknowledge this reality is incomplete. Donor activities should explore engagements with non-state schools as a means of building resilience and peace and supporting marginalized communities. Any sector-level research should also incorporate non-state schools, as these schools form an important part of the education sector.
- 9. Consider providing technical assistance to MINED to support the reform of accreditation requirements, support the collaboration with non-state schools, improve data collection practices, and develop standardized testing.** Donors should investigate the

potential benefits of providing system-strengthening assistance to MINED. Such assistance could benefit the public and non-state sectors, improve accountability of non-state schools, and improve the ability of the MINED to target schools with the greatest need of assistance or with the greatest potential for investment.

## **ANSS ADVOCATES**

- 10. ANSS advocates should dedicate efforts to changing the popular perception that all private schools are well-resourced, have high fees, and target high- and middle-income populations.** One major barrier to government, donor, and NGO collaboration with ANSS is a perception that private schools are elite, rent-seeking, and not in need of assistance. Correcting this stigmatization could result in greater inter-sectoral cooperation.
- 11. Private school associations should participate more vocally in the National Education Council (CONED),** using the platform to sensitize other council members to the status and needs of non-state schools. While the El Salvador Private School Association (*Asociación de Colegios Privados de El Salvador, or ACPES*) is already a member of CONED, CECE schools should also be represented independently in the council. Private school associations should use this space to suggest additional areas for cooperation with the public sector.

## **RESEARCHERS**

- 12. To date, researchers have not devoted their attention to private schools. Researchers should expand on the findings of this report by exploring various topics, including the following:**
  - **Violence as a driver for enrollment in non-state schools.** Researchers should conduct quantitatively rigorous research to determine to what degree violence and gang activity have affected enrollment trends in non-state schools and compare these trends with enrollment in public schools.
  - **Private school financial models.** Researchers should perform analyses of private school revenues and expenditures to understand school sustainability and cost-effectiveness.
  - **Non-state pedagogy and educational outcomes.** While non-state schools are perceived to have superior educational outcomes, actual outcomes have not been comparatively studied. Researchers should rigorously study the differences in education outcomes between public and private schools, accounting for student income and level of communal violence. They should also conduct comparative classroom observations to understand differences in pedagogy and instructional methods and their effects on learning.

## **SCHOOLS**

**13. ANSS should seek out engagements with government services and NGOs.** While NGOs and representatives of government services show initial hesitancy toward working with private schools, this study found that these perceptions often change when actors understand that many private schools are low-resource, operate in violent areas, and serve low-income populations at affordable fees. Expressing this sentiment to service providers could increase the probability of non-state schools accessing NGO or government services and funding. Organizing and advocacy groups such as ACPES could assist in systemic outreach efforts as a service to their member schools.

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## IX. ANNEX

### INFORMANTS INCLUDED IN STUDY

INFORMANT GROUP	INFORMANTS
Donors	<p>AECID</p> <p>GIZ</p> <p>Inter-American Development Bank</p> <p>Millennium Challenge Corporation</p> <p>UN Population Fund</p> <p>UNDP</p> <p>UNICEF</p> <p>USAID</p>
MINED	<p>Department of Institutional Accreditation</p> <p>Department of Education - San Salvador</p> <p>MINED, National Directorship of Youth and Adult Education</p>
NGO/CSO	<p>Fundación para la Educación Integral Salvadoreña (FEDISAL)</p> <p>Asociación de Colegios Privados El Salvador (ACPES)</p> <p>Glasswing International</p> <p>Fe y Alegría</p> <p>Fundación Educo</p> <p>Fundación Pro Educación El Salvador (FUNPRES)</p> <p>CIDE</p> <p>Compassion International</p> <p>Fundación Salvador del Mundo (FUSALMO)</p> <p>Fundación para la Educación Superior (FES)</p> <p>Episcopal Conference</p> <p>Sindicato de Maestras y Maestros de la Educación Pública de El Salvador (SIMEDUCO)</p>

## ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN PESS MUNICIPALITIES

**TABLE 9: ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC AND NON-STATE SCHOOLS IN PESS MUNICIPALITIES, 2015-2016<sup>26</sup>**

MUNICIPALITY	SECTOR	2015	2016	MUNICIPALITY	SECTOR	2015	2016
Ciudad Delgado	Public	12,429	11,391	San Salvador	Public	46,001	42,578
	Non-state	6,418	6,486		Non-state	78,414	67,161
	CECE	2,565	2,710		CECE	6,755	8,613
	Private	3,858	3,776		Private	71,659	58,548
	% Non-state	34.1%	36.3%		% Non-state	63.0%	61.2%
Cojutepeque	Public	10,815	9,374	Santa Ana	Public	42,691	44,415
	Non-state	5,630	5,612		Non-state	18,152	18,429
	CECE	1,423	1,445		CECE	4,777	5,143
	Private	4,207	4,167		Private	13,375	13,286
	% Non-state	34.24%	37.45%		% Non-state	29.83%	29.32%
Colón	Public	17,210	16,008	Sonsonate	Public	22,566	20,460
	Non-state	5,472	6,349		Non-state	9,410	10,220
	CECE	0	743		CECE	699	1,326
	Private	5,472	5,606		Private	8,711	8,894
	% Non-state	24.1%	28.4%		% Non-state	29.4%	33.3%
Jiquilisco	Public	14,351	12,853	Soyapango	Public	27,928	26,192
	Non-state	313	322		Non-state	26,380	25,982
	CECE	231	248		CECE	4,591	5,171
	Private	82	74		Private	21,789	20,811
	% Non-state	2.13%	2.44%		% Non-state	48.6%	49.8%
Mejicanos	Public	15,591	14,520	Zacatecoluca	Public	18,622	17,670
	Non-state	9,162	9,254		Non-state	2,302	2,277
	CECE	1,425	1,354		CECE	631	641
	Private	7,737	7,900		Private	1,671	1,636
	% Non-state	37.01%	38.92%		% Non-state	11.00%	11.42%

Source: MINED 2016a; MINED 2017b

<sup>26</sup> Note that some year-to-year changes in CECE and private school enrollment totals are caused by Catholic schools joining or exiting the CECE association. This could explain the dramatic change in CECE enrollment in Colón between 2015 and 2016, for example. This does not affect overall non-state sector enrollment trends, as Catholic schools are counted as non-state regardless of whether they are part of CECE or not.

## AFFORDABILITY OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS

To ensure that the study includes schools that could be considered affordable to low-income families, it was first necessary to develop a definition of affordability based on an understanding of what a family living in poverty could reasonably expect to pay for education. In El Salvador, a person is considered to be living in extreme poverty if their monthly income is lower than the cost of purchasing a predetermined basket of basic goods. A person is considered to be living in relative poverty if their income is lower than two times the cost of the same basket of basic goods, referred to as the expanded basket of goods. El Salvador has defined a national average cost of this basket, along with baskets for rural and urban areas. These baskets correspond with per capita extreme and relative poverty lines (ODHAC, 2015).

In 2016, the average household size in El Salvador was 3.6. For such a household in urban areas, the cost of the basket of basic goods was \$189.85 per month, and for rural areas, it was \$128.78 (Calderón & Belloso, 2017). The cost of the expanded basket of goods was therefore \$379.70 for urban and \$257.56 for rural areas. These figures correspond to the extreme and relative poverty lines for average-sized households in 2016.<sup>27</sup>

Various scholars have offered definitions for what could be considered affordable or low-fee. Barakat et al. (2012) consider schooling affordable if all school fees for one child are below 4 percent of a family's income, whereas Tooley (2013) argues that the total of education expenses for all children is affordable if it accounts for less than 10 percent of a family's income. Regardless of the threshold used, there is consensus that affordability depends on the individual household's situation, including income level and the number of school-aged children (Psacharopoulos et al., 1997). Fees that are affordable for one family will not necessarily be affordable for another.

Because affordability is dependent on the individual situation, we recognize the limitations of creating a universal threshold or definition for affordability. For the sake of simplicity, we propose to use the Barakat et al. (2012) threshold for affordability (4 percent of household income per child) as a definition of low-fee.<sup>28</sup> We applied this threshold to urban and rural relative poverty lines to derive what we consider to be affordable monthly school fees. This would be \$15.20 per month for urban areas and \$10.32 per month for rural areas.

Applying these thresholds to a list of all private schools within the 10 priority municipalities yields 19 schools that could be categorized as affordable. However, the greatest concentration of private schools falls within the range of \$15 to \$30 per month. This distribution suggests that the lowest-fee schools, while most likely to be affordable, may not be representative of all lower-fee private schools.

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<sup>27</sup> In 2015, 9.1 percent of El Salvador's population was living in extreme poverty; 25.7 percent was living in relative poverty; and the remaining 65.2 percent were living above the relative poverty line (ODHAC, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> We feel that the Tooley definition (10 percent of income allocated to education between all children) would also result in a threshold close to 4 percent per child. Given that the average household size in El Salvador is 3.6 (suggesting between 2 and 3 children per household), the per-child expenditure on education under the Tooley definition would be between 3.3 percent and 5 percent.