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June 2016

## Rapid Education and Risk Analysis El Salvador *Final Report*



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Rapid Education and Risk Analysis El Salvador (RERA El Salvador) Final Report reflects an intensive and important collaboration between USAID Washington, USAID/El Salvador, the Ministerio de Educación, USAID implementing partners, and selected school communities in El Salvador. Several people made important contributions to the RERA El Salvador exercise and to this report. Larry Sacks, Mission Director for USAID/El Salvador, and Adam Schmidt, Director of the Mission's Democracy and Governance Office, provided leadership and a cross-sectoral vision to the RERA El Salvador exercise. Joy Searcie, Deputy Director of the Mission's Democracy and Governance Office, played a central role in making the entire exercise happen—from engaging USAID's Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN) Support Team to carry out the RERA to providing constant guidance and co-ordination to the RERA Team and delivering substantive comments on the drafting of the report. Ligia Perez, also in the Democracy and Governance Office at USAID/El Salvador, served as the Mission's focal point for support to the RERA Team. Karen Towers, Education Team Leader at USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, offered insightful comments on preliminary findings and on the drafting of this report.

Critical organizational and logistical support was offered by two implementing partners to USAID/El Salvador—Federación para la Educación Integral Salvadoreña (FEDISAL) and Fundación Empresarial Para El Desarrollo (FEPADE). These partners and many others also contributed invaluable feedback on the initial orientation of the RERA El Salvador and on preliminary findings.

Cornelia Janke, USAID ECCN Project Director, provided strategic level direction to the overall exercise, while Gwen Heaner, Research Manager with USAID ECCN, provided remote support on data collection and analysis.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



As its name implies, the Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) process is designed to provide USAID program planners and managers with a fast and “good enough” situation analysis of the interactions between education and the multiple risks that may exist in any given crisis and/or conflict affected environment, so that such contextual information can inform Mission policy and programming.<sup>1</sup> The USAID Mission to El Salvador and the USAID Goal 3 Education Team in Washington asked the USAID Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN) to conduct a customized RERA in El Salvador. The in-country implementation of the RERA El Salvador took place on March 9–18, 2016.

The analysis focused on risks associated with gang violence, general insecurity and, to a lesser extent, natural disasters, and their interaction with different aspects of the education sector, such as schools, education staff, learners, families, and school communities. The RERA El Salvador was a qualitative situation analysis, which combined secondary data and key informant interviews at the national level with primary data from a limited, purposive sample of school communities in nine high-risk municipalities: Ciudad Delgado, Ilobasco, Sonsonate, Soyapango, Lourdes, Puerto la Libertad, Ciudad Arce, Ilopango, and El Congo. Primary research was guided by a community and youth resilience approach.

“Es un delito ser joven.” (“Being young is a crime.”)

—Student

“Teachers are between a rock and a hard place about who should provide security—the police or the gangs themselves.”

—School teacher

ECCN’s in-country implementation of the RERA El Salvador had three objectives:

1. Give USAID/El Salvador an updated “snapshot” of the country situation and show how education interacts with key risks—gang violence, insecurity, and, to a lesser extent, natural disasters—with a focus on selected municipalities and schools
2. Gauge the relevance of current USAID programming in the selected municipalities
3. Offer lessons on the draft RERA guide, including methodology and management

### EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

El Salvador is currently confronting epidemic levels of violence and a gang problem that challenges the authority of the state. Successive governments have been unable to sustainably deal with the violence and criminality, and the Salvadoran social compact is under great strain. The national crisis of violence has also overshadowed the country’s high vulnerability to natural disasters.

Within El Salvador’s climate of violent confrontation and public dissatisfaction with the government, education is one of the country’s most publicly valued institutions. Despite achieving gains in universal primary education and increased access however, the sector faces many challenges including below-average public spending on educa-

1 The rapid nature of RERA’s approach requires making deliberate trade-offs between speed and rigor. The RERA is not research, but rather a specific type of qualitative situation analysis that can inform decisions about strategy and programming.

2 MINED. (2015, November 26). *Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador*. Retrieved from <http://simeeduco.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OBSERVATORIO-MINED-2015.pdf>



tion, poor and unequal learning outcomes, and a high and growing dropout rate, particularly at the secondary level. This last challenge is of particular concern with respect to its possible link to increased violence and insecurity in a subset of municipalities.

The impact of violence on education is alarming. Around 65 percent of schools are affected by gang presence; 30 percent face internal security threats from gangs.<sup>2</sup> Yet schools in the RERA sample not only face a high risk of violence and insecurity, but also the risk of natural disaster—such as earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions. Understanding how school communities are managing these risks is imperative.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the headline findings from the limited and purposive sample of high-risk school communities. These findings are not intended to be representative of the Salvadoran education sector as a whole and may be biased towards the schools and communities sampled.

### Safety

- Respondents in all schools sampled considered themselves safer inside their schools than in their external environments, but they also cited gang presence and influence over internal school affairs.
- Schools located on the “front lines” of gang territorial confrontation witnessed more insecurity than those located well within a particular gang’s territory.
- Some gang members—particularly those who are also parents in the school communities—want schools to function.
- Schools that sustain outreach and collaboration mechanisms with parents and communities appear to manage insecurity better.
- Respondents expressed diverging views as to whether the presence of police and military in and around schools improved security.
- Respondents in all schools exhibited general awareness of the school’s main disaster risks and report having carried out basic disaster preparedness measures.

### Students

- Gang violence, intimidation, and territoriality constrain access to all schools in the sample and are reported as key drivers of school dropout.
- Adolescent male students are most at risk of gang violence and intimidation—including recruitment.
- Students—boys and girls—in all schools value their education and their future.
- Students in all schools judiciously adapt their behavior to be safe.
- Respondents at all schools consistently agreed that low parental support and family violence are key factors behind student dropout.

## Teachers, Principals, and Curriculum

- Teachers and principals report feeling overwhelmed and under-equipped to handle the emotional needs of students, stating a need for psychosocial support.
- All principals and teacher focus groups argued that the curriculum should focus more on life skills training, social-emotional skills, and employment skills.
- Respondents argued that a positive school atmosphere plays an important role in student well-being, learning, and retention in these contexts.

## Education Policy and Systems

- Implementation of education policy and programs is constrained by community insecurity.

## USAID Projects

- Schools, teachers, and students value USAID-funded programs and would like more support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to USAID/El Salvador:

- **Review its strategy and programming** from the perspective that the school can be the most local interface between citizen and state, and that it offers a multi-sectoral platform for community change.
- **In high-risk zones, USAID should work in partnership with school-based community groups to (integrate and/or) build resilience and protective capacities**, including assisting schools to facilitate joint participatory planning processes with community stakeholders, leveraging USAID projects across sectors to support local priorities and address the risk factors, and ensure a community sensitivity and “do no harm” approach.
- **Support the Ministry of Education (MINED) to better contextualize national planning and programs to the high-risk realities**, including providing or enhancing social-emotional skills and crisis response training for teachers, management and leadership training to principals and *Consejos Directivo Escolar*, parent skills training, psychosocial support in schools, school-parent committees and strengthening the extended school hours programs under the *Escuela Integral Tiempo Pleno* (EITP) framework.
- Assist MINED to conduct an **assessment of disaster preparedness and risk reduction activities** in high risk schools, including how they are affected by violence and insecurity.
- Provide assistance to MINED to **convene a donor meeting on the issues of violence, insecurity, and education**, with the goal of developing a common approach to support the government of El Salvador.
- Support the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to **improve community policing, specifically the patrols assigned to schools**.

# DETAILED REPORT

## PURPOSE

USAID's Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN) developed the first version of the Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) guide in July 2015. USAID's ECCN sought field application of the tool by USAID missions to provide concrete, real-time lessons on how to improve and complete the next version of the RERA, due in 2016. The USAID Mission to El Salvador and the USAID Goal 3 Education Team in Washington asked the USAID ECCN to directly manage a RERA in El Salvador. The in-country implementation of the RERA El Salvador took place on March 9–18, 2016.

The RERA El Salvador had three purposes:

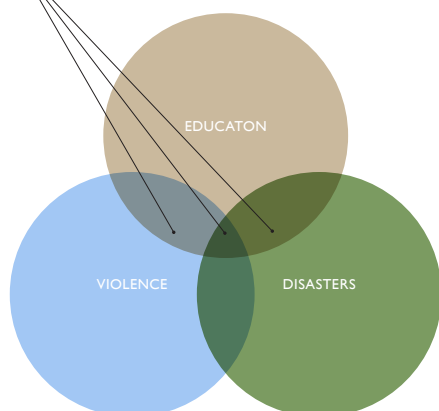
1. Give USAID/El Salvador an updated “snapshot” of the country situation and show how education interacts with key risks—gang violence, insecurity, and, to a lesser extent, natural disasters—with a focus on selected municipalities and schools
2. Gauge the relevance of current USAID programming in the selected municipalities
3. Offer lessons on the RERA tool, including methodology and management

## METHODOLOGY

A RERA is an approach to situation analysis that integrates a rapid education sector assessment with elements of conflict analysis, disaster risk assessment, and resilience analysis. It aims to provide USAID with a fast and “good enough” situation analysis of education and how it interacts with multiple risks. It can inform a decision by USAID to pursue a more comprehensive assessment. While a RERA can be customized to a particular context, it is not intended to evaluate or assess any one project.

The RERA guide was tailored to El Salvador's unique context, and focused on three risk categories—gang violence and insecurity (the main priorities) and natural disasters (to a lesser extent)—and their interaction with the education sector, including schools, education staff, learners, families, and the school communities.

RERA Focus



The RERA guide was further adapted for El Salvador in order to pursue more primary data collection. The RERA El Salvador used a desk review of secondary data and key informant interviews at the national level, but devoted the majority of its fieldwork to probing a limited, purposive sample of school communities. The RERA El Salvador sought to enhance existing knowledge about the education system in El Salvador and how it interacts with gang-related violence, insecurity, and natural hazards. It was carried out based on the conviction that one cannot understand the state of an education system without analyzing it as an inherent element of its dynamic, interacting risk environment.

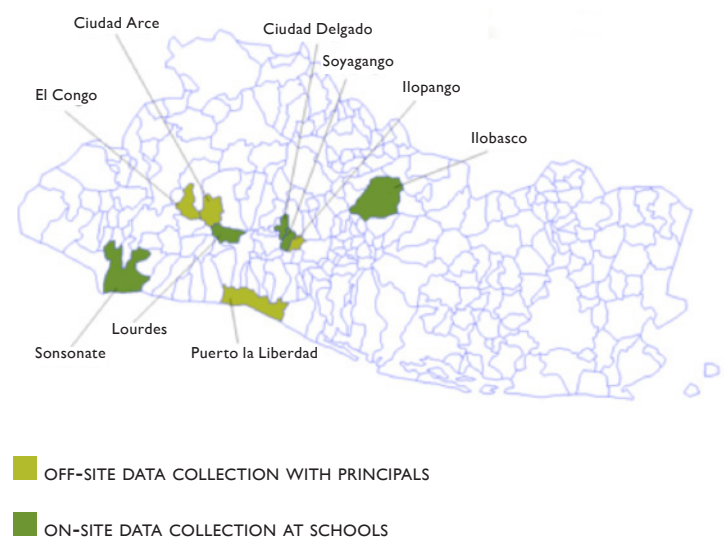
## Geographic Scope

In discussions with USAID/El Salvador and implementing partners, a limited, purposive sample of municipalities and schools was chosen for primary data collection. The criteria for selection of municipalities, and school communities in particular, included the following:

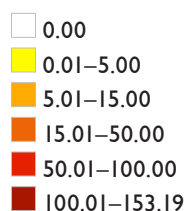
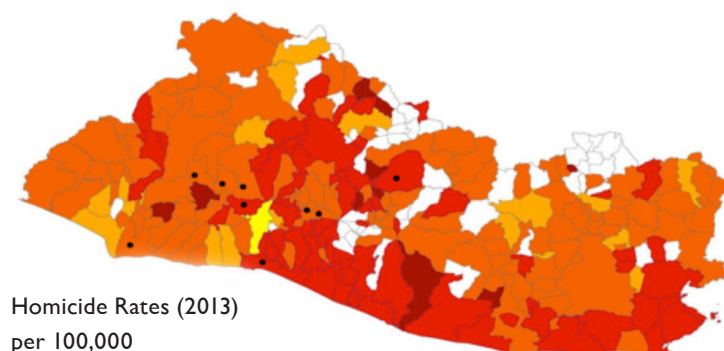
1. Schools that are located in high-risk municipalities
2. Presence of USAID projects
3. Municipalities that are a focus of the *Plan El Salvador Seguro*

In all, primary data were collected from nine high-risk municipalities. Primary data collection was carried out on-site in schools in five high-risk municipalities: Ciudad Delgado, Ilobasco, Sonsonate, Soyapango, and Lourdes. Off-site primary data collection was carried out with school directors from an additional four high-risk municipalities: Puerto la Libertad, Ciudad Arce, Ilopango, and El Congo.

## RERA El Salvador Primary Data Sample Locations

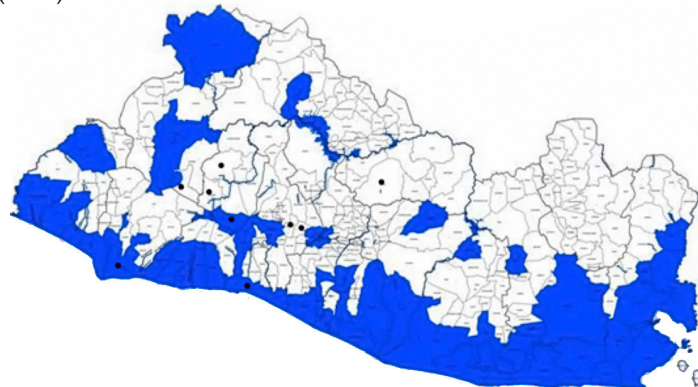


## Homicide Rates by Municipality (2013)

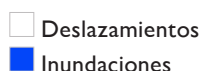


Source: Homicides: Matthew C. Ingram and Karise M. Curtis. (July 14, 2014). Homicide in El Salvador's Municipalities: Spatial Clusters and the Causal Role of Neighborhood Effects, Population Pressures, Poverty, and Education. Woodrow Wilson Center. p.6 [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Homicides\\_El\\_Salvador.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Homicides_El_Salvador.pdf)

## Municipalities Affected by Floods from Tropical Depression 12E (2011)



### LEGEND MUNICIPIOS\_CON\_INUNDACIONES



Source: Dirección General de Protección Civil

## School Focus Groups

NO	SCHOOL	MUNICIPALITY	TEACHERS	F	M	STUDENTS	F	M	COMMUNITY MEMBERS	F	M	PRINCIPALS	F	M
1	Centro Escolar Canton Colonia La Palma	Ilobasco	4	4	0	11	5	6	10	7	3	1	1	0
2	Centro Escolar Canton Calle Real	Ciudad Delgado	6	4	2	12	6	6	11	10	1	1	0	1
3	Centro Escolar Caserio San Antonio las Vegas	Ciudad Delgado	5	5	0	12	6	6	10	8	2	1	1	0
4	Centro Escolar Caserio Lotificacion San Antonio	Sonsonate	5	4	1	12	6	6	9	3	6	1	1	0
5	Centro Escolar Catolico Fe y Alegria, San Jose	Soyapango	6	5	1	12	6	6	9	6	3	1	0	1
6	Centro Escolar Gustavo Vides Valdes	Colon, Lourdes	6	3	3	12	6	6	5	3	2	1	0	1
7	Superate Cassa	Sonsonate	8	4	4	12	6	6	18	10	8	1	1	0
8	Superate Raices	Soyapango	6	3	3	12	6	6	11	7	4	1	1	0
SUBTOTALS			46	32	14	95	47	48	83	54	29	8	5	3
TOTALS													232	

## School Community Target Groups

The RERA El Salvador focused on a mix of schools and programs covering the primary and secondary levels. On-site key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held at six public schools and two Superate programs—complementary education centers focusing on English, computers, and life skills. Key informant interviews were held with 8 principals, and focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 46 teachers, 95 students, and 83 community members and parents. The number of participants in each focus group discussion varied from 4 to 6 teachers, 6 female students, 6 male students, and 5 to 18 community members. Focus group discussions with students included grades 7 to 9 (ages 13–16). Of the focus group participants, 70 percent of the teachers and 65 percent of the community members were female. The gender balance between principals and students was, broadly, more even.

Focus group discussions with community actors typically included local community leaders, community-based organizations, municipal health representatives, and church representatives.

An off-site focus group discussion was conducted in San Salvador with directors from six Adopt-a-School program schools: Ciudad Delgado, Soyapango, Puerto la Libertad, Ciudad Arce, Ilopango, and El Congo.

## Protocol for Primary Data Collection

A protocol was developed for organizing and holding focus group discussions at the school level that encompassed coordinating with partners at the local level, clearly communicating the purpose of the RERA with schools, and setting rules for conducting focus group discussions.

Coordination at the School Level

USAID Implementing Partners introduced the RERA Team to each school. In concert with USAID Implementing Partners, the RERA Team laid the following groundwork for each school visit:

- Fostered a clear understanding of the specific purpose and scope of the RERA (focusing on education and related risks in order to inform USAID strategy and programming)
- Defined the list of schools and key informants (including those in the community)
- Defined safety and security protocols for moving in and around each community
- Sought local advice to optimize the overall approach to identifying informants and scheduling meetings
- Defined required conditions during the day of visits to schools
- Coordinated with technical staff from USAID’s partners with a presence in the municipalities and schools selected, and with contacts at the Ministry of Education (MINED)
- Scheduled meetings with local stakeholders of the municipality during the visit (and after the focus groups and interviews with students, teachers, and principals)

Example School Visit Schedule

8:00 am	Interview with Director of SubDirector Provide information about and a full panorama of the school conditions and situation (n=1)
9:00 am	Focus group with teachers Representation of multiple grades (n = 5–7)
10:00 am	Focus group with students (F) Representation of multiple grades (n = 5–7)
11:00 am	Focus group with students (M) Representation of multiple grades (n = 5–7)
2:00 pm	Meeting with parents and community actors Mixed group of parents and community organizations (n = 7–9)
3:30 pm	Return

Focus Group Discussion Protocol

The following protocol was developed for planning and conducting focus group discussions with school stakeholders:

- The RERA Team carefully explained the purpose and methodology of the RERA to the school principals and then to local partners and school administrations. This was crucial, given the tension and suspicion in the communities, and the concern that the RERA would be an assessment about gangs and used to target gang members.
- The RERA Team organized focus group discussions inside schools, and discussed school schedules with principals to make every effort to minimize disruption.
- The RERA Team worked through local partners and school administrations to enlist voluntary participants in the focus group discussions.
- The RERA Team applied a gender lens to ensure the participation of women and girls, and held separate discussions for female students.
- The RERA Team designated one facilitator to conduct each focus group, with one or two note-takers present.
- The gender of the lead facilitator corresponded to the gender of the participants, particularly for focus group discussions with female students.
- Local partners known and trusted by school stakeholders were present.
- The facilitator opened the discussions by explaining the objectives of the RERA—particularly, that the exercise is about education and looks at how *all* risks affect schools.
- Due to the high levels of risk faced by stakeholders, particularly students, the facilitator clarified that the discussion is completely voluntary, confidential, and not personal—that participants should not speak about themselves, but instead try to speak as representatives of a group.
- To avoid causing distraction, few, if any, focus group sessions used computers.
- Consent forms were not used, as there were concerns that these would unsettle participants and compromise candor and trust.



The RERA Team adhered to the following principles when facilitating the discussions:

1. Participation was voluntary. If any participant felt uncomfortable during the meeting, he or she had the right to leave or to pass on any question. There was no consequence for leaving or for passing on a question.
2. To protect participants, the facilitator stressed that the meeting objective was to solicit representative input, rather than personal input.
3. Consensus was not an objective of the discussions. When disagreement or divergence emerged, it was simply noted.
4. The identity of the attendees was treated as confidential, and anything said remained confidential.
5. Every response was respected, and no comment nor judgment was made. There were no right or wrong answers.
6. One person spoke at a time.
7. Everyone had the right to talk. The facilitator may ask someone who was talking a lot to step back and give others a chance to talk, and likewise may ask a person who wasn't talking if he or she had anything to share.
8. Breaks were allowed as required.
9. Before closing, ample time was offered for questions.

Following the data collection, all focus group notes were discussed among the RERA Team and then submitted to USAID ECCN's Research Manager to integrate into a data collection management tool, which was available to the entire RERA Team.

### Approach for Data Collection, Analysis, and Synthesis

The RERA El Salvador developed a community and youth resilience approach to guide data collection, analysis, and synthesis, as well as recommendations for USAID/El Salvador. This addressed a gap in the current version of the RERA guide, which contains neither guidance, nor a tool for conducting primary data collection, nor a conceptual framework to guide data analysis and synthesis. The RERA El Salvador approach drew on a synthesis of several common characteristics<sup>3</sup> of a resilient system, adapted to the school community, for example:

- *Flexibility:* The ability of the school community to manage and carry out change in a timely way
- *Diversity and redundancy:* The variety and diversity of assets in the school community that help keep essential education services functioning and accessible to learners during adversity and crisis

- *Adaptive capacity:* The ability of the school community to continually integrate new knowledge into its planning and delivery of school functions and services and to adjust or transform them as needed
- *Collective action:* The mobilization of school and community actors and assets to jointly decide and work toward common goals, including reduction of risk, particularly during a crisis
- *Social capital and cohesion:* The relationships among actors and groups in the school community and within families that reduce risk and support cooperation during and after a crisis

The resilience approach was also based on Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents,<sup>4</sup> which categorizes the assets as external or internal. External assets reinforced the RERA El Salvador's approach to community resilience, while internal assets helped guide questions focusing on the individual.

Particularly relevant internal assets included the following:

- *Achievement Motivation:* The young person is motivated to do well in school.
- *School Engagement:* The young person is actively engaged in learning.
- *Bonding to School:* The young person cares about her or his school.
- *Interpersonal Competence:* The young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
- *Resistance Skills:* The young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
- *Peaceful Conflict Resolution:* The young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
- *Personal Power:* The young person feels like he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
- *Sense of Purpose:* The young person reports, "My life has a purpose."
- *Positive View of Personal Future:* The young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Particularly relevant external assets included the following:

- *Family Support:* The young person's family life provides high levels of love and support.
- *Other Adult Relationships:* The young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
- *Caring School Climate:* The school provides a caring, encouraging environment.
- *Caring Neighborhood:* The young person experiences caring neighbors.

3 Adapted from *Fostering Resilience, Protecting Children: UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children Report 2011*, which was based on UNICEF's 2010 literature review of resilience literature (available at [http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/hac\\_lead.html](http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/hac_lead.html)). Other useful works explaining the dynamic, systems approach of community resilience include: Frankenberger, T., Mueller, M., Spangler, T., & Alexander, S. (October 2013). *Community Resilience: Conceptual Framework and Measurement, Feed the Future Learning Agenda*. Rockville, MD: Westat; and USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity Request for Applications No. RFA-520-16-000003, Community Roots Project. For useful insights into education resilience, see Community Roots Project, Guatemala (<https://www2.fundsfornogs.org/latest-funds-for-ngos/usaiddguatemala-community-roots-project-addressing-causes-violence-migration/>), and SABER: Education Resilience Approaches, World Bank (<http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm?indx=8&pd=14>).

4 Search Institute. (2016). *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents*. Minneapolis, MN: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ag-es-12-18>

- *Parent Involvement in Schooling:* Parent(s) are actively involved in helping the young person succeed in school.
- *Community Values Youth:* The young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
- *Safety:* The young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.
- *Creative Activities:* The young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
- *Youth Programs:* The young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.

Using the resilience approach and the guiding questions in the RERA guide, the RERA Team developed the following broad questions:

1. How do violence, insecurity, and disasters interact with education, particularly at the school level?
2. How do violence, insecurity, and disasters impact education access and quality?
3. How can school communities—including schools, teachers, students, families, and the greater community—be more resilient to violence, insecurity, and disasters and improve access to and the quality of education?
4. How is MINED supporting school communities in managing these risks?

More specific questions were elaborated to be used in focus group discussions and key informant interviews for the purpose of primary data collection. The development of the questions also explicitly aimed at filling gaps in the secondary source literature. A core group of questions was developed and used across all target groups, and additional questions were tailored for each group. Questions were iteratively refined and improved after the initial focus groups. Core questions included the following:

1. How can parents and the community jointly help students safely go to school and learn?
2. What would help the school be a safe place to learn?
3. To whom do students look in times of insecurity and crisis?
4. What did the school community look like five years ago? What will it look like five years from now?
5. If the school had to temporarily close, how would students continue with their studies?
6. What skills and behaviors have most helped students, teachers, and principals manage violence and/or insecurity in the school?

7. In the event of a natural disaster (earthquake, flood, etc.), how would the school community respond, in order to protect safe learning?
8. Why do students abandon school and drop out?

Lastly, the RERA El Salvador placed particular importance on *data synthesis*, which involves a broader interpretation of the patterns and relationships found in the data. It strives to articulate a higher-level meaning from the data analysis. Data synthesis is also crucial for formulating findings that bring value to strategy, policy, and/or program audiences.

## Limitations

The design of the RERA intentionally requires making deliberate trade-offs between speed and rigor. The RERA is not research, but rather a specific type of qualitative situation analysis that can inform decisions about strategy and programming. In the case of the RERA El Salvador, there were several trade-offs:

- The purposive sample was not intended to be representative of all school communities across the country, but rather was aimed at providing in-depth insights into the dynamics of risk and education at selected locations most relevant to USAID's portfolio.
- The RERA Team decided to invest time in focus group discussions with informants on-site at the schools. However, off-site discussions might have offered conditions for more candid and forthcoming discussions. The level of violence and insecurity faced by the school communities was palpable, and participants, at times, were reticent.
- The RERA Team prioritized focus group discussions and key informant interviews with the immediate school communities. There was insufficient time to organize additional key informant interviews or focus group discussions with mayors,<sup>5</sup> police, faith-based organizations, and other local NGOs and community-based organizations.
- Visits to two locations—Soyapango and San Juan Opico—were cancelled due to security considerations, including USAID security protocol changes.<sup>6</sup>

## RERA EL SALVADOR TEAM

The RERA Team included Wim Savenije (Violence Specialist), Pauline Martin (Education Specialist), Guillermo Gomez (Local Consultant), Megan Meinen (Youth and Workforce Development Specialist, USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean), Ashley Henderson (Education Analyst, USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and the Environment), and James Rogan (Team Leader and Senior Advisor, USAID ECCN).

<sup>5</sup> Invitations were extended to mayoral offices to join community focus group discussions, with the option of delegating another representative from municipalities.

<sup>6</sup> The RERA Team visited Soyapango on two other occasions.

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

This section offers a snapshot of the country situation and provides overviews of the main risks (causes, dynamics, impact, and government response) and the education sector in El Salvador.

### Country Snapshot

El Salvador is at a crossroads again as the country confronts epidemic levels of violence and a gang problem that challenges the authority of the state. Since the end of the 12-year civil war in 1992, the country has made progress in sustaining peace, consolidating democracy, and reducing poverty and income inequality—but challenges remain. Economic growth has been slow, and economic mobility is limited.<sup>7</sup> Salvadoran politics lack public trust and remain polarized between the two main political parties: the National Republic Alliance and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, which currently holds the presidency.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, the World Bank Human Opportunity Index, which measures access to public services, ranked El Salvador's among the lowest in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> Hard-won development gains in El Salvador face the challenge of the high risk of natural disasters, in part related to the country's widespread deforestation.

Most critically, violent rivalry between the two main street gangs—the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and *Barrio 18*—and their confrontations with government security forces are driving the highest levels of violence in the world. Violence and insecurity are fraying the fabric of

Salvadoran society, causing social displacement, constraining economic growth and development, and confounding government efforts to respond. At present, the authorities are poised to take extraordinary measures, including curtailing constitutional rights and deploying more soldiers on the streets, to contain the gangs and the violence.

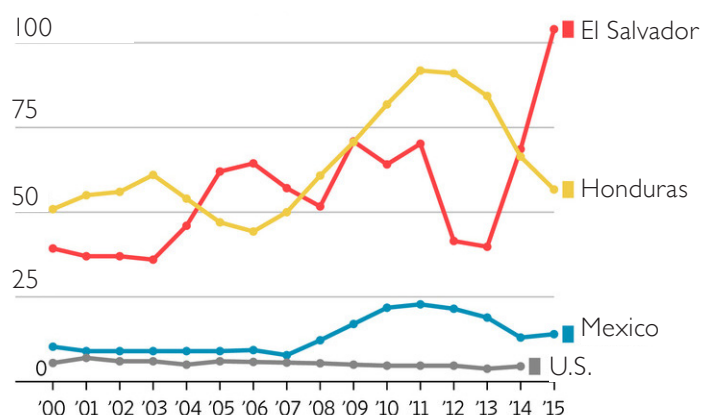
### Violence and Insecurity

As Central America's most densely populated country, with almost two-thirds of its population living in urban areas, El Salvador is now home to the highest levels of violence in the world.<sup>10</sup>

### Gang Violence: Impact and Dynamics

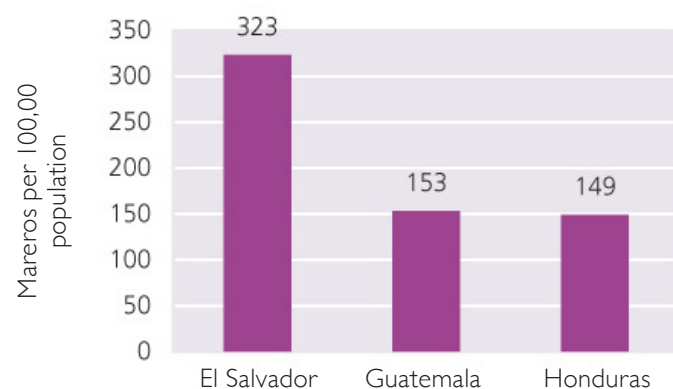
El Salvador has the highest concentration of gang members per capita in the subregion.<sup>11</sup> There is evidence to suggest that over the past two decades, violence related to gangs has represented a substantial percentage of homicides in El Salvador.<sup>12</sup> After a truce between *MS-13* and *Barrio 18* fell apart in 2014, the death toll surged to 6,600 in 2015 alone, and this pace appears to continue into 2016.<sup>13</sup> The nature of the violence involves massacres, killing of police and their families, sexual violence, extrajudicial killing of suspected gang members, and constant surveillance and intimidation of communities. The toll now rivals the worst periods of the country's civil war from 1980 to 1992.<sup>14</sup>

### Homicides per 100,000 people



Sources: World Bank (through 2013); Governments of U.S. and Mexico, press reports (2014–15) *The Wall Street Journal*.

### Gang Members per 100,000 people<sup>15</sup>



7 Calvo-Gonzalez, O., & Lopez, J. H. (2015). *El Salvador—Systematic country diagnostic: Building on Strengths for a New Generation* (p. 2). Washington, DC: World Bank Group. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2015/06/24706162/el-salvador-systematic-country-diagnostic-building-strengths-new-generationhttp://docume>

8 A survey of parliamentarians' self-assessment showed that the Salvadoran parliament is the most ideologically polarized in Latin America (Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 1).

9 Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 61.

10 According to the National Civil Police, 43 percent of homicide victims are in the age range of 18–30 and are predominantly young males.

11 Defining the actual number of gang members is challenging, particularly as "membership" has different meanings. In May 2015, David Munguía Payés—former Minister of Justice and Public Security, and current Minister of Defense—stated that there are more than 60,000 active gang members in El Salvador (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]. [2012, September]. *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment*. Retrieved from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC\\_Central\\_America\\_and\\_the\\_Caribbean\\_english.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_Central_America_and_the_Caribbean_english.pdf); Ministro de Defensa Dice Que Hay más pandilleros que soldados. [2015, May 21]. *La Prensa Gráfica*. Retrieved from <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2015/10/20/ministro-de-defensa-dice-que-hay-mas-pandilleros-que-soldados>).

12 Wim Savenije and Chris Van de Borgh refer to a recent report by the National Civil Police, which estimates that 50 percent of homicides over the last five years were committed by gang members (Savenije, W., & Van de Borgh, C. [2014, December]. San Salvador: Violence and Resilience in Gangland—Coping with the Code of the Street. In K. Konings & D. Kruijt [Eds.], *Violence and Resilience in Latin American Cities* [pp. 90–107]. London, England: Zed Books). UNODC estimates place the figure at 16.8 percent for 2012 (UNODC. [2014]. *Global Study on Homicide*. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/gsh/>). In November 2011, the Minister of Justice and Public Security, without revealing sources, contended that the gangs were responsible for 90 percent of homicides in El Salvador (Castillo, B. [2011, March 29]. Munguía Payés declara la "guerra al crimen." *Diario CoLatino* [p. 4]. Retrieved from <http://biblioteca.utec.edu.sv/hemeroteca/svdel/2011/DCL20111129.pdf>).

13 Partlow, J. (2016). Why El Salvador became the hemisphere's murder capital. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/01/05/why-el-salvador-became-the-hemispheres-murder-capital/>

14 El Salvador violence up to civil war-era level. (2015, September 2). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-34124090>

15 UNODC, 2014, p. 29.

The two main gangs are fighting over control of territory, interests, and identity. This results in violence between gangs, between gangs and the public, and between gangs and security forces.

Gangs consider large parts of poor, urban areas—and increasingly some rural areas—as their territory. They use violence to defend their territory against their rivals and to control the people who happen to be there.<sup>16</sup> The notoriety of gangs for extremely violent behavior makes their threats credible and provokes considerable fear and anxiety. Gangs prevent people from crossing what are invisible, usually unmarked borders, often extorting fees from businesses and the public for safe passage.<sup>17</sup> Local residents and workers, including school staff, are forced to treat gang members with deference and to avoid interfering in gang interests. Gangs have extorted millions of dollars from residents, bus drivers, and businesspeople. A failure to pay often results in harassment, threats, or death.<sup>18</sup> Some observers argue that the gangs have links to drug trafficking as well, but this is debated.<sup>19</sup> The threat and fear of violence serves to strengthen—and harden—gang identity. The fact that a gang member can encounter and readily identify a rival gang member anywhere outside their “turf” means that violence can happen anywhere, at any time. This creates a universal climate of insecurity for the public.<sup>20</sup>

When breaking down the alarming human cost of the violence, young men constitute the majority of the perpetrators of violence, and they are also the most affected by it. More than 48 percent of all homicide victims in 2015 were Salvadoran males ages 15–29.<sup>21</sup>

## Homicides by Age Group

AGE	2014 HOMICIDES	2015 HOMICIDES
0–17	398	663
18–30	1,803	2,853
31–40	926	1,507
41–50	356	751
51–60	147	316
61+	122	200
Not specified	169	367
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,921</b>	<b>6,657</b>

16 See Smutt, M., & Miranda, L. (1998). *El fenómeno de las pandillas en El Salvador*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UNICEF, FLACSO—Programa El Salvador; Savenije, W. (2009). *Maras y barras. Pandillas y violencia en los barrios marginales de Centroamérica*. San Salvador, El Salvador: FLACSO El Salvador.

17 For instance, see: Martínez, O. (2016, January 11). Driving Across the Borders of El Salvador's Gang Territory. *InsightCrime*. Retrieved from <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/driving-across-the-borders-of-el-salvador-gang-territory>

18 Savenije & Van de Borgh, 2014, p.9.

19 Local gang cliques, which vary in organization and capacity, have equally varying levels of involvement with small-scale drug dealing and with drug trafficking organizations (see Dudley, S. [2010, May]. Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras. Working Paper Series on U.S.-Mexico Security Collaboration. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars and University of San Diego). Other observers maintain that the gangs are involved in large-scale trafficking. Robust evidence, however, is lacking, and anecdotal evidence is mostly used.

20 Cruz, J. M. (2010). Central American *maras*: From youth street gangs to transnational protection rackets. *Global Crime*, 11(4), 379–398.

## Homicides by Gender

GENDER	2014 HOMICIDES	2015 HOMICIDES
Male	3,624	6,068
Female	294	575
Not specified	3	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,921</b>	<b>6,657</b>

Source: National Civilian Police

The fact that the majority of homicides involve men as either victims or perpetrators should not diminish the extent of the violence against women. Young women who maintain a close relationship with gang members are at risk of kidnapping, extortion, sexual assault, and even murder, mostly by rival gangs.<sup>22</sup> Girls as young as 14 can be coerced or forced to become girlfriends of the gang members, subjecting them to violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.<sup>23</sup>

While the impact of the violence is widespread, there is a degree of geographic concentration, with more than one-third of the country's homicides in 2015 occurring in four municipalities: San Salvador, Soyapango, Apopa, and San Miguel.<sup>24</sup>

Gang-related violence is also driving internal displacement and (often illegal) emigration. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, more than 288,000 people were displaced due to violence in El Salvador in 2014. The UN High Commission for Refugees indicates that asylum applications in Guatemala from Salvadoran nationals nearly doubled between 2013 and 2014—an increase of 172 percent. Applications by Salvadorans to other countries, such as the United States and Mexico, have quadrupled and tripled, respectively, since 2010.<sup>26</sup>

While government response to the gangs and violence has evolved over the last 25 years, it has not been effective in controlling either. Efforts have moved from relative neglect in the 1990s to an emphasis on zero tolerance—*mano dura* and *super mano dura*—in the early 2000s, to more integrated approaches thereafter. A common feature of all government efforts to date, however, has been an inability to formulate, reach consensus on, and implement a coherent approach to gangs.<sup>27</sup> President Sanchez Ceren came to power after the failed gang truce and

21 Muggah, R. (2016, March 2). It's official: San Salvador is the murder capital of the world. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0302-muggah-el-salvador-crime-20160302-story.html>

22 El Salvador's Gangs Target Women and Girls. (2014, November 6). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/11/06/world/americas/ap-lt-salvador-violence-against-women-abridged.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/11/06/world/americas/ap-lt-salvador-violence-against-women-abridged.html?_r=0)

23 El Salvador: Submission to the Human Rights Committee for the 114th Session (p. 7). (2015, June 29–July 24). The Advocates for Human Rights.

24 Interview with Policía Nacional Civil.

25 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. (2015, May). *Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence* (p. 83). Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

26 As gang violence worsens, more Salvadorans flee. (2016, February 3). *UNHCR News Story*.

27 Jütersonke, O., Muggah, R., & Rodgers, D. (2009) Gangs, urban violence, and security interventions in Central America. *Security Dialogue*, 40(4-5), 373–397.



pledged to not negotiate with the gangs and to take a hard line toward them. In 2015, his government launched *Plan El Salvador Seguro* to deal with the gangs and violence. The Plan, which emphasizes prevention, has mobilized civil society and the government to work together. More time and investment are needed to assess the impact of the Plan, together with the government's more hardline strategies, on the levels of violence.<sup>28</sup>

The national police have struggled to contain the gangs and violence. Despite their stated community policing policy, police maintain a minimal presence in poor neighborhoods with a gang presence—and in some neighborhoods, they are not present at all. Police also have a tendency to equate urban youth culture with gang involvement. Youth are often wrongly profiled or mishandled by police who are not familiar with the community,<sup>29</sup> leading youth who are not involved with gangs to develop fear and resentment toward the police. Combined with gang pressure on the community to avoid interaction with authorities, the result is an unhelpful divide between communities and the police.<sup>30</sup>

The gang situation has compelled the government to pursue extraordinary measures. In August 2015, the country's Supreme Court declared street gangs to be terrorist groups, making it illegal to negotiate with them.<sup>31</sup> At present, authorities in El Salvador are considering implementing a series of exceptional measures in the most violent municipalities, which would suspend certain constitutional rights, create prison lockdowns, restrict prison visits, monitor communications, judge minors as adults in homicide cases, and deploy additional soldiers to specific locations.<sup>32</sup> This occurs at a time when concerns are already being voiced that the country's security forces could again be involved in human rights abuses, unlawful killings, and torture.<sup>33</sup>

## Causal Factors Behind Gang Violence

A number of factors have contributed to the rise of El Salvador's street gangs.

In the early 1990s, local gangs, or *pandillas*, emerged in the aftermath of the civil war to provide youth with a measure of order and predictability in highly uncertain and insecure environments. The growth of the local *pandillas* was influenced by a range of structural factors, including poverty, marginalizations, social exclusion, discrimination, violence, family disintegration, and poor-quality education and vocational training.<sup>34</sup>

Migration has been a crucial factor in the expansion of street gangs in Central America. The *maras* emerged in Los Angeles in the late 1980s, where Salvadoran migrant youth fleeing the civil war lived at a cultural and economic disadvantage, and were often neglected by their parents in a particularly hostile environment. These young migrants found identity and peer support in the Los Angeles *maras* culture.<sup>35</sup> Their deportation back to El Salvador ultimately transformed the pre-existing local *pandilla* culture and organization into the *maras* model.<sup>36</sup> The availability of small arms and light weapons (weapons designed for individual use) and a weak criminal justice system contributed to the continued growth of the *maras*.<sup>37, 38</sup>

Family violence is a factor at the individual level that contributes to gang involvement and growth in gang numbers. Gang members are often a product of home and school environments where violence is legitimized as abuse, and physical punishment is the norm. In El Salvador, some 80 percent of households now feature violence,<sup>39</sup> and it is no surprise that family violence and dysfunction have been cited as factors that increase the likelihood of children and adolescents participating in violence.<sup>40</sup> The vulnerability of children and youth is

28 The Plan was created by the National Council on Citizen Security and Coexistence, comprising leaders from government, civil society, businesses, the church, the media, universities, and political parties. It includes (1) violence prevention and job creation initiatives, which account for nearly three-quarters of the funding; (2) an increased state presence in the country's 50 most-violent municipalities, with the goals of improving public spaces, engaging in community policing, and increasing student retention in schools; (3) improved prison infrastructure; and (4) increased services for crime victims. See <http://www.presidencia.gob.sv/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/El-Salvador-Seguro.pdf>

29 See Savenije, W. (2014). Enfrentando a las pandillas y el crimen organizado. Los militares en la seguridad pública en El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras. In M. Misse, D. Míguez, & A. Isla (Eds.), *Estado y crimen organizado en América Latina* (pp. 253–282). Buenos Aires: *Libros de la Araucaria*; Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho [FESPAD]. (2004). *Informe Anual Sobre Justicia Penal Juvenil. El Salvador 2004*. San Salvador, El Salvador: FESPAD Ediciones; Savenije, W. (2013). Las maras. Las pandillas callejeras en Centroamérica. In C. V. Kaplan & C. C. Bracchi (Eds.), *Imágenes y discursos sobre los jóvenes* (pp. 335–371). La Plata, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

30 Savenije, 2014, pp. 253–282.

31 Sala de lo Constitucional declara ilegal negociación con pandillas y las nombra grupos terroristas. (2015, August 25). El Faro. Retrieved from <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201508/noticias/17307/Sala-de-lo-Constitucional-declara-ilegal-negociación-con-pandillas-y-las-nombra-grupos-terroristas.htm-sthash.rOd7eO4p.dpuf>

32 El Salvador baraja el estado de sitio. (2016, March 8). *La Prensa*. Retrieved from <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2016/03/08/internacionales/1998843-salvador-baraja-estado-sitio>

33 See U.S. Department of State. (2015, June). *Country Report on Human Rights Practices: El Salvador*. Washington, DC: Author; Olson, E. L., & Hyde, K. (2015, December). *Four Questions and Observations About El Salvador's Deteriorating Security Situation*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center.

34 Cruz, J. M. (2009, May 14–15). Global Gangs in El Salvador: Maras and the Politics of Violence (p. 6). Paper presented at the Global Gangs Workshop, Centre on Conflict, Development, and Peacebuilding, Geneva, Switzerland. According to Cruz, “Salvadoran gangs emerged as a result of multi-level processes of marginalization. These mechanisms did not entail ethnic or racial discrimination, since ethnicity is not a major social issue in El Salvador; but rather they entailed socioeconomic discrimination that prompted other marginalization processes. See also Rodgers, D., Muggah, R., & Stevenson, C. (2009). *Gangs of Central America: Causes, Costs, and Interventions*. An Occasional Paper of the Small Arms Survey. Geneva, Switzerland: Graduate Institute of International and Development.

35 See Demoscopia S. A. (2007, October). *Maras y pandillas, comunidad y policía en Centroamérica: Hallazgos de un estudio integral*; Cruz, 2010, p. 384.

36 The transnational origins of *MS-13* and *Barrio 18* are fundamental to explaining the violent nature of the two gangs—and why Nicaragua does not have *maras*. See Rodgers, Muggah, & Stevenson, 2009, p. 7.

37 See World Bank. (2011). *Gangs of Central America: Crime and Violence in Central America: A Development Challenge*. Washington, DC: Author; Seery, M. L. (2014). *War in the Streets: El Salvador's Gang Problem and the Need for International Prosecution and Intervention by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights* (p. 2). Law School Student Scholarship. Paper 142. Retrieved from [http://scholarship.shu.edu/student\\_scholarship/142](http://scholarship.shu.edu/student_scholarship/142)

38 Few arrests carried out by National Civilian Police officials are successfully prosecuted in the Salvadoran justice system. The State Department maintains that “inefficiency, corruption, political infighting, and insufficient resources” have hindered the performance of the Salvadoran judiciary. As police and prosecutors are often loathe to work together to build cases, El Salvador's criminal conviction rate is less than 5 percent (Seelke, C. R. (February 2016.) Congressional Research Service. El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations. February, 2016. p.9. Retrieved at <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/rsw/R43616.pdf>.)

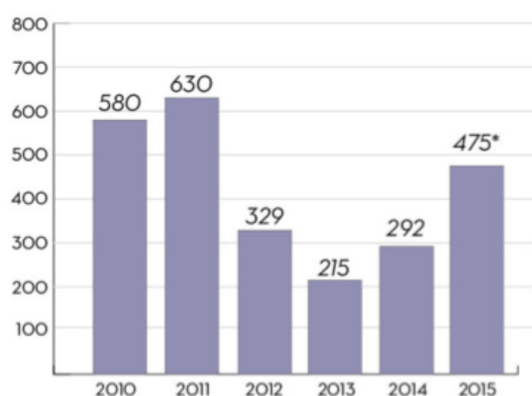
exacerbated by the massive migration to the United States. Children and youth who remain in the country are often left in the care of a single parent or extended family members.<sup>41,42, 43</sup>

Hardline government responses may have unintentionally played a role in consolidating the *maras*. The government's *mano dura* and *super mano dura* responses to the gangs over the past two decades, which included extrajudicial killings, hardened the gangs' opposition to the state and required them to make their operations more sophisticated.<sup>44</sup> In fact, a "qualitative leap" in gang organization occurred in response to the *mano dura* policies.<sup>45</sup> For those youth falsely accused of gang activity, many ultimately joined gangs in prison.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the incarceration practices under *mano dura* and *super mano dura* paved the way for the most distinctive feature of contemporary *maras*: the formation of criminal organizations whose leaders operate from prison.<sup>47</sup> The gangs again offered a substitute coping mechanism for many children and youth who were not gang members but were nonetheless treated (harshly) as such by security forces.<sup>48</sup>

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Amid the epidemic of male-dominated gang violence, El Salvador also confronts high levels of violence against women. El Salvador has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, and the rate of impunity for femicide crimes is estimated to be as high as 77 percent.<sup>49</sup> Women in El Salvador report more physical or sexual partner violence than in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>50</sup> In addition, domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other crimes of violence against women are widespread and are ineffectively investigated, prosecuted, and adjudicated.

### Femicides in El Salvador (per Annum)



\*Reflects data from January to October 2015. Source: Data compiled and analyzed by the Observatory of Violence Against Women, maintained by the Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace and the Institute for Legal Medicine.

The statistics on violence against women are sobering. In 2015, 575 of 6,657 victims of homicide (9 percent) were women, an increase of 96.6 percent from 294 in 2014. There were an estimated 5,007 reported cases of domestic violence in 2014.<sup>52</sup> The National Forensic

Institute reports that for the period 2013 to 2015, 61 percent of the 11,012 injuries suffered by women were classified as domestic violence.<sup>53</sup> Household survey data suggest that 36 percent of women ages 15–49 who are married or in a relationship in El Salvador sought institutional help for physical or sexual partner violence, and 65.5 percent told their family and friends about it.<sup>54</sup> Three out of every 10 women suffered physical abuse before age 18, and women were physically mistreated by men in one out of four families.<sup>55</sup> In 2013, 73.6 percent of rape cases were committed against girls under 19 years of age.<sup>56</sup>

- 39 Giralt, S. C., & Concha-Easman, A. (2001). *Barrio Adentro: La Solidaridad Violenta de las Pandillas*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Instituto de Opinión Pública Universidad Centroamericana, cited in Thale, G. (2006, November). *Youth Gangs in Central America: Issues in Human Rights, Effective Policing, and Prevention*. Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America.
- 40 See Cruz, J. M. (Ed.). (2007). *Street Gangs in Central America* (p. 32). San Salvador, UGA Editores; Vigil, J. D. (2002). *A rainbow of gangs: Street cultures in the mega-city*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press; Howell, J. C., & Griffiths, E. (2015). *Gangs in America's Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.; Sampson, R., Raudenbusch, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277(5328), 918–924; Sampson, R. (2012). *Great American city: Chicago and the enduring neighborhood effect*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; SolucionES Project. (2016, March). *Youth Resiliency in El Salvador: Risk and Protective Factors (draft)*, FUSADES. p.18–19.
- 41 Bibler Coutin, S. (2007). *Nations of Emigrants. Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 42 Cruz, 2010, p. 395.
- 43 Statistics on families are incomplete, but census data cite that 847,165 children live in single-parent homes, 148,564 are separated from parents due to immigration, 88,032 lost a parent due to death, and 610,569 live with one parent due to separation. Plan International reports that children abandoned by parents may live with other relatives and, in the most extreme cases, end up with a neighbor or on the street—all of which makes them more susceptible to physical and sexual abuse and for recruitment into gangs.
- 44 Gangs themselves have stated that the *mano dura* policies of recent governments contributed to their expansion and opposition to the state. See Valencia, R. (2016, March 23). El "manodurismo" (contado por un marero). *El Faro*; Valencia, R. (2016, March 29). El Salvador Govt Helped Strengthen Gangs: Gang Leader, *InsightCrime*.
- 45 See Cruz, 2010, p. 390; Hume, M. (2007). *Mano Dura: El Salvador responds to gangs. Development in Practice*, 17(6), 739–751; Thale, 2006, p. 11.
- 46 Seelke, C. R. (2014, February 20). Gangs in Central America (p. 9). Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fas.org/srg/crs/row/RI34112.pdf>
- 47 Cruz, 2010, p. 382, 396.
- 48 See Hallsworth, S. (2013). *The Gang and Beyond. Interpreting Violent Street Worlds*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan; Savenije, W. (2009). *Maras y barras. Pandillas y violencia en los barrios marginales de Centroamérica*. San Salvador, El Salvador: FLACSO El Salvador; Vigil, J. D. (2007). *The Projects. Gang and Non-Gang Families in East Los Angeles*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press.
- 49 UN Women. (2013, April 4). Femicide in Latin America. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/4/femicide-in-latin-america#sthash.WyDyzaZE.dpuf>
- 50 Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 65.
- 51 Observatorio de violencia. (n.d.). *Indicadores de Violencia*. Retrieved from <http://observatoriode-violencia.ormusa.org/feminicidios.php>
- 52 Corte Suprema de Justicia Sala de lo Civil, Casos de Violencia Intrafamiliar por Departamento 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.csj.gob.sv:88/?op=content&seccion=11&categoria=tru&cid=95>
- 53 Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer. Informe Sobre el Estado de la Situación de la Violencia Contra las Mujeres en El Salvador. November 2015. p. 27.
- 54 Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 65
- 55 *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Familia—FESAL 2008*. Asociación Demográfica Salvadoreña. 2009. p. 236, 239.
- 56 UNICEF El Salvador. Situación de la niñez y adolescencia en el país: Protección. Retrieved at [http://www.unicef.org/elsalvador/overview\\_29518.htm](http://www.unicef.org/elsalvador/overview_29518.htm).

Recently, there have been reports that gangs and security forces are increasingly engaging in raping and sexually assaulting girls. Gangs can also claim girls as *novias de las pandillas*—“girlfriends” of the gangs.<sup>57</sup> Girls must be particularly cautious about entering a relationship with a police officer or soldier, as they will then be suspected by the gangs of being an informant.<sup>58</sup> Police officers and soldiers stationed in high-risk zones have also been linked to cases of sexual violence.<sup>59</sup>

## Natural Disasters

Salvador has a “high, but stable” disaster risk ranking.<sup>60</sup> Poverty, deforestation, and urbanization are some of the key drivers of the country’s high vulnerability to disasters, which include earthquakes, floods, landslides, tropical storms, and volcanic eruptions.<sup>61</sup> El Salvador is the second most deforested country in Latin America after Haiti,<sup>62</sup> with almost 85 percent of its forested cover lost since the 1960s. Deforestation-induced erosion and soil degradation have left much of the country unsuitable for agriculture, and have increased the risk to communities during periods of tropical storms.<sup>63</sup>

Nearly 95 percent of the Salvadoran population is at some risk of a natural disaster. Close to 90 percent of the country’s territory is susceptible to severe impacts of a natural disaster. More than 40 percent of the Salvadoran population reside in municipalities with a high risk of natural disasters (i.e., those municipalities that were affected during 1980–2007 by three or more natural hazards: earthquakes, floods, storms, and droughts).<sup>64</sup> El Salvador also has the world’s second highest economic risk exposure to two or more hazards. According to the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources’ Division of the National Service of Territorial Studies, economic losses directly linked to catastrophic events during the last 30 years amounted to almost \$US4 billion (equivalent to the total cost of building 33,000 new primary schools).<sup>65</sup>

The World Bank notes that El Salvador has developed a sound legal and institutional framework for disaster risk management. The Civil

Protection and Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Law was enacted in 2005 to improve the country’s capacity to manage natural and man-made risks. However, adequate funding for this disaster management system has been lacking, and community participation and decentralization—such as in the form of community committees—needs further support.<sup>66</sup>

El Salvador adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015) and has a national platform for disaster risk reduction. The World Bank has made recommendations for further progress in disaster risk reduction, including carrying out additional hazard and vulnerability assessments, expanding the types of development projects required to perform risk assessment, implementing Municipal Civil Protection Plans, and performing an assessment—at all administrative levels—to gauge the country’s disaster risk reduction achievements and identify outstanding challenges.<sup>67</sup>

## Education Sector

The Salvadoran public education system has made some important gains over the last 10 years. El Salvador has achieved the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, and access to education has steadily improved.<sup>68</sup> The net enrollment rate in lower and upper secondary levels increased between 2000 and 2014 from 43 percent to 65 percent, and from 27 percent to 38 percent, respectively.<sup>69</sup> In addition, female students have made significant gains and now outnumber boys in net enrollment rates in practically all levels.<sup>70</sup>

Such improvements are especially important because they bolster the high value that young people and the general public place on education,<sup>71</sup> at a time when many other aspects of El Salvador’s social contract are under great strain. Salvadorans see most state institutions as corrupt and incapable of stopping the rising violence, insecurity, and territorial control of the gangs.<sup>72</sup> Yet, MINED may be an exception: A recent survey by *La Prensa Gráfica* showed respondents giving education the highest approval rating of any other public ministry.<sup>73</sup>

57 Welander, A. (2015). Ellas ven, oyen y callan. El País. Retrieved from [http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/08/25/planeta\\_futuro/1440515739\\_660469.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/08/25/planeta_futuro/1440515739_660469.html)

58 Savenije & Van de Borgh, 2014, p. 12.

59 Albaladejo, A. (2016, February 22). How Violence Affects Women in El Salvador. Working Group on Latin America. Retrieved from <http://www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1590-how-violence-affects-women-in-el-salvador>

60 INFORM. (2015). Index for Risk Management 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.inform-index.org>

61 See Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 25; UNISDR/Prevention Web. (2014). El Salvador Basic Country Statistics and Indicators. Retrieved from <http://www.preventionweb.net/countries/slv/data/>

62 World Bank Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. (n.d.). Disaster Risk Management in Central America: GFDRR Country Notes (pp. 16–33). Retrieved from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACREGTOPURBDEV/Resources/840343-1319499018982/DRM\\_CENTRAL\\_AMERICA.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACREGTOPURBDEV/Resources/840343-1319499018982/DRM_CENTRAL_AMERICA.pdf)

63 World Bank GFDRR, n.d., p. 21.

64 World Bank GFDRR, n.d., p. 18.

65 World Bank GFDRR, n.d., p. 18.

66 The National Commission includes heads from the Ministries of Foreign Relations, Public Health and Social Assistance, Agriculture and Livestock, Environment and Natural Resources, Public Works, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, National Defense, and Education; the National Civil Police; two representatives of the National Association of Private Businesses; and three nongovernmental organizations that represent the country’s western, central, and eastern, respectively. World Bank GFDRR, n.d., pp. 23–24.

67 World Bank GFDRR, n.d., pp. 23–24.

68 United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2015, August). Country programme document: El Salvador. Retrieved from [http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2015-PL28-El\\_Salvador\\_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2015-PL28-El_Salvador_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf)

69 MINED. (2014a). *Educación de El Salvador en cifras*. San Salvador, El Salvador.

70 MINED. (2014a). *Educación de El Salvador en cifras*. San Salvador, El Salvador.

71 Santacruz Giral, M. L., & Carranza, M. (2009). *Encuesta Nacional de Juventud. Análisis de resultados*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, UCA.

72 Calvo-Gonzalez & Lopez, 2015, p. 64.

73 Education received 42.6 percent approval, a higher rating than the economy (15.4 percent), health (33.8 percent) and public security (18.5 percent) (Sanchez Ceren con Baja Aprobación de los Salvadoreños. [2016, March 28]. *La Prensa Gráfica*. Retrieved from <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2015/09/01/sanchez-ceren-con-baja-aprobacion-de-los-salvadorenos>).

In a 2014 World Bank country survey, education was ranked the highest development priority (53 percent), with crime and violence the second highest (52 percent).<sup>74</sup> Given that the school is arguably the most direct and local interaction between citizens and the state, this is especially significant.

High public support for education therefore represents one of the sector's few assets amid a broad array of challenges, for example:

- Below-average public spending on education—El Salvador's 2015 education budget represents 3.5 percent of GDP,<sup>75</sup> whereas the regional average is 5.2 percent.<sup>76</sup>
- Poor and unequal learning outcomes—for example, only 55 percent of 7 year olds from the poorest 40 percent of households can read, compared to 73 percent of those in the top three income quintiles.
- Dramatic recent declines in primary net enrollment. The net enrollment rate in primary school increased from 87 percent in 2000 to 94 percent in 2009,<sup>77</sup> only to fall precipitously to below 86 percent in 2015.
- High and growing dropout rates, particularly at the secondary levels. This is of particular interest with respect to the possible link to increased violence and insecurity in a subset of municipalities.

#### Enrollment statistics for 2014 and 2015

EDUCATION LEVEL	ENROLLMENT RATES 2014			ENROLLMENT 2015	
	Boys	Girls	Average	Total Enrollment 2014	Total Enrollment 2015
Primary (grades 1–6)	86%	86.7	86.4%	773,221 (–)	645,407 (–)
Low secondary or third cycle (grades 7–9)	62.0%	67.9%	64.9%	382,729 (–)	300,244 (–)
High school (grades 10–12)	35.4%	39.7%	37.5%	214,668 (–)	144,196 (–)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60.23%</b>	<b>63.5%</b>	<b>61.85%</b>	<b>1,602,630</b>	<b>1,283,170</b>

Source: MINED<sup>78</sup>

Note: The + or – after the total number of students indicates if it's an increase or decrease from the previous year. Excludes early childhood, accelerated, night school, and other special modalities.

74 World Bank Group. (2014, June). *The World Bank Group Country Survey FY 2014: Report of Findings* (p. 13). Retrieved from <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2196>

75 Cuéllar-Marchelli, H. (2015). *El Estado de las Políticas Públicas Docentes*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social.

76 UNICEF. August 2015. *Country programme document. El Salvador*. United Nations Economic and Social Council. Consulted at: [http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2015-PL28-El\\_Salvador\\_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2015-PL28-El_Salvador_CPD-ODS-EN.pdf)

## The Dropout Challenge

The Salvadoran government collects annual data on the number of school dropouts and the reasons for leaving school, which include relocation, migration, gang violence, a need to work, poverty, pregnancy, poor academic outcomes, poor health, distance from school, sexual violence, prostitution, and marriage and family problems. Among these, the most prevalent in 2014 was relocation (implying that the student will re-enroll in another school in El Salvador), followed by migration out of the country, and insecurity (violence). Together, these three reasons accounted for 48,000 school withdrawals in 2014 (3.5 percent of the total school population of 1.37 million).<sup>79, 80</sup>

School withdrawal data are especially interesting when viewed retrospectively. According to a report published in August 2015 by El Faro, “insecurity” was cited in 2009 as the reason for 6,114 school withdrawals. By 2014, it was cited as the reason for 13,402 school withdrawals, representing an increase of 120 percent in five years. When one considers that families’ decision to “relocate” (an additional 29,785 in 2014) or “migrate” (an added 15,806 in 2014) may also have been affected by violence, the potential impact of violence on school withdrawals takes on an added dimension.

## Violence and Dropouts

Although school withdrawal occurs in all parts of the country, a geographic review of the data reveals interesting patterns. For example, schools in the northern part of El Salvador—in particular, the departments of Chalatenango and Morazan—experience relatively low rates of school withdrawal. Conversely, La Paz and Cusacatlan experience the highest rates of withdrawal—9 of the 20 municipalities with the highest withdrawal rates were located in these two departments.

When homicide rates are added to the analysis, another noteworthy dimension of school withdrawal emerges. Of El Salvador's 262 municipalities, 82—concentrated in the North—registered zero withdrawals due to insecurity; of these same municipalities, more than 25 percent also registered zero homicides. Conversely, 50 of the 262 municipalities accounted for 66 percent of El Salvador's total homicides in 2014, and these same municipalities accounted for 83 percent of all school withdrawals. Of the 20 municipalities with the highest withdrawal rates, 17 had homicide rates above the national average of 61 per 100,000 in 2014.

77See Rivas, F. (Ed.). (2008). *El estado de la educación en América Central: 2000–2008*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Fundación de Innovaciones Educativas Centroamericanas; MINED, 2014a.

78 MINED. (2014a); MINED (2015b).

79 Alvarado, J. (2015, August). La Desercion escolar por inseguridad de duplico en los ultimos cinco anos. El Faro. Retrieved from <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201508/noticias/17252/La-desercion-escolar-por-inseguridad-se-duplico-en-los-ultimos-cinco-anos.htm>

80 It should be noted that withdrawal categories are not mutually exclusive; multiple factors can be at play at the same time. For example, the decision to relocate or migrate might also be in part motivated by a desire to seek earning opportunities elsewhere—and/or to escape violence.



Homicide is not the only risk factor that affects the decisions by students and teachers about whether, and where, to attend school. In fact, schools are faced with a number of inter-related internal (within school grounds) and external (outside the school) risks. In the highest-risk municipalities, many of these negatively combine with gang presence.

Overall, MINED estimates that around 65 percent of schools are affected by gang presence, while almost 30 percent see their internal security as threatened by gangs.<sup>81</sup> A school located in gang territory is usually considered by the gang as its property; the gang also views it as a potential pool of new recruits.<sup>82</sup> Gangs threaten and extort principals, teachers, and students; prevent students from crossing gang borders and going to school; and in some cases seek to influence if not control the functioning of the schools themselves—in particular, secondary schools or *complejos*, including their principals and teachers.<sup>83</sup> In addition to direct gang influence, students and teachers in the most vulnerable communities face a higher incidence of crime and drug trafficking.

The following table presents a summary of internal and external risks that schools faced in 2015, as reported by school principals in a total of 5,132 schools.

Internal and External Social Risks that Students Face

RISK	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS WITH INTERNAL RISKS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS WITH EXTERNAL RISKS
Gangs	1,220	3,327
Theft/robberies	1,622	3,188
Drugs	733	3,121
Weapons and firearms	560	2,909
Extortion	348	2,349
Rape	78	1,085
Trafficking of persons	58	685
Other (alcoholism, threats, family violence)	179	207
Lack of public transportation to the school	n/a	1,147

Source: MINED

Violence has a considerable impact on teachers as well. In 2015, 7.35 percent of teachers suffered extortion in or around their school, and 3.5 percent had received threats from gangs. According to union and media reports,<sup>85</sup> 10 teachers were assassinated in 2014; this number rose to 12 in 2015. Due to threats of extortion, abuse, and/or death, a growing number of teachers request school re-assignment. In recog-

nition of such challenges, MINED developed a protocol to transfer teachers quickly and efficiently, but has stopped short of initiating policies that explicitly address the risk of violence to students or teachers in or around school.

Despite its reluctance to formally address school-related violence as an education issue, MINED has long sought to work more indirectly on crime and violence prevention. Since 2010, it has initiated numerous crime and violence prevention-related strategies, such as values education, “building a culture of peace,” conflict resolution, and life skills training.<sup>86</sup> Twenty percent of schools offer training on school management in situations of violence, and 16 percent of teachers in these schools have received training on violence prevention or peace culture. In addition, 93 percent of schools report organizing activities for improving school coexistence and human rights.<sup>87</sup>

MINED has also sought to address violence and crime-related risks through broad education reform and programming. Beginning in 2006, MINED implemented the EDUCAME (flexible education) program to offer educational alternatives to overage and out-of-school youth. In 2012, MINED introduced an online, 100 percent virtual high school program as part of the EDUCAME program. During 2014–2015, 50,455 students in the third cycle of secondary school (grades 7–9) took advantage of such flexible education alternatives. This included 722 high school students who studied exclusively online, 714 youth residing in detention centers, and an additional 5,360 youth and young adults who participated in technical courses. In recent years, a significant number of students have been incorporated into EDUCAME due to violence and insecurity, and not primarily because they dropped out and/or are overage.

With its most recent restructuring in 2015, MINED added a new office of Prevention and Social Programs, which is responsible for violence prevention efforts and for providing school meals, uniforms, and supplies to the most vulnerable students, with the overarching goals of better supporting student access and retention and improving learning.<sup>88</sup>

81 MINED. (2015, November 26). Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador. Retrieved from <http://simeeduco.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OBSERVATORIO-MINED-2015.pdf>

82 Savenije, W., & Van de Borgh, C. 2014, p. 104.

83 From three key informant interviews.

84 MINED. (2015). Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación.

85 As a policy, MINED does not keep official records of murdered teachers.

86 See: Ardón, W. (Dec. 2013). *Sistematización de iniciativas de prevención en la educación en El Salvador*. San Salvador: GIZ.

87 MINED. (2015). *Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación.

88 MINED. (2015). *Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación.

In 2009, MINED initiated the Social Education Plan, at the heart of which was MINED's "Full-Time Inclusive Schools" (*Escuela Inclusiva de Tiempo Pleno*, or EITP) model. Advocates believed that the EITP model could mitigate student risks by building stronger ties within school communities and by keeping students off the streets and out of trouble. The EITP model features the following:

- Expanding educational opportunities beyond general curriculum topics to include activities such as music, art, and sports
- Linking multiple aspects of the community (local businesses, community leaders, social service providers) with the school as a way to make the curriculum and overall student experience more relevant and connected to the community
- Leveraging shared resources by clustering geographically proximate schools together so that different schools can offer different programs and resources (the "Integrated System" model)<sup>89</sup>

By mid-2015, the EITP model had expanded to 2,082 of El Salvador's 5,132 schools, and 259 Integrated System networks were formed in 92 municipalities. However, there were not enough resources to provide the rich array of activities planned for EITP implementation. The EITP also underestimated the challenge of violence and insecurity, as students were unable to cross gang territorial lines to access other schools in the local EITP network. Finally, the EITP approach placed additional responsibilities on schools without providing the necessary facilities, supplies, or support staff, such as social workers, psychologists, and counselors, for dealing with the special needs of students.<sup>90</sup>

While crime and violence constitute urgent and visible school threats in many of El Salvador's most vulnerable municipalities, schools also are vulnerable to natural disasters. One study found that 838 schools are located in zones at risk of floods and landslides.<sup>91</sup> The 2015 Global Assessment Report calculated an average annual loss for the education sector of more than \$40 million due to earthquakes and cyclonic wind. A probabilistic risk assessment of 20 percent of the educational infrastructure in San Salvador demonstrated the high vulnerability of school buildings and the necessity to ramp up efforts to make them resilient to natural hazards.<sup>92</sup>

### Making Schools Safer

The Salvadoran Government and MINED have recently begun to address the variety of threats to their schools, students, and teachers by adopting a number of measures. Toward the objective of reducing the number of children and adolescents who are out of school or who

work in selected municipalities, the *Plan El Salvador Seguro* set out a number of broad actions, including expanding the coverage of the EITP, expanding coverage of the National Plan for Prevention and Safety in Schools, and developing psychosocial programs for children and youth.<sup>93</sup>

The Salvadoran Government included education as one of its three priorities in its Five-Year Development Plan (2014–2019) and established a National Education Council (CONED) in May 2015. CONED is a forum for dialogue, consultation, and advice to the government on education. Its diverse membership includes representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, international partners, and government. CONED is currently finalizing its Plan El Salvador Educativo (Educated El Salvador Plan), which names "schools free of violence and a central focus of prevention" as one of its six objectives.<sup>94</sup> However, while this objective involves 50 recommended actions, it received only 3.9 percent of the Plan's \$11 million budget—the lowest of all six objectives. In addition, the Plan does not explicitly address disaster vulnerability.

MINED has developed a national School Protection Plan, which advocates taking action to "identify risks and threats, and to enhance capabilities of the school community to prevent and respond to emergencies and disasters."<sup>95</sup> The plan states that each school should have a School Protection Committee, composed of students, parents, and teachers, which is responsible for operationalizing school protection plans. The plan identifies a number of safety measures that include informing and sensitizing the school community, organizing school protection committees, developing risk and resource maps, preparing emergency response, and regularly evaluating the plan.

MINED has collaborated with the Red Cross on disaster simulations and preparedness activities, including training on disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation for teachers in 90 schools in high-risk communities. MINED and the Red Cross also worked together to develop disaster plans focused on disaster management and risk reduction in more than 100 high-risk schools.<sup>96</sup> In 2012, USAID and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance supported Save the Children in implementing a school-based disaster risk reduction project in vulnerable communities in rural El Salvador, holding 30 drills in schools, in which more than 5,000 students and adults participated.<sup>97</sup>

89 *Hacia una Escuela Inclusiva de Tiempo Pleno* (EITP). 2015. MINED. p. 41.

90 MINED. (2015). *Observatorio MINED 2015 sobre los centros educativos públicos de El Salvador*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación.

91 Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2015.

92 World Bank GFDRR, n.d., p. 85.

93 National Council on Citizen Security and Coexistence. (2014). *Plan El Salvador Seguro* (pp. 27–28). Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.gob.sv/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/El-Salvador-Seguro.pdf>

94 CONED. (2016, May). Plan El Salvador Educativo.

95 MINED. (2012). *Plan de Protección Escolar*. Retrieved at <http://www.mined.gob.sv/jdownloads/Reduccion%20de%20Riesgo/PLAN%20PROTECCION%20FINAL%20MINED.pdf>.

96 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (n.d.). *Estudio de Caso: El proyecto de mitigación de El Salvador apoya a 30 municipios*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Cruz Roja y Cruz Roja Salvadoreña. Retrieved from <http://www.eird.org/ifrc-toolkit/docs-clave/mitigacion-el-salvador.pdf>.

97 USAID. (2012, September 30). *Disaster Risk Reduction—Latin America and the Caribbean*. Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2012. Retrieved from [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/09.30.12%20-%20USAID-DCHA%20LAC%20DRR%20Fact%20Sheet%20\\_1%20FY%202012.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/09.30.12%20-%20USAID-DCHA%20LAC%20DRR%20Fact%20Sheet%20_1%20FY%202012.pdf)

MINED continues to work toward school safety. Disaster risk management is now included in education policies, plans, and systems, including (1) the MINED 2021 National Plan, which incorporates risk reduction as a strategic objective; (2) the official curricula for primary and secondary schools (though not higher education); and (3) “school safety” plans. MINED representatives also participate on the municipal *Comités Municipales de Prevención de la Violencia* (Municipal Violence Prevention Committees).

A high number of schools have served as shelters in the event of a disaster. For example, in the 2011 Tropical Depression 12-E, 308 schools were used as shelters.<sup>98</sup> However, MINED indicates that its policy on school shelters has changed, which can have important implications for the ability of students to continue studying after a disaster. MINED has issued a new plan for the interruption of education in case of an emergency, including psychosocial support and a curriculum that can be used in post-disaster circumstances. However, MINED admits that it does not have capacity to monitor whether these plans actually exist and are implemented at the school level.

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98 UNICEF (2014). *Informe de Situación de la Niñez y Adolescencia en El Salvador*. p

## MAIN FINDINGS

Findings from the limited and purposive primary data collection sample of school communities, via focus group discussions and key informant interviews, are presented below. However, these findings are not intended to be representative of the Salvadoran education sector as a whole and may be biased towards the schools and communities sampled. The sample offers in-depth insights into the interaction of school communities and gang violence, insecurity, and disaster risk, including assets and sources of resilience. Data analysis and synthesis refers to or “counts” responses at the level of Focus Group or Key Informant Interviews.

### SAFETY

**Respondents in all schools sampled considered themselves safer inside their schools than in their external environments, but they also cited gang presence and influence over internal school affairs.**

Some specific findings:

- All student focus groups—boys and girls—said that they feel safer in school than on the route to and from school. However, one focus group of male students and student focus groups at four public schools said that they did not feel fully safe in school.
- All teacher focus groups and principals—men and women—stated that they feel safer inside their schools, particularly when the schools are located near the gang borders.
- While only one focus group of teachers mentioned receiving threats, teachers in six schools explained that they had to adapt their teaching methods and classroom management to be more careful around students associated with gangs.
- In three of the eight schools visited, parents indicated that there were risks inside the schools, ranging from gang-related insecurity (such as threats and fights) to physical abuse by teachers.
- In one school, the community and parents’ focus group surfaced concerns over abuse by teachers and conflicts between school staff.
- In three schools, teacher focus groups and principals explained how gangs use cell phones to communicate with members inside the school. In one instance, a student and gang member threatened the teacher to give him a cell phone; another time, gang members in the school received calls about violence happening outside the school, making the entire school anxious and fearful.

**Schools located on the “front lines” of gang territorial confrontation witnessed more insecurity.** Most schools in the sample were on the front lines—either very near or immediately on the borders of rival gang territories. These front-line border areas—which are never formally demarcated and can shift, as gangs are in constant competition over territory and territorial control—are particularly subject to provocations and violent confrontations between gangs. Two schools in the sample drew students from different gang territories, requiring students to travel across the front lines. Some specific findings:

- All student and teacher focus groups, as well as all principals at front-line schools, mentioned how confrontations between gangs created a heightened sense of fear and insecurity.
- Principals and teacher focus groups in five front-line schools recounted how gang violence and insecurity in these areas left students very anxious and agitated when they arrived at school, affecting their disposition, motivation, and ability to learn.
- According to one principal, after a student was killed last year near a front-line school due to gang fighting, enrollment dropped by 200 students, as parents pulled their children out of school.
- Students and teachers from one front-line school recalled how a member of a rival gang climbed over the school wall (which was on the border), entered the grounds, and assaulted a student.
- At two schools, teachers and students could not travel to other schools in their system for sports events due to gang territorial borders. Instead, intramural sports events and competitions had to be carefully planned within the school walls.
- In one school, located directly on the front line, the gangs “divided” the school, and only students from one gang territory could attend school. Students who happened to reside in the other gang territory, and who otherwise would attend this school, had to find another school.



**There are indications that some gang members—who are also parents in the school communities—want schools to function.** Gang members are part of the local education community as students and parents, and some still value education for their own and their neighbors' children. Teacher focus groups and principals in four schools reported that they have established communication channels between the school and some gang members to protect students' right to an education and to keep the school working. Some specific findings:

- In one school, the principal maintains a dialogue with the gang clique leader to ensure that education will not be compromised, and parents who are gang members sign the *manual de convivencia* (coexistence manual, akin to a code of conduct) just as other parents do. The principal clarifies that this dialogue is made easier by the fact that there is only one gang in the community.
- In one school, teachers reported how gang leaders reprimanded unruly students who were disrupting the studies of their own children in the school. A teacher recalled how a mother—the daughter of the local gang leader—asked her to treat and discipline her child the same as the other students.
- In the same school, a teacher recounted how a leader of the local gang clique told her that he became a gang member because a teacher mistreated him, but now, as an electrician, he fixes the lights in the school for free. This teacher stated that the gang respects teachers if they are good, but also noted that the gang requested that one disrespectful teacher be re-assigned.
- In another school, the focus group of teachers revealed that they had all worked there for many years and had taught some of the gang leaders. Due to their standing in the school community, those gang leaders respected them and the school.
- One teacher spoke of how a misbehaving child of a gang member was, in fact, reprimanded by the gang member for not respecting another teacher.
- In one school, the principal recalled a conversation with a gang leader from jail, who said that he wanted a different future for his child.
- In another school, a teacher said that the gang does not impose itself on the teachers or the school. The gang lets the teachers do their work, even if this implies reprimanding their children. The majority of the teachers have worked a long time in the school and are known by the gang leaders, some of whom were their students in the past. The gang members send their own children to this school and reportedly trust the school.

### **Schools that sustain outreach and collaboration mechanisms with parents and communities appear to manage insecurity better.**

Several collaboration mechanisms already exist or are common practice, such as parent committees, School Protection Committees, and Community Development Associations. Some specific findings:

- Three schools mentioned having an active School Protection Committee, though it is worth noting that two of the three are Superate centers.
- One school maintains a range of collaborative mechanisms with the community, including extracurricular activities, a *Comité de Convivencia* that works on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and municipal health worker outreach. Parents participate in school committees, including one on family education. Teachers at the school spoke of a relationship of “mutual respect” between students, teachers, the principal, and the community, including the local gang. They stated that they did not feel threatened; there was no extortion, not even petty theft.
- Three out of eight schools did not report clear, strong community outreach or collaboration mechanisms, and these schools in general expressed difficulties in managing internal and external gang-related risks.
- In one school where staff and students felt less insecurity, they explained that some of the key factors included values education, constant school surveillance using cameras, a policy prohibiting cell phone use, all parents signing and adhering to the *manual de convivencia*, on-site school psychologists, school staff visits to families (negotiated with gangs), and very active parental involvement.

### **Respondents expressed diverging views as to whether the presence of police and military in and around schools improved security.**

Respondents in three schools believed that the police and military added to insecurity, while respondents in another three schools saw the police as a positive influence on safety. Respondents in another school were divided: the focus groups with teachers and male students conveyed a negative view of the police, while the female student focus group was more positive. Some of the opinions expressed from the broader sample of schools are as follows:

- Principals in four of the schools expressed the need to maintain a distant relationship with the police in order to avoid retribution from the gang, particularly when the school is in a front-line zone.
- Principals at two schools thought that the police presence in and around the school reduced gang activity and made the school environment more secure.
- The focus group of male students in one school expressed fear of police that in some cases surpassed their fear of gangs, due to situations where they were held up, frisked, roughed up, or otherwise wrongly profiled.
- Female students in the focus group at one school stated that more police in and around school were needed to feel safer. At another site, the female students thought that the police were not effective in the school and were even afraid of the gangs.
- In two other schools, parents felt that police presence did not enhance and could possibly detract from students' perceptions of school safety, as police themselves were perceived as potential threats. Parents indicated that they themselves felt they should be responsible for children's security and, by implication, not the police.
- Teachers also had mixed perspectives on police presence and activities. In one front-line school, the focus group of teachers thought that a prevention program run by the police would put children and youth at risk. In another school, deeper in one gang's territory, teachers in the focus group noted that the police were well-received.
- Students in one school indicated that military patrols would stop them and beat them up, without provocation or reason. They claimed that soldiers were more aggressive than police officers and described an incident last year when soldiers came to the school on rumors that some students were selling drugs, and threatened to beat students.
- One student explained that the problem is that the school, community, and police are not "integrated."

### **Respondents in all schools exhibited general awareness of the school's main disaster risks and report having carried out basic disaster preparedness measures.**

However, more information is needed on the actual state of their disaster resilience. While disaster risk universally affects all schools and communities, the key informant interviews and focus group discussions confirmed that the overarching preoccupation of the school communities is violence and insecurity. Some specific findings:

- Earthquakes were cited as the main risk in five schools, while floods were mentioned in three schools, tropical storms and tsunami in two schools, and volcanic activity in one school. One school had already been destroyed and rebuilt due to a previous earthquake.
- MINED states that all schools should carry out monthly drills, but respondents in several schools revealed that this was not necessarily the reality.
- MINED's role is to support schools in implementing disaster preparedness plans and activities; however, MINED respondents reported that the ministry has only three staff dedicated to risk management.<sup>99</sup>
- Three schools mentioned having active School Protection Committees.
- Simulations have been conducted in seven schools, with support from partners such as the Red Cross, although the frequency varied from every few months to last year to three years ago.
- In two schools, gang presence outside the school prevents the completion of evacuation drills.

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99 From an interview with MINED Dirección de Prevención y Programas Especiales.

## STUDENTS

**Gang violence, intimidation, and territoriality constrain access to all schools in the sample and are reported as key drivers of school dropout.** Gang violence and intimidation make the environments surrounding schools, and the routes that students walk to school, threatening. Gangs intimidate, attack, extort, and monitor students on their routes to school, and prevent students from crossing their territorial boundaries. Some specific findings:

- In seven of eight schools, respondents indicated that gang violence and insecurity are drivers of low school enrollment and dropout. At these schools, principals, students, and teachers alike conveyed that students leave school, either temporarily or permanently, due to the violence and insecurity in and outside the school.
- All student focus groups—boys and girls—explained that they must be extremely careful about what to say and with whom to talk, both inside and outside the school.
- Students and principals from several schools cited inter-gang conflict outside the school as a major threat to students.
- In one school, a student recalled how a fellow student was killed outside the entrance of the school, making many students afraid to come back—some of whom never returned.
- Students in yet another school described how fellow students were kidnapped outside their school and a food vendor was killed just outside the school.
- One student summed up the situation as follows: “[The gangs] decide who goes to school.”

### **Adolescent male students are most at risk of gang violence and intimidation—including recruitment.**

- In one school, parents indicated that gangs begin to follow students at the age of 10.
- A principal at one school argued that boys suffer more threats from gangs; however, parents of boys allow their sons to go on field trips more readily than parents of girls. Girls are more often denied permission to leave the house, as they run the risk of attracting the attention of a gang member.
- Third cycle (grade 7–9) teachers in one school said they could clearly tell who is in a gang.
- One principal noted that a boy is most likely to join a gang between the ages of 11 and 13.
- A focus group of male students stated that students entering school in adolescence are more at risk because they may be asked to help or join the gang. If the students do not want to join, they can be threatened, beaten up, or even killed.

**Students—boys and girls—in all schools value their education and their future.** The value placed on school can be an indication of a student’s bond to the school and his or her personal drive and motivation. These are key factors to an adolescent’s resilience, particularly in times of adversity. Some specific findings:

- At one front-line school, a focus group of female students said they wanted to have a better future, to learn, and to be professionals. In a separate focus group session, their male counterparts stated precisely the same.
- Student focus groups in four schools conveyed the desire to achieve more than their parents, and two groups mentioned the aspiration to give back to their parents.

### **Students in all schools judiciously adapt their behavior to be safe.**

More needs to be known about the differential impact of gangs on boys and girls. What is known is that boys are directly recruited or pressured to join gangs. Girls are not recruited into gangs as much as boys, but they may be targeted to be partners or to provide support to gang members or for gang activities. The focus group discussions with students did not reveal noteworthy differences between girls and boys in how they were affected by or dealt with violence and insecurity.

Some specific findings:

- All student focus groups—boys and girls—explained how they needed to be careful about crossing gang lines and knowing what routes to walk to and from schools.
- Students in all schools explained how their dress was crucial to their security. They cannot always wear the clothes they want to, as they must avoid drawing attention to themselves or being mistaken for rival gang members. Students in the Superate complementary education centers stated that the uniforms they wear helped them, as gangs gave them more respect as higher-achieving students.
- All student focus groups—girls and boys—indicated that they toed a fine line to keep a respectful distance from gang members, both in and outside school.
- One girl commented that she felt like she was under constant surveillance by the gangs.
- Another girl mentioned that gang members are at her bus stop and have followed her on occasion.
- A focus group of boys at one school mentioned that walking to and from school was also made unsafe by the police and their often arbitrary confrontations, searches, and profiling.
- One male student said that students must always walk to school in groups of friends, and that students without friends were the most vulnerable.

**Respondents at all schools consistently agreed that parents and family violence are key factors behind dropout.** While MINED's Social Education Plan is based on parental and community participation, school practices seem mostly informative and do not always encourage a horizontal, equitable relationship between parents and schools. Some specific findings:

- Principals and focus groups of community members and parents, teachers, and students at all schools described how the role of parents in the family influences whether a student stays in school or leaves. Parental participation may be limited by different factors, such as employment responsibilities, a passive attitude about school, and a lack of parent-friendly approaches to parent involvement on the school's part.
- All respondents stressed that parental engagement with schools and parents' active participation in their children's education is a key factor in minimizing dropout. Where there is parental support, students are motivated to be successful and to continue schooling, even when faced with other kinds of constraints. On the other hand, breakdown of the family due to migration, poverty, violence, or other factors; physical or emotional abuse; and parental absence or disinterest all contribute to students' difficulties at school and an increased likelihood of dropout.
- Only two schools reported a satisfactory relationship with parents.
- Respondents in all schools emphasized the need for family education.
- Respondents in one school emphasized that some parents do not make an effort to enroll their children.
- Respondents in one school noted that parents' educational level is an obstacle for homework support.
- In the majority of schools visited, parents were recognized as a determining factor of whether a student would join a gang or not. Close parental supervision and support for students were seen as crucial in this regard.
- A key factor behind female student dropout cited by multiple respondents in six schools was pregnancy.

## TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND CURRICULUM

**Teachers and principals report feeling overwhelmed and under-equipped to handle the needs of students, stating a need for psychosocial support.** Students come to school burdened by violence, threats, and family difficulties, and parents often look to teachers to help solve their children's problems. Teachers feel threatened and are afraid to teach and correct (or reprimand) students who are, or are related to, gang members. Some specific findings:

- In six of the eight schools visited, teachers and principals said they experienced stress from working in an environment of intimidation and, at times, threats. They also felt in need of psychological support.
- In two schools, the combination of teamwork among teachers, specific training on psychological support, and the local gang's respect for the school reduced the level of stress among the teachers and principals.
- Teachers in the focus groups in four schools expressed how they are losing confidence in their normal role of orienting and advising students—and even assigning grades—out of fear of gang reprisal. They feel like their authority has been upended. In one school, teachers formed peer groups, which they claimed helped their resilience very much. In another school, though teachers claimed they felt more at ease in school, they still had to be careful around students.
- In one school, the deputy principal quit due to gang threats.
- One principal articulated the specific needs of teachers and principals as skills in mediation, conflict resolution, and permanent psychological support for teacher “self care.”



**All principals and teacher focus groups argued that the curriculum should focus more on life skills training, social-emotional skills, and employment skills.** The national curriculum, although competency-based, focuses primarily on academic subject-area knowledge,<sup>100</sup> whereas the present situation of violence requires the development of additional skills, such as emotion management, problem solving, and communication. Teacher pre-service and in-service trainings focus on content areas and methodology, while giving little or no attention to important topics such as classroom management, violence prevention, and risk management.<sup>101</sup> Some specific findings:

- In the two Superate schools, which have a strong emphasis on life skills training and values education, teacher focus groups and principals recognized the positive results and recommend the inclusion of these topics in the general national curriculum.
- At five of the eight schools visited, including the focus group discussion with Adopt-a-School principals, youth job training and the teaching of more practical, technical, and otherwise employable skills are priorities.
- Teacher focus groups and principals in every school indicated the need for “integral” education, meaning extracurricular activities—sports, music, art, and social skills—in addition to the basic subject areas. Workshops were highly valued across the board for their complementary activities, although parents and teachers additionally recognized the value of keeping students occupied.

**Respondents argued that a positive school atmosphere plays an important role in student well-being, learning, and retention in these contexts.** A constructive school atmosphere was described by informants as comprising infrastructure (adequate classrooms, library, recreational spaces, computer centers, etc.), resources (books, supplies, computers), respectful and encouraging relationships with teachers, and established standards or codes of conduct (*manuals de convivencia*). The urgency for improved school atmospheres cannot be overstated, given that students generally have two relatively safe spaces to play and learn—their homes and their schools. Some specific findings:

- Teachers in three schools, principals in three schools, and a community group in another school specifically cited that infrastructure, materials, and resources make schools more attractive for students, contribute to permanence, and help to improve the psychosocial state of learners.
- Respondents in five schools emphasized the importance of an attractive school atmosphere to retain students and to keep the focus on education, rather than the challenges outside the school.
- These students also mentioned the importance of caring adults within the school to supervise, counsel, and orient students.
- Parents and principals at six of the eight schools emphasized that an orderly, disciplined environment makes school more attractive to students and parents and contributes to successful learning.

- Superate students emphasized the caring, trustful relationships they have with their teachers, particularly when compared to their previous public school, as an important source of resilience for overcoming risk situations in their neighborhoods.
- In one school, the principal attributed improved enrollment to a better school atmosphere, including both the physical plant and teaching methodologies.

## EDUCATION POLICY AND SYSTEMS

**Implementation of education policy and programs is constrained by community insecurity.** Schools face many risks that impede their ability to follow the models and systems established by MINED. Some specific findings:

- Principals and teacher focus groups in two schools spoke of the difficulties they encountered in accepting students with either gang backgrounds or special needs, in line with MINED’s inclusivity policy. School principals report being given no special training or resources to attend to the needs of these students.
- Principals and teachers in one school stated that they are restricted from working in a different territory from their residence or traveling to meetings in other zones.
- Respondents indicated that they could not implement MINED’s Integrated System model, as staff in their network of schools were not allowed by gangs to travel across gang borders to physically meet.
- In a case cited by teachers at one school, MINED could not hire qualified teachers from one gang’s territory, as the gang prevented them from crossing the border. MINED had to hire under-qualified teachers from the gang’s home territory. In another school, which was able to transport students to another school in the network for extracurricular activities, the teacher focus group stated that their MINED Technical Advisor told them not to travel so much.

## USAID PROJECTS

**Schools, teachers, and students value USAID-funded programs and would like more support.** Many respondents across schools noted the value of USAID projects in their communities. The opportunity to participate in extracurricular, creative, and social activities, in particular, has been cited as a crucially valued resource by school directors, teachers, and students alike. School communities with partner-supported projects and community participation mechanisms are also more optimistic about the future.

100 MINED. (2007). Currículo servicio aprendizaje [www.oei.es/pdfs/curriculo\\_aprendizaje\\_salvador.pdf](http://www.oei.es/pdfs/curriculo_aprendizaje_salvador.pdf)

101 MINED. (2014b). Plan Nacional de Formación Docente. San Salvador, El Salvador. <http://www.mined.gob.sv/index.php/programas-educativos/formacion-docente>

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID

USAID/El Salvador should review its strategy and programming from the perspective that the school can be the most local interface between citizen and state and that it offers a multi-sectoral platform for community change. Improving equitable and safe access to quality education in El Salvador can deliver dividends across different sectors, including Democratic Governance, Disaster Assistance, Child Protection, Youth, Economic Growth, and Citizen Security—but it requires action. In the short term, the school can serve as a catalyst for risk reduction and social cohesion; in the longer term, it can serve as an investment in strengthening the Salvadoran social contract.

**In high-risk zones, USAID should work in partnership with school-based community groups to (integrate and/or) build resilience and protective capacities.**

- In targeted high-risk school communities, **facilitate joint, participatory planning processes led by school communities** to locally identify priorities, surface gaps in service delivery and partner project implementation, and help enlist external partners. Support local leadership of the process by schools, and foster ownership and collaboration with their immediate communities, municipalities, and project partners and donors; provide guidance on facilitating multi-stakeholder planning discussions; and identify and support collaboration and partnership between these actors to instill confidence and build cohesion.
- **Leverage, adjust, and coordinate current USAID projects** across sectors, and design additional cross-sectoral interventions in support of priorities identified in the community resilience frameworks. Identify meaningful ways to leverage existing community knowledge and priorities so that resilience capacities and protective factors are explicitly addressed. Identify and leverage key leaders and stakeholders that can influence partners' re-orientation to build resilience capacities and protective factors.
- In these targeted school communities, advocate for analysis and interventions within the school-based resilience frameworks that **address the risk factors** affecting education access and parent and community vulnerability; **strengthen school-community collaboration and cohesion**; and **increase the resilience of the school and its community** (including students, teachers, parents, principals, and community members).
- Illustrative areas of interventions that could support a **school community resilience framework** include: fostering dialogue between community police and the school community; joint planning and problem-solving opportunities with municipalities on prevention and service delivery; establishment and/or professionalization of youth centers; optimizing Community Development Association engagement to support equitable and safe access to school; providing psychosocial support through trauma counseling; offering professional development for school representatives, other key community actors, and parents on social-emotional learning, parenting and family support, life and work skills (e.g., life and career planning, financial literacy, time management), and preventive health (including reproductive health); and providing safe spaces for extracurricular and creative activities.
- For all of the above, ensure a **community sensitivity and “do no harm”** approach, including a judicious use of USAID branding, avoidance of perceived instrumentalization of education programs for security objectives, and carefully crafted external messaging and communication. An emphasis on the right to education as a human right and humanitarian arguments can be helpful as a basis for communications with local stakeholders and can also help manage their expectations.

The nature and scale of both gang violence and disaster risk obviously requires a comprehensive and multi-sectoral response, even to support schools in high-risk zones. The following recommendations are oriented to MINED; however, they should not be understood to imply that MINED alone can solve the problems of gang violence, insecurity, and natural disaster risk.

**USAID should work with/or enable MINED to better contextualize its national planning and programs to reflect the high-risk reality faced by school communities.** This includes providing assistance to MINED to design and evaluate more effective evidence-based policies, programs, and interventions for risk-specific problems, or to make specific adaptations and adjustments to the dynamic and volatile situation. These should be based on evidence-based theories of change that can be clearly understood by all stakeholders.<sup>102</sup>

**Specific recommendations for supporting MINED are as follows:**

- Include **social-emotional skills and crisis response training** in the pre-service and in-service teacher training curriculum.
- Develop a two-track strategy with international partners to (1) provide **management and leadership training to principals** in high-risk zones while (2) developing a MINED-accredited management and leadership training program for principals and *Consejos Directivo Escolar*, a representative and elected school body over which the principal presides.
- Broaden **parent skills training** efforts, using schools as the platform to convoke and maintain participation, in coordination with already established programs from the Instituto Salvadoreño de Niñez y Adolescencia (*También soy persona*), Health Department (*Familias Fuertes*), and MINED (*Educación Familiar, Miles de Manos*).
- Develop **MINED accreditation for psychosocial support counselors**, build support for **training and preparing counselors** prior to their assignment to schools, and place **trained psychosocial counselors in high-risk schools** to support staff and students on risk prevention and post-crisis trauma response.
- Help schools **establish and actively maintain school-parent committees**. Strengthen school-parent-community involvement to address the wider range of school management, insecurity, and other community issues. This may include new forms of organizing school-parent working committees, such as consultative bodies with community representation, to foster more horizontal collaboration and shared decision-making.

- **Extend school hours to offer extracurricular and community activities** within the EITP framework. Go beyond activities for keeping children and youth occupied, and move toward a systematic strategy for making positive interventions in their lives through social and employment skills, integral activities, and the promotion of school as a safe, positive, and open place for the whole community.
- Conduct an assessment of the state of **disaster preparedness and risk reduction activities** in high risk schools, including how they are affected by violence and insecurity.
- Convene a **donor meeting on the issues of violence, insecurity, and education**, with the goal of developing a common approach to support the government of El Salvador. Given the epidemic level of violence and the growing dropout problem, a national-level leadership response is required.

**USAID support to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security** focuses on improving community policing patrols assigned to schools and improving the community policing model. Community police assigned to schools are too often seen as a risk factor by the communities they aim to serve. More information about the professionalization and practice of community policing is needed—with a view to considering the incorporation of more “community-based” policing principles into the current model.

**The specific recommendation to USAID is to support the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in doing the following:**

- **Strengthening the sensitivity of community police in school community areas to the needs of children and youth.** Support an assessment of community policing patrols assigned to school communities, and vet and enhance the community policing training package for child- and youth-specific components (e.g., social-emotional learning, child protection, adolescent rights). Support the ministry in monitoring and evaluating patrols in this area.
- **Reviewing the current community policing model** and identifying cost-effective opportunities to improve it, based on evidence and lessons learned from other community-based policing models. This may also offer insights into how the National Civil Police patrols can strengthen their relationships and collaboration with local communities, including adolescents and youth.

102 For example, MINED’s approach to use EDUCAME for younger, migrant learners was a pragmatic step. However, EDUCAME was created for the specific needs of young adults rather than for children and youth, who have their own unique learning and psychosocial needs.