

# Global Partnership for Education

## Thematic and Country-level Evaluation

### El Salvador Case Study (2024)

**Transformation potential of the priority reforms, country's position to implement these reforms, and GPE support to the reform process up to the compact**

#### Introduction and background

This report is a part of the Thematic and Country-Level Evaluation (TCLE)<sup>1</sup> of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s global and country-level support to its partner countries as part of its [Strategic Plan for 2021–2025](#) (GPE 2025). To operationalize this strategy, GPE's operating model seeks to support governments to transform their education systems. El Salvador was selected as one of eight country cases for study as part the evaluation,<sup>2</sup> which explores El Salvador's potential for transformative reform by closely examining the process of the partnership compact development, selection of its priority reform, and potential for implementation. This case study uses evidence from primary data (interviews with key country-level stakeholders with fieldwork conducted between 21 and 25 August 2023 in San Salvador, El Salvador) and a secondary document review. A stakeholder map, list of respondents interviewed, and a full list of documents reviewed can be found as annexes.

#### Current education situation in El Salvador

El Salvador suffered the effects of a violent civil war lasting over twelve years between 1980 and 1992. Following the 1992 Peace Agreement, widespread gang violence and insecurity continued. In 2019, an emerging political force, Nuevas Ideas, ushered in a new stage in national politics and bringing Nayib Bukele to the presidency of the Republic, focused on reducing gang violence and corruption. El Salvador operates under a highly centralized system with administrative subdivisions. States and county's hold little power and resources. The Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología, MINEDUCYT) establishes the standards and mechanisms necessary for the education system to coordinate and harmonize its modalities and levels, and regulates what is pertinent to ensure the quality, efficiency, and coverage of education. The Ministry of Education is the governing body of public and private education and establishes guidelines for the operation of all educational levels, including higher education.

Education outcomes in El Salvador reflect the learning crisis in the country. Enrolment rates decreased in the period between 2014 and 2018 from 58.6% to 57.4% at pre-primary, 86.4% to 82% at primary, and 64.9% to 57.3% at middle school, while secondary enrolment remained largely stagnant (37.5% to 37.6%).<sup>3</sup> Learning levels were further exacerbated during COVID-19 school closures, which affected 1.3 million children between March 2020 and April 2021. Just 5.3% of children between the age of 0 and 3 were reached by Early Childhood Development (ECD) services, and just 54,5% of children aged 4–6 years attended preschool. Learning poverty is prevalent, with only 34% of high-school graduates reading and understanding a simple text<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The TCLE seeks to progressively assess how GPE's operating model and 2025 strategy support partner countries to select and implement a chosen transformative reform, and assess the likelihood of achieving the intended impact and its potential for sustainability. The evaluation involves longitudinal country-level case studies using a mixed-methods approach for data collection, analysis, and synthesis. The evaluation is being conducted by a consortium, led by Triple Line with partners Learn More and Technopolis.

<sup>2</sup> The other seven partner countries sampled are Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania – Mainland, and Uganda.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Country Office Annual Report, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Country Office Annual Report, 2021.

In 2018, as part of President Bukele's programmatic political platform, the Cuscatlán Plan was launched, which included an initial route to address quality challenges in the education system, including improving the social standing of teachers and the teaching profession, improving the relevance of pedagogical methods and the curriculum, incorporating technology and innovation into education, modernizing legislation, and strengthening institutional management. The formulation of the 2020-2030 policy *Crecer Juntos (Growing Together)*, launched in 2020, proposed a shift in educational policy in which curriculum, resources, materials, and teachers are prepared to address the relevant stage of development. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a new educational reform 'Mi Nueva Escuela' (my new school) was announced in 2022. Amidst this approach, the reconstruction of all public schools in the next five years was announced, and the six pillars of the reform were established: 1) comprehensive early childhood care; 2) New educational infrastructure; 3) Curricular change and improvement; 4) Training of all teachers; 5) Educational technology; 6) Health and nutrition.

### **GPE partnership in El Salvador**

El Salvador joined GPE in 2022, and has received a total of US\$17,499,225 in grant support. Funding under the previous GPE 2020 model funding includes an education sector plan development grant (ESPDG) totalling \$699,625 from 2020-2025, which supported the development of: an education sector diagnosis; the sector plan document; an investigation of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning; a curriculum analysis and roadmap for transformation; the design of a learning evaluation system; and the first Joint Sector Review (JSR) 2022.

El Salvador is part of the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) regional hub. Support has included: research into early childhood curriculum implementation; an exchange between El Salvador and Chile focused on strengthening the quality and inclusiveness of early education, improved transition between educational levels, and education system assessment; and curriculum reform support from a dedicated gender specialist. El Salvador has also benefited from Education Out Loud (EOL) supporting the Ministry of Education programs (i.e. Family Orientation), and strengthening the Salvadoran Network for the Right of Education (RESALDE) that is coordinated by Fundación Ayuda en Acción, and composed by Plan International, FUSALMO, Save the Children, among others.

### **El Salvador's engagement with GPE 2025**

El Salvador is part of the pilot cohort for GPE 2025 which began engagement in January 2021. The Enabling Factors Analysis (EFA) package was finalized in June 2021, and the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) assessment finalized by December 2021. The El Salvador Partnership Compact was completed in April 2022, and the GPE Board approved the strategic parameters for GPE engagement by September 2022. El Salvador is not eligible for a system transformation grant, but has received a Multiplier and girls education accelerator (GEA) grant allocation of \$15 million from January 2023 to January 2027. El Salvador also received a system capacity grant (SCG) of \$1.6 million (2022-2025). The World Bank was selected as grant agent for both the SCG and Multiplier / GEA grant, and UNICEF is the coordinating agency in El Salvador.

The selected priority reform focuses on achieving quality early childhood learning with equity and inclusion by strengthening inclusive access to early childhood education. The Multiplier and GEA will focus on improved literacy achievement in the first cycle of basic education; combatting negative social norms; expanding the scope of curricular development activities in early childhood to strengthen the transition to first grade; the provision of inclusive and targeted books and materials to promote socio-emotional skills and girls' empowerment.

## 1. Did the GPE model help with policy dialogue, identification of system bottlenecks, and solutions to address these bottlenecks for better education outcomes?

### How inclusive is the policy dialogue in El Salvador?

All country stakeholders interviewed during fieldwork reported that the dialogue leading to the identification of the priority reform in El Salvador was government-led, with MINEDUCYT playing a leading role, and the Office of the First Lady playing supporting the selection of the priority reform. Early childhood education is high on the political agenda, and therefore the priority reform emerged with strong stakeholder buy-in. The compact development process required internal coordination within the MINEDUCYT, involving teams of different units, as well as alignment with different initiatives of various governmental institutions. It also demanded significant effort and coordination among the Ministry, the World Bank and UNICEF to produce the documents in a timely manner.

Over 40 organizations were involved from the local education group, including the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO, Fusalmo, Fusades, Fundación Ayuda en Acción/Resalde, Italian Cooperation Agency, Glasswing El Salvador, the Norwegian Committee for Refugees, FEPADE, AECID, Delegation of the European Union, ESEN, Save the Children, Plan International, Contextos, World Vision, among others. However, interviewees noted the limited representation of some important education actors outside of the local education group (LEG), including teachers/students and families, and the private sector. Although three higher education institutions are members of the LEG, only one of these is reported to participate actively. The Ministry of Finance expressed initial interest, but they were not involved in the compact development process. There has however been concerted effort to engage with the Ministry of Health due to the associated WASH activities in the priority reform.

Stakeholders involved in the compact development processes acknowledged the role played by the local education group in supporting the enabling factors assessment and compact development process, which facilitated open and inclusive policy dialogue between the government and country stakeholders. Although there was high engagement from the local education group during the early stages of compact development, in particular the diagnosis and EFA steps, this appears to have reduced, with less local education group involvement in the selection of the priority reform itself, which was undertaken by government. Interviewed members of the LEG reported that its function was limited to the endorsement of the compact and priority reform with limited powers for holding government to account, and some perceived that the roles and responsibilities of the group during the compact development process were not clear. However, while the local education group is a new and evolving mechanism, it is an important platform for education sector coordination with the potential to influence and lead proposed actions to implement the reform.

LEG members and Development Partners stated that GPE actors (MINEDUCYT, coordinating agency and grant agent) are fulfilling their roles in supporting the country. However, some felt that the role of the coordinating agency was not completely clear, expecting more active participation and involvement from them ("*hands on*") rather than acting predominantly as a facilitator. The coordinating agency (UNICEF) promoted the creation of a "*petit comité*", a steering committee created to more efficiently coordinate policy dialogue by facilitating discussion between the Ministry of Education and the local education group, raising the key issues to be discussed within the group, and coordinating with the government. One limitation of the *petit comité* was the short timeframe for which the LEG members are appointed (6 months) which was reportedly not enough time to define and develop its agenda.

### What enabling factors bottlenecks were identified and what policy actions/interventions were chosen to address the bottlenecks in El Salvador?

**Data and evidence (high priority):** The EFA and ITAP assessment made evident the gaps in the availability of high-quality data to support decision making, and the lack of capacity for data utilization in El Salvador. A new data collection system – the "Information System for Salvadoran Educational Management" (SIGES) – was developed by MINEDUCYT in 2019 but was not yet operationalized. Persistent challenges in the collection, verification and use of data were highlighted, including analysis of gender issues and other intersecting factors. Data accuracy is limited due to a reliance on out-of-

date census data. Learning assessment data had not been systematically collected at pre-primary, primary, and middle school levels of education, and a need for capacity building in this area was identified through both the EFA and ITAP assessments.

The compact identifies relevant policy actions for the majority of the identified bottlenecks, which will be supported by both GPE and external funding and programming. SCG will be invested into the improvement of data collection and data generation processes (including through the SIGES), and in capacity building for data usage and monitoring mechanisms. Actions include building the capacity of MINEDUCYT to implement SIGES at central and local levels (using SCG funding), and implementing a learning assessment framework at the elementary and middle school levels in the areas of language, mathematics, and socioemotional development (partly funded through multiplier fund and GEA funding). The compact emphasizes planned actions to generate data to better understand school drop-out, sexual violence that could result in teenage pregnancy in girls and adolescents, and the violation of rights for young mothers.

**Gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring (high priority):** The policy landscape in El Salvador demonstrates a strong commitment to a rights-based vision for education, as set out in the Plan Estratégico Institucional (PEI) 2019-2024, however issues of inequalities and social exclusion persist. The EFA and ITAP highlight ongoing challenges of school-based violence, prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices against indigenous children and families, and the exclusion of children with disabilities. While the PEI sets out an ambitious vision for equality, this has not been fully implemented at the school or institutional level due to insufficient operational planning tools, accountability structures, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the achievement of concrete outcomes.

The SCG and the multiplier are oriented towards addressing evidence gaps related to gender and inclusion at the country level. The proposed solution encompasses the collection of disaggregated data and the design of monitoring and evaluation frameworks tailored to the specific needs of both sexes. Other actions identified in the compact include promoting a teaching model and teacher training which addresses discriminatory attitudes; building the capacity of MINEDUCYT to mainstream gender into education plans, and to design and analyze data from gender sensitive learning assessments; making revisions to SIGES modules to incorporate relevant gender indicators; conducting an analysis of the early childhood education curriculum foundations and roadmap, and strengthening the early childhood education curriculum staff on the importance of mainstreaming equity and equal educational opportunities between boys and girls; and updating the education sector plan. El Salvador plans to include gender-sensitive indicators and data that go beyond simply distinguishing between boys and girls, by including other vulnerable characteristics and needs of the most vulnerable groups, for example, indigenous populations and migrant or returnee children.

**Sector coordination (high priority):** El Salvador has made steps towards, and demonstrates a commitment to, strong coordinated actions, but there are further efforts required to ensure that policy commitments include coordinated funding and regular monitoring to ensure that concrete outcomes are achieved. The local education group was relatively new in El Salvador, having been established in 2019 and active from 2020. The ITAP recommended that it may be valuable to introduce a self-assessment / peer review process to monitor the success of the group in improving dialogue, coordination, and collaboration across stakeholders. A Joint Sector Review (JSR) had not been completed before the EFA was conducted, which would be important to establish indicators to measure progress against the PEI strategic objectives. The EFA noted a need for improved processes, guidelines, and funding to coordinate efforts around the gender and sexuality education. The compact includes plans to conduct a JSR funded through the ESPDG and Multiplier grant, and the priority reform itself makes clear links between the actions of various government portfolios and institutions leading efforts in different areas, as well as identifying synergies across different stakeholder types.

**Volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic financing for education (medium priority):** Notable challenges relating to the equity and efficiency of domestic financing were identified by the EFA and ITAP. Volume related challenges were also identified, but these were less prominent than equity and efficiency challenges. Reported government spend on education as a proportion of GDP had consistently exceeded 4%, and execution rates were reported to be close to 100% in 2020 and 2021, but concerns were flagged relating to the feasibility of the government to meet expenditure targets following the economic impacts of COVID-19. Equity in the distribution of domestic financing is challenging, with disparities in the distribution of teachers and achievement of learning outcomes

across rural and urban locations. The absence of recent public expenditure reviews means there is a lack of data to assess or inform pro-poor spending policies. The ITAP report states that high repetition and drop-out rates may imply an inefficient use of funds. Only one distinct policy action relating to domestic financing was identified: To conduct a study of the efficiency of public spending in El Salvador, funded through the SCG, as recommended by ITAP. The priority reform also emphasized the importance of creating a governance, monitoring, and evaluation structure within the MINEDUCYT to oversee funding sources, their utilization, and their alignment with identified program priorities, which could indirectly impact on accountability and potential volume of public expenditure on education. However, it was not clear how this will be implemented.

## How useful were the enabling factors analysis and ITAP processes?

The enabling factors self-assessment exercise was perceived by stakeholders as useful for identifying key bottlenecks to system transformation associated with the enabling factors categories. The assessment guided MINEDUCYT and education stakeholders to undertake a systematic diagnosis and a bottleneck analysis, which underpinned the reform prioritization and compact development. Interviews with some development partners, the grant agent, the funding manager highlighted that the assessment provided a clear mechanism to establish critical bottlenecks and actions to overcome those bottlenecks. The enabling factors assessment and ITAP processes enabled stakeholders to identify bottlenecks more systematically than in the past, and was something that had not been done before by MINEDUCYT. The enabling factors assessment was also reportedly useful for informing policy dialogue at the country level, not only to prepare the compact but also to prepare for the new overall reform. The process ensured that the identified constraints were evidence-based, and the root causes were thoroughly understood.

The Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) provided a useful assessment, which revealed and added further depth of analysis around several issues. For example, it shed light on gender issues and encouraged the country to consider this in planning for the multiplier and Girls' Accelerator grants, by placing a greater emphasis on addressing identified gender gaps in the sectoral plan's diagnosis. The need for data disaggregation was also strongly emphasized in the ITAP recommendations. ITAP did not change the rating of the enabling factors as defined in the self-assessment, and validated the country's prioritization assessment. The ITAP identified and emphasized the need for improvement in the collection, quality and use of data and evidence for policy making in the education sector, and also identified the absence of a recent public expenditure review as a notable gap.

Although the overall EFA and ITAP process was generally agreed to add value, the GPE Secretariat, coordinating agency, grant agent, and country national partners noted that it was necessary to adopt a 'learning by doing' approach during the compact development process, as there were limited clear guidelines during the early stages of the operating model roll-out. The lack of guidelines at the piloting stage of the 2025 operating model roll out meant that stakeholders found the process difficult and more complex than initially expected - and this sometimes led to country partners having to review and backtrack on some agreements. For example, initial confusion around the prioritization process led to the need to further reduce the reform from three priorities to one.

## 2. Do the priority reforms demonstrate potential for transformation?

### What is El Salvador's understanding of system transformation and the need for transformation?

The compact offers a view of system transformation, outlining a vision of improved quality of early childhood education, with an emphasis on achieving equity and equality, particularly for girls. This goes beyond isolated improvements and encompasses multiple components, including curriculum revision, the establishment of rigorous quality standards for education services and gender-sensitive teacher training.

Among all the interviewees, there was consensus on the urgent need to transform the education system in El Salvador, that system transformation requires changes at multiple points in the system, and that there must be a major initiative that seeks to address various issues, diagnose root causes of poor educational outcomes and system constraints, such as access to early childhood education (ECE), training of teachers and tutors, and educational infrastructure, among others. Stakeholders also

identified the importance of wider stakeholder engagement to achieve system transformation, particularly with the inclusion of civil society more widely in the process. Many of the LEG members made explicit reference in interviews to the fact that system transformation required a move away from “business as usual”, suggesting it required a new way of working. Some of the LEG members recognized the importance of considering both the system and sub-system levels. There was no mention in any of the stakeholder interviews, except from the grant agent (World Bank) of the concrete processes involved in system transformation, which left some questions about actors' understanding of how this change should be implemented in the context of El Salvador.

### **What is El Salvador's priority reform?**

The priority reform aims to achieve quality early childhood learning with equity and inclusion to improve learning outcomes and reduce gender disparities in education. Focusing on early childhood education will tackle underperformance in the education system from the outset, by improving children's readiness for education which can lead to positive learning outcomes throughout the education system, sowing the seeds for structural change. This approach, based on the concept of a complete life cycle, seeks to create new opportunities for all students, educators, and communities within El Salvador's education system. This change was expected not only to improve the capacities of individuals, but also, in the medium and long term, to improve the overall quality of life of Salvadorans and contribute to reducing poverty and migration. Ensuring that children, from their earliest years, have access to enhanced learning experiences has the potential to create a positive cycle of learning and promote equity within the education system and the labor market by reducing learning gaps between vulnerable and advantaged groups early on. The compact stresses the importance of early childhood education on cognitive and socio-emotional development, learning skills, and breaking gender role patterns in Salvadoran society.

The priority reform builds on the priorities defined in the Cuscatlán plan. El Salvador received an education sector plan development grant to support preparation of the 2030 sectoral education plan and to update MINEDUCYT's Strategic Institutional Plan (known as PEI), a five-year planning document defining educational priorities and setting six major areas of intervention with goals and activities, complemented with the preparation of multilateral loans. Evidence produced and used in the sectoral education plan was also used to inform the compact development, particularly for the definition of priorities, as both documents were produced simultaneously. The prioritized reform in the compact was also well aligned to the country's overall education reform (Mi Nueva Escuela), and the pillars of educational transformation are related to early childhood care and the transformation of the pedagogical model.

LEG members and Government stakeholders' interviewees reported that the priority reform is more distinctive and focused than previous reforms, and that it is specifically framed to tackle underlying causes of educational challenges, in a departure from previous reforms in education which had focused on symptoms. However, the compact itself does not explicitly reflect on learning from past reforms, which may be because this was not a requirement included in the compact development guidelines provided by GPE, but may also reflect that the compact was led by a new government. The selected priority aimed to address the most pressing issues within the system, emphasizing inclusivity, gender parity, and closing identified gaps in the enabling factors assessment. Interviewed government officials emphasized that El Salvador had already defined educational priorities, including prioritizing early childhood education, but that the GPE operating model provided a systematic approach to diagnosing gaps in the enabling factors and bottlenecks to further prioritize the reform. There were questions during the interviews with LEG members, the grant agent, and development partners about critical problems elsewhere in the system, for example, the high drop-out rates in secondary education, or the teaching profession. However, there was general agreement that this was a good starting point that would support the achievement of long-term benefits.

## Does the priority reform meet the criteria of system transformation?<sup>5</sup>

The description of the planned transformation in the partnership compact includes accelerating system change, having considerable scale and being inclusive. When asked about what system transformation would entail, interviewed stakeholders referenced the importance of inclusion, gender, and scale. Stakeholders interviewed expressed that they hoped that the current political will around ECE would increase the **speed** of the reform, and that support from all local education group members would speed up the achievement of the objectives in the priority area. However, there are no further concrete details about how speed would be achieved, including the (financial) support required to achieve outcomes at greater speed. The compact also does not include the necessary baseline or target values to infer if there are ambitions for speed.

The compact sets out plans to provide early education at a greater **scale**, and scaling up the transition from pre-school to basic education, while addressing gender inequality. However, it does not include a comparison with previous efforts, or qualify the scale of change envisaged, including references to levels of scale or targets in the theory of change or results framework. The compact includes some references to expanding curriculum (pre-primary to basic education) in reference to use of the Multiplier grant. Results framework baseline references are zero, so by nature, the targets imply scale.

The compact includes an explicit discussion of **inclusion**, equity, and equality, particularly for girls, and includes discussions on gender mainstreaming considerations. Gender is featured prominently in the reform, as one of three results pillars. There are disaggregated targets/indicators for gender in the results framework. For disability inclusion, there is a discussion of the extent of the inequality issue (with statistics) and other references to 'vulnerable groups', suggesting that vulnerable groups were identified, but not necessarily targeted or monitored explicitly. However, there are fewer references to gender in terms of the proposed activities (the only references include: 'reducing gender bias in examination' and 'non-sexist material in textbooks'). All interviewees (government stakeholders, LEG members and development partners) highlighted the centrality of gender as 'integral' to transformation and discussed gender and inclusion. However, in the past, gender-sensitive education has been controversial and government stakeholders and some LEG members expressed caution in addressing gender equality issues more explicitly, where there are not necessarily concrete actions to support intentions for inclusion.

The compact contains evidence of a **multi-faceted approach to change**, including a discussion of multiple system constraints with regards to access to ECE, education infrastructure, curriculum revision, the establishment of rigorous quality standards for education services, training of teachers and tutors and gender-sensitive teacher training. There is limited information related to **the alignment of subsystems**. There is some discussion about the need to support decentralization and the lack of alignment of subsystems at sublevels, but not much more information is provided. The compact does not include mentions of the role or **incentives of sublevel actors** (local, regional levels), and the education system is highly centralized.

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<sup>5</sup> These criteria are set out in our inception report. The criteria include:

- Whether the reform endeavors to achieve improvements to learning with greater speed, scale, and inclusion than past and/or business-as-usual reforms.
- The reform addresses multiple system constraints through a multi-faceted approach to change.
- Whether the reform aligns relevant subsystems, policies as well as practices such as those related to teacher professional development, curriculum, assessment systems, EMIS and more, to achieve the intended outcomes.
- Whether the reform aligns the incentives of actors from all relevant levels and aspects of the education system (e.g., national, regional and district).

One further criterion (whether the reform endeavors to achieve learning improvements through approaches that are evidence-based) is set out in the section below.

In addition to these five criteria to define a transformative reform, there are three additional transformative reform criteria which examine the implementation of a transformative reform as well as five criteria which define the process required to design a transformative reform.

### Is the priority reform evidence-based?

The compact provided a solid justification for the chosen reform, incorporating diagnostic information and refining the focus areas and the model helped to ensure that prioritization was informed by different sources of evidence and data. The selection of the priority reform was informed by relevant country level evidence, highlighting the need to address low coverage in early childhood education, the desire to learn from past unsuccessful reform efforts, insights from studies by entities such as UNICEF that highlighted the potential return on investment in early education, existing data indicating learning gaps in early childhood education, and comparisons of access to early education within the region. In addition, international test results, dropout data and other relevant factors informed the shaping of the reform agenda. The compact contains explicit reference to national-level data to support the design of the priority reform, including references to national studies conducted by development partners as well as national data sources (including EMIS and annual school censuses).

There is less evidence that proposed solutions were based on global evidence and best practice, although the compact does strongly align with global evidence relating to the importance of providing quality pre-primary education for ages 3-5.<sup>6</sup> Overall, proposed solutions and actions were informed by MINEDUCYT's technical expertise and experience. This expertise was nurtured by observing international experience implementing similar processes and considering best practices from neighboring countries and insights gained during the pandemic, following the advice of external consultants contracted by the World Bank for the selection of approaches. Learning enhancement approaches were subsequently refined based on the findings from the sector review, enabling factors analysis, and ITAP suggestions.

### Is there a credible theory of change for the priority reform?

The theory of change was informed by evidence on bottlenecks, but the pathways of change describing implementation leaves some doubt as to whether or how certain outputs and outcomes will be achieved. At the output level there is detail provided on *what* is to be achieved, but there is limited exploration and discussion about *how* these will successfully lead to the proposed outcomes. The pathway from outputs to outcomes is unclear and not explained. Some of these explanations are found in other sections of the compact, for example, the move from activities to outputs is well explained in the section on prioritized interventions. However, the same is not true for the move from outputs to outcomes. The theory of change contains objectives, but they cannot be described as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). They are rather general, lacking specifics regarding timeframes, degree of achievability, and other essential elements. It is noted that as El Salvador was part of the pilot phase, guidance around the development of a theory of change was limited, and standards had not yet been fully developed.

## 3. What is El Salvador's readiness to implement its priority reform?

### To what extent are implementation plans for the priority reform in place and how credible or feasible are the plans?

While El Salvador does not have a comprehensive and standalone implementation plan for the reform, and significant gaps in information persist, there are signs that progress is being made through the development of an Action Plan for the broader Mi Nueva Escuela reform which covers the main aspects of the priority reform. El Salvador had not yet produced a risk assessment, but in the compact identified the need to "Work on a comprehensive list of assumptions and a risk analysis (implementation and political)" as one of six key actions to take place prior to implementation, and with the assistance of Summa Lab, MINEDUCYT have identified challenges and risks to implementation, alongside costings (Summa Lab is collaborating with the ministry as part of the support provided through the KIX grant).

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<sup>6</sup> See Banerjee et al., 2023 *Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning - What does Recent Evidence Tell Us are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-income Countries?* (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099420106132331608/IDU0977f73d7022b1047770980c0c5a14598ee8>



Moreover, according to interviews with stakeholders, the ministry has developed implementation plans for specific goals in relation to gender inequality. However, stakeholders have reported that transparency around the implementation process could be improved and they seem unclear about how changes will occur. Findings from the document review and stakeholder interviews suggest that there are particular challenges around the understanding of roles and stakeholder capacity at regional and local levels in El Salvador; the education system is highly centralized, and it is unclear how local and regional actors will be involved on an operational level. Engaging these stakeholders will be essential to the success of the priority reform and, therefore, further work is needed to clarify their roles in the implementation phase.

### **To what extent are priority reforms costed or resourced?**

El Salvador had not produced any budget documentation for the priority reform explicitly, but MINEDUCYT has taken proactive steps towards developing a realistic budget for the broader Mi Nueva Escuela reform, which is aligned with and covers the priority reform, including Summa Lab's studies on the estimated costs of the reform and its scaling. From the enabling factors assessment, MINEDUCYT completed an initial planning of costs to address the enabling factors. This approach is also likely to encourage further focusing and adjustments to the reform, to ensure it can be delivered effectively.

MINEDUCYT has taken responsibility for conducting the education reform and in general, interviewees recognized that it is doing this well, making organizational changes to align with the transformational goals, with a strong emphasis on early childhood education, and strengthening internal capacities (e.g. through SIGES). A potential shortage of human resources, driven by overwhelming workloads, poses a challenge however, and stakeholders also recognized that reform is highly dependent on external financing including loans, which is a concern for sustainability. Interviews with LEG members also revealed a critical gap in stakeholders' access to comprehensive financial information, particularly concerning the allocation of domestic funds within the reform sector. There are positive indicators however, since the state has a legal obligation, backed up by the Crecer Juntos or "Growing Together" policy and law, and by the creation of the Instituto Crecer Juntos (ICJ), to incrementally invest in early childhood programs, demonstrating a commitment to educational development.

However, there was a shared concern among interviewees, also stated in the compact document and EFA and ITAP assessments, about the lack of sufficient domestic funds available to implement the reform, and the challenge to longer term planning and public education budget stability due to government budgets being approved and allocated on an annual basis. Currently the reform is primarily supported by multilateral development bank loans, money that will be invested in the next four to five years. For officials at the ministry of education, the main concern relates to the adequate design of the educational transformation so that the process is sustainable and effective over time.

### **Are stakeholders aligned around the priority reform?**

Several factors appear to have supported the enabling conditions for alignment around activities and resources. El Salvador benefits from strong political will at the highest level: Education is one of three fundamental pillars of the President's social policy and El Salvador benefits from the strong and determined support of the First Lady, who emphasizes the importance of education and whose office has significant influence in the social sector. All interviewees highlighted the importance of presidential buy-in in the context of El Salvador, whose political system is presidential, and therefore initiatives aligned with presidential priorities tend to progress more smoothly. The reform is supported from the central government by the Ministry of Education, the Office of the First Lady, and the Instituto Crecer Juntos – and indeed it is felt that stakeholder clarity, alignment and capacity is strongest at the central level.

The creation of the LEG in 2020 has been an important step to improve coordinated efforts and resources in the sector, by creating a space for education sector actors to interact. Interviewed LEG members and government stakeholders highlighted the value of the local education group as a space to share insights into each other's work and promote better coordination and synergy, while reducing the risk of fragmented efforts. For example, Plan International shared knowledge and experience of running Early Childhood Comprehensive Care Centers (CAIPs) with the ICJ, so that they can use it to formalize their own CAIPs. Although this in itself is not evidence of alignment in activities, LEG

members and development partners believed that is an important step to support the long-term continuity of the reform by encouraging collaboration among stakeholders and ensuring everyone works towards the reform's goals, and gradually support alignment around the reform.

Country policy and legal frameworks are well aligned to the priority reform – the Instituto Crecer Juntos has been established to support implementation, as the public entity responsible for leading comprehensive early childhood care in El Salvador, and the Crecer Juntos policy and law orders different institutions such as de Consejo Nacional de la Primera Infancia, Niñez y Adolescencia (CONAPINA - National Council for the Early Childhood, Childhood and Adolescence), Instituto Crecer Juntos and Ministry of Health among others to jointly direct their resources towards comprehensive early childhood care as a priority. The coordinating agency observed improved alignment of institutions, priorities/objectives, and planning instruments. For example, there was an agreement between the MINEDUCYT and the Ministry of Health to adopt a unified approach providing care, education, health, and a protective environment to children, and with the Ministry of Public Works (Dirección de Obras Municipales -DOM), to improve education infrastructure.

For 2024, according to the Legislative Assembly, an investment of \$245 million was expected to strengthen infrastructure, specifically newly created institutions such as the Instituto Crecer Juntos and CONAPINA. These priorities are reflected in the loan agreements with international entities like the World Bank (\$250 million) and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (\$100 million) for a total of \$350 million for the Ministry of Education, plus \$250 million for the Ministry of Health aimed at improving early childhood healthcare.<sup>7</sup> Although loans were previously agreed and approved before the compact development process, they nevertheless will be supporting actions related to the prioritized reform. For instance, the World Bank loan activities financed through the Multiplier grant were processed as additional financing of the original programme, which supports alignment with the priority reform more explicitly (for example to finance the revision and adjustment of the national curriculum for early childhood education). In 2020, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved the Nacer, Crecer, Aprender (Be Born, Grow Up and Learn) programme focused on improving the quality and coverage of education in the country through four pillars: (a) improvement and expansion of family circles through pedagogical material with a gender focus, seeking to improve the pedagogical model and double coverage in early education; (b) remodeling of schools and construction of classrooms for preschool level nationwide; (c) rehabilitation of the infrastructure of Child Development Centers (CDI) and transformation to an evidence-based pedagogical model; and (d) implementation of flexible modalities for secondary education, expanding coverage and improving quality. This programme is supporting El Salvador's priority reform.

### **To what extent are monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks in place to support the priority reform?**

The compact includes a monitoring plan featuring a results matrix with associated indicators at the level of outputs and activities. However, MEL frameworks, mechanisms and capacities were still being developed at the time of data collection, both within the Ministry and the LEG, so it was not yet clear how data will be collected, analyzed, and reported on, in order to develop and mobilize insights into the implementation of the priority reform. The primary platform for monitoring and accountability is the Joint Sector Review (JSR), however thus far it has served as an informative space without a strong focus on facilitating learning. Mechanisms for learning are not well-established, and government stakeholders have consistently noted that MEL processes are either lacking or insufficient. Government stakeholders and LEG members interviewees when asked about MEL mechanisms referred to evaluation systems of student learning, not MEL of the reform as such. MINEDUCYT is cognizant of the need for tools to effectively monitor policy implementation.

Demonstrating awareness of challenges in this area, the compact and enabling factor analysis highlighted a need to improve capacity to conduct meaningful and timely data analysis and establish a governance, monitoring, and evaluation structure within MINEDUCYT to supervise funding sources, their

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<sup>7</sup> Assembly Press. Asamblea Legislativa aprueba financiamiento para ejecución de Política Nacional de Primera Infancia 'Crecer Juntos' | Asamblea Legislativa de El Salvador. 2021. [online] Asamblea.gob.sv. Available at: <https://www.asamblea.gob.sv/node/11237>.

allocation, and their alignment with identified program priorities. Nonetheless, it does not establish how it will interlink planning, budgeting, and results-based expenditure.

## 4. Domestic financing

### What is the status of domestic financing in El Salvador?

Data relating to the volume of public expenditure for education in El Salvador shows some positive trends, consistently achieving 4% of GDP for public investment in education between 2019 and 2020, increasing to a little more than 5% in 2022. The government had also committed to achieving 5.5% for 2023 and 2024. This occurred in the context of the pandemic, and to a large extent has been oriented towards investment projects, educational technologies, curriculum and teaching skills. However, it is noted that according to the domestic financing matrix completed as part of the EFA, the percentage of public expenditure on education (excluding debt service) has remained below the 20% recommended by GPE, with a reported 16.8% of public expenditure reported to be allocated to education in 2019, which dropped to 13% in 2020, likely resulting from COVID-19 pressures to reallocate spend to health services. Execution rates were reported to be close to 100% in 2020 and 2021, although the ITAP report flagged that historic trends have shown that execution of funds can fluctuate between 85% and 90%, and stressed the importance of annual monitoring of actual versus planned expenditure.

Equity issues in El Salvador include inequalities in the distribution of teachers and disparities in educational outcomes, particularly for children from poor rural backgrounds, indicating unequal provision of quality education and educational resources. This is further hampered by a lack of data and public expenditure reviews to inform efforts to target specific populations and groups, resulting in persistent urban-rural and income quintile gaps in public spending equity.

Inefficiencies in expenditure were reflected by repetition and drop out rates in basic education. Repetition rates between grades 1-7 are an indicator that the students lack readiness to transition to higher levels. Efficiency concerns are linked to the lack of reliable and consistent data on education budgets, or its inconsistent use.

### Do the domestic financing-related policy actions have the potential to support the enabling conditions for transformation?

The domestic financing enabling factor is the only enabling factor category rated as medium rather than high priority in El Salvador, and therefore addressing the remaining three enabling factor areas, in particular data and evidence which underpin challenges in many other areas, are prioritized over domestic financing.

Only one explicit policy action was identified to respond to gaps in the domestic financing enabling factor: to conduct a review of public spending on education (funded through the SCG). This was a key recommendation from ITAP, and will be important for informing future actions to address inequity and inefficiency. The compact also emphasized the importance of creating structures and mechanisms to oversee funding sources and use, and to ensure alignment with the priority reform. This may indirectly support improved accountability and increase the volume of public expenditure on education, although specific and concrete plans for how planning, budgeting and results-based expenditure would be interlinked was not identified in our analysis.

Our analysis does not suggest that the identified policy actions are sufficient at this stage to support the enabling conditions for transformation, however it represents an important step in providing the information needed to identify and inform future actions.

### To what extent did the GPE operating model help El Salvador identify and address system bottlenecks in domestic finance?

The EFA And ITAP assessment supported the identification of system bottlenecks relating to domestic financing, and interviews with MINEDUCYT reported the role of these steps in identifying financing gaps and inefficiencies in fund allocations. This process facilitated funding and led to more clarity about how much should be invested, when and in what. However, as implied in the previous section, it is unclear that at this stage the 2025 operating model has helped El Salvador to concretely address the identified gaps, and it may be too soon to make this assessment.

Unlike most of the countries sampled to participate in case studies, El Salvador is not eligible for STG funding, and this combined with the 'medium' priority rating for domestic financing, means that no top-up funding linked to domestic financing related indicators are applied to release additional results-based financing.

## 5. Gender equality

### What is the status of gender equality in El Salvador?

El Salvador has advanced efforts towards addressing gender and inclusion issues within its education system, demonstrating a commitment to fostering a more equitable and diverse learning environment. Spearheading these efforts is MINEDUCYT, which has established a dedicated Gender Management Unit, initially supported by FOMILENIO, to drive progress in this area. This unit will play a key role in the development of the Gender Equity and Equality Policy, which has been integrated into the Ministry's framework, moreover a monitoring and evaluation system has been implemented to track the policy's impact, featuring indicators to assess progress effectively. Nonetheless, despite these initiatives', challenges persist, particularly in prioritizing targeted interventions for specific groups due to limited availability and use of data disaggregated by vulnerability characteristics or geographical location, which led to enduring disparities in educational outcomes, particularly in the differentiation between urban and rural areas.

The compact highlights some of the challenges towards the achievement of gender equality in education. The curriculum is not sufficiently gender sensitive, and learning assessments such as "Conociendo mis Logros" (knowing my achievements) was reportedly designed without consideration of gender perspectives. Gender disparities amongst male and females in educational outcomes appear relatively minor during the early years of schooling but become pronounced as students make the transition to secondary education, pursue post-secondary studies, or enter the labor market.

El Salvador struggles with high rates of youth maternity, significantly limiting the educational opportunities available to young women. It has one of the highest fertility rates in girls, with 5.89 births per 1,000 girls (10-14 years old), increasing to 54.44 per 1,000 adolescents (15-19 years old).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, gender disparities in the country are deeply embedded within the societal structure, for instance around 26.4% of individuals aged 15 to 29 neither pursue education nor engage in employment and within this age bracket, 43% of women find themselves in this circumstance, a stark contrast to the 13% of men who face similar challenges. The Multipurpose Household Survey (2018) found that that 40.5% of girls aged 7 to 15 and 30% of girls between 16 and 18 who do not attend school attribute it to a lack of interest, highlighting a notable rate of disengagement from formal education.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, 16% of girls in the 16 to 18 age group were reported to have limited access to education due to household or caregiving responsibilities.

El Salvador aims to advance gender equality through a range of reforms. The government has enacted several key legislations, including the Equality, Equity, and Eradication of Discrimination Law (2011), the Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence (2012), and the General Education Law (2011). Existing laws, including the Law of Equity and Equality, as well as a comprehensive special law for a life free of violence for women, do further demonstrate the Ministry of Education's commitment to equal opportunities for boys and girls and indicate a foundation for addressing gender issues in education. The "Crecer Juntos" law (2023) focuses on early childhood development, and takes a gender-oriented perspective, recognizing and addressing the barriers that hinder both boys and girls from enjoying their rights equally. Its inclusion approach seeks to overcome these obstacles through effective public policy.

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<sup>8</sup> UNICEF Country Office Annual Report, 2023

<sup>9</sup> GPE. El Salvador Partnership Compact. 2022

## Do the gender equality-related policy actions have the potential to support the enabling conditions for transformation?

The compact and proposed priority reforms exhibit a strong commitment to promoting gender equality within various facets of education, which builds upon previous policies and commitments. Evidence of this commitment is presented in the MINEDUCYT Gender Equity and Equality Policy (2020 to 2025) which establishes the need to integrate a gender perspective in education in order to make gender, social and educational inequalities between women and men visible, as well as the creation of a Gender Management Unit within MINEDUCYT.

The compact outlined several initiatives aimed at mainstreaming and integrating gender considerations into the curriculum and teaching materials, as well as their inclusion in practices related to learning data collection, assessments, ongoing educational research and broader educational coverage. Gender concerns were identified across all four enabling factor categories, and several policy actions put in place to address these, which include:

- The inclusion of gender indicators in education data collected through the SIGES platform
- Implementing a learning assessment framework which is free of gender bias in its design, ensuring that results are analyzed using a gender perspective, and building capacity to design and analyze assessment findings using a gender lens.
- An analysis of the current situation regarding the violation of rights of young mothers
- Promotion of a teaching model that supports gender equality

A key action to address gaps in the availability, accuracy and reliability of gender data will be the integration of pertinent information from different sources on gender into the SIGES platform, which will be supported by funding through the SCG. For example, a 2017 survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety regarding violence against children yielded critical data on school-related gender-based violence and is now intended to be included in SIGES. Similarly, interviews with government stakeholders revealed that the Ministry of Education aims to create an early alarm system for girls at risk of falling pregnant. This will enable schools to identify when girls are regularly missing school and follow up accordingly, as well as to identify alternative education pathways for them. Furthermore, plans to implement a learning assessment framework for primary and lower secondary levels includes a specific recognition that these should be reviewed to remove potential gender biases, and the need to build the capacity of MINEDUCYT to identify and address barriers in the design of learning assessments.

Interviews with LEG members highlighted that there are still areas where further progress is needed, particularly in promoting inclusivity in a context where efforts are often met with resistance. Interviews with government stakeholders, development partners and LEG members revealed that tackling gender-related issues is a complex task due to prevailing cultural norms and 'macho' culture. Many teachers have been shaped by traditional, male-dominated cultural norms through which gender-based violence and the marginalization of women were normalized. Likewise, the country is polarized around issues of gender: some families strongly support teaching about gender, education, and sexuality in schools, while influential groups oppose it, as in the case of movements like "Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas" (Don't mess with my children), present in various Latin American countries. Navigating these conservative contexts is a significant challenge for making progress on gender equality within education.

The GEA funding provided to El Salvador is hoped to go some way to addressing these barriers. Activities planned as part of the GEA funding provided to El Salvador aims to enhance girls' access to quality education by focusing on eradicating gender stereotypes in early childhood education and facilitating gender analysis and information gathering to support decision making. This will primarily be supported through the development and distribution of educational materials which are gender sensitive. Specific actions funded through the GEA include the "Reading at home" project which will curate books and reading materials for young children which are gender sensitive and do not perpetuate gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. The project aims to contribute to both the empowerment of children and their socio-emotional development. GEA funding will also facilitate gender analysis and information gathering, and the reformulation of learning assessment questions and tests to ensure they are inclusion sensitive.

One gap identified by ITAP which does not appear to be explicitly addressed is the absence of plans to address prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices against indigenous children and families or addressing the limited services for children with disabilities. Although this may be partially addressed through actions focused on addressing discriminatory attitudes more broadly, it is not clear whether this has been directly considered.

### **To what extent did the GPE operating model help and incentivize El Salvador to identify and address challenges in gender equality and hardwire gender equality into its priority reform?**

Our analysis suggests that the GPE operating model provided relevant support and incentives to enable El Salvador to identify and address several relevant challenges to gender equality as part of its priority reform. The enabling factors assessment and compact dialogue were instrumental in identifying gender equality challenges within the education sector. These processes highlighted the prior lack of gender analysis in education policy development. The collaboration between the World Bank, UNICEF, and the ministry of education for compact development fostered internal coordination within the ministry, emphasizing the importance of generating evidence, collecting data, and integrating a gender perspective into activities.

The ITAP review played a pivotal role in shedding light on gender-related issues to inform the prioritized allocation of funds for the Multiplier and GEA. It highlighted the critical challenge of insufficient access to accurate, available, and reliable gender-related data, which hinders the ministry's capacity to effectively address gender needs at the national level, as well as the importance of considering gender inequalities in policies that originate outside the school environment, such as those addressing violence, migration, and natural disasters. It emphasized the importance of data disaggregation, concentrating on the particular characteristics and requirements of vulnerable populations, including indigenous communities and migrant or returnee children. Prioritizing up-to-date and shared official data became crucial, benefiting both MINEDUCYT and all stakeholders dedicated to promoting the right to education.

Various GPE instruments are further supporting and incentivizing El Salvador to explicitly address and prioritize actions to support gender equality in education. This includes:

- **SCG** funding will be used to strengthen MINEDUCYT capacity to generate timely, good quality, and gender-sensitive data that moves beyond disaggregated indicators towards further generating data in strategic thematic areas with the potential to support gender transformative planning and responsiveness (for example, generating data which can be used as an early alarm system to identify girls at risk of teenage pregnancy, supporting the prevention of school drop-out.) Alongside the SCG, the GPE strategic capabilities support will be utilized in El Salvador through the provision of MEL technical assistance from Social Impact, with the aim of supporting improved use of data.
- **Multiplier /GEA** funding requires the consideration of gender equality is explicit within project plans and aligned to the overarching gender principles of the reform as a condition for disbursement. El Salvador became the first eligible country for the Girls' Education Accelerator (GEA) in 2022, securing a \$15 million grant, comprising \$5 million from the GEA and a \$10 million Multiplier grant. Actions highlighted in the previous section are well aligned to the bottlenecks identified in the EFA and ITAP assessments.
- **EOL** funding supported the education network on the right to education (Red Salvadoreña por el Derecho a la Educación -Resalde) to strengthen its strategic planning and governance.
- **KIX** has also supported a greater gender focus in the compact and priority reform, with support including the provision of a gender specialist to support curriculum reform, research into early childhood curriculum implementation, and the facilitation of a learning exchange around sex education policy between El Salvador and Chile.

## Annex 1. Summary background tables

What is the priority reform that El Salvador is planning to undertake?<sup>10</sup>

Summary description of the priority reform in El Salvador	
<b>Focus area and strategic parameters for GPE funding</b>	Achieving quality early childhood learning with equity and inclusion by strengthening inclusive access to early childhood education. The Multiplier and Gender Equality Accelerator (GEA) will focus on: improved literacy achievement in the first cycle of basic education; combatting negative social norms; expanding the scope of curricular development activities in early childhood to strengthen the transition to first grade; the provision of inclusive and targeted books and materials to promote socio-emotional skills and girls' empowerment.
<b>Levels targeted</b>	Pre-primary
<b>Thematic areas covered</b>	Early learning, gender equality and inclusion, quality teaching.
<b>Description</b>	<p>The priority reform aims to achieve <b>quality early childhood learning with equity and inclusion</b> to improve learning outcomes and reduce gender disparities in education.</p> <p>Focusing on early childhood education tackles underperformance in the education system from the outset, sowing the seeds for structural change. This approach, based on the concept of a complete life cycle, seeks to create new opportunities for all students, educators, and communities within El Salvador's education system. This change is expected not only to improve the capacities of individuals, but also, in the medium and long term, to improve the overall quality of life of Salvadorans and contribute to reducing poverty and migration.</p> <p>Ensuring that children, from their earliest years, have access to enhanced learning experiences has the potential to create a positive cycle of learning and promote equity within the education system and the labor market. The compact stresses the importance of early childhood education on cognitive and socio-emotional development, learning skills, and breaking gender role patterns in Salvadoran society. The reform seeks to tackle underlying causes rather than focusing on the final outcome of development, making it different from previous reforms.</p>
<b>Priority reform intended outcomes</b>	<p>The compact's theory of change identifies three key outcome areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Outcome 1: Enhanced institutional capacity and effectiveness:</b> Institutional restructuring and strengthening of institutional capacity of early childhood care and education services is essential for enhancing quality educational provision.</li> <li>• <b>Outcome 2: Reduced gender gaps and access in early childhood:</b> Gender disparities can perpetuate societal inequalities, and early childhood education can be a powerful tool for challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. Equal access to education can help break down gender-based barriers, and increased access to early childhood education for marginalized communities and children from disadvantaged backgrounds can foster inclusivity.</li> <li>• <b>Outcome 3: Reduction of learning gaps in early childhood:</b> Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive and socioemotional development. Addressing educational disparities early on supports children to begin education journeys on an equal footing, and fosters inclusion by accommodating the diverse needs of children including those with special educational needs or from marginalized backgrounds. This early intervention lays the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable educational system as children progress through their academic journey.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority reform main activities and pathways of change</b>	<p>Five output areas and associated actions have been identified to support the achievement of the intended outcomes and impact. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improved curricula and teacher training:</b> Ensuring coherence and continuity of the reform, through a process of curriculum reform at all levels, and a review of the current early childhood curriculum to ensure a logical transition to the basic education curriculum. Promoting a teaching model which aims to eradicate gender discrimination</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> The source for this table is the partnership compact.

in national education systems, by mainstreaming gender in teacher training plans and programs, conducting capacity building within MINEDUCYT to mainstream gender equity and equality.

- **Quality learning assessments:** Implementation of a learning assessment framework in elementary and middle school for the areas of language, mathematics, and socioemotional development to identify and close gaps from the early years of life, especially in reading and writing achievement.
- **Evidence for decision-making and policy formulation:** Quality learning assessments should be used to inform pedagogical improvement at the school level. In the Salvadoran educational system, existing test results have not guided policies or pedagogical decisions in schools since they are not socialized. Hence the importance of implementing the use of learning assessment results to transform the quality of education from the early years.
- **Adequate infrastructure early childhood care:** Provision of quality and safe learning environments, requiring investments to build or remodel early childhood education centers. Architectural models established to guarantee the quality of learning and a certification system for educational centers will be implemented to ensure that these infrastructure standards are achieved over time.
- **Institutional restructuring for effective early childhood care:** Implementation of institutional restructuring and a new organizational chart, including the formation of the National Directorate of Education and Curriculum (Dirección Nacional de Educación y Currículo), aimed at consolidating and reinforcing the various level directorates; the National Directorate of Educational Evaluation (Dirección Nacional de Evaluación Educativa), which coordinates and oversees assessment processes; and the National Directorate of Teacher Training (Dirección Nacional de Formación Docente).

### What GPE support has El Salvador received to identify transformative priority reforms and align partners and resources to them?<sup>11</sup>

GPE engagement	
Year joined GPE	2022
Coordinating Agency	UNICEF
Total grant support	USD \$17.5m
Key GPE 2025 timelines and grants	
Cohort	Cohort 1 (Pilot)
<p>The timeline chart displays key milestones from January 2021 to October 2023. Vertical bars indicate the following events: Cohort start date (Jan 2021), Submission of Enabling Factors Analysis (Jun 2021), ITAP assessment finalized (Dec 21), Compact finalized (May 2022), and GPE Board approval of strategic parameters (May 2022). The x-axis is labeled with quarterly intervals: Jan-21, Apr-21, Jul-21, Oct-21, Jan-22, Apr-22, Jul-22, Oct-22, Jan-23, Apr-23, Jul-23, and Oct-23.</p>	




### Status of GPE grants to support the priority reform

<sup>11</sup> The sources for this table are: GPE Secretariat Operating Model Pipeline for key GPE 2025 information and timelines (updated February 2024), the grant databases maintained internally by the GPE Secretariat, and the GPE website on Nepal (see: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/el-salvador>)

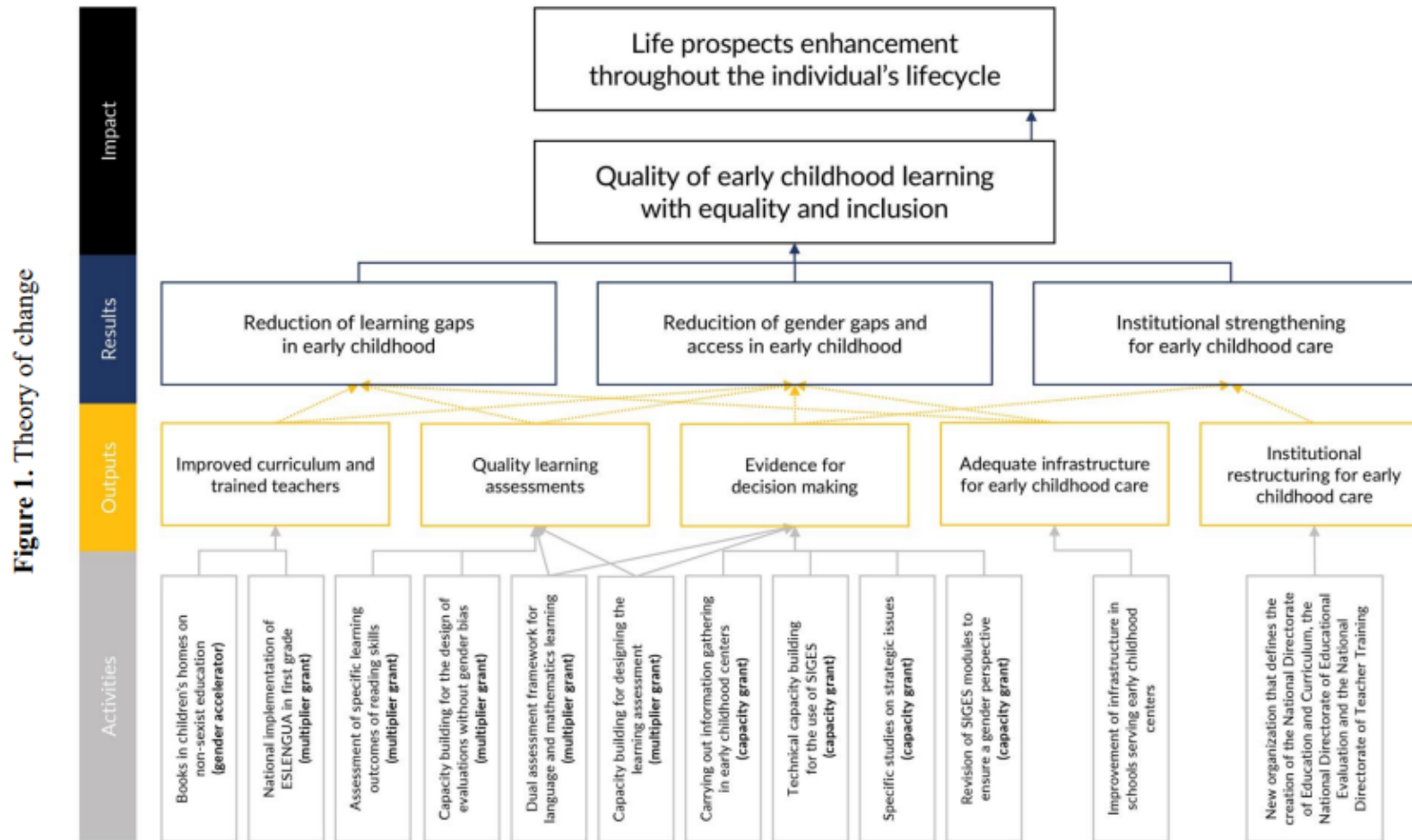


GPE grants	Grant agent	Maximum allocation	Current status	Start date	Duration
System Transformation Grant	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
System Capacity Grant	World Bank	USD \$1.6m	Active – Approved Oct 2022	October 2022	3 years, 2022-2025
Multiplier Grant and Girls Education Accelerator	World Bank	USD \$15m	Active – Approved June 2022	January 2023	4 years 2023 - 2027
Enabling factor type			Self-analysis	ITAP	
Data and evidence			High	High	
Gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring			High	High	
Sector coordination			High	High	
Domestic financing			Medium	Medium	
Other GPE programs and support					
<b>Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX)</b>	El Salvador is part of the Knowledge and Information Exchange (KIX) Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) regional hub. KIX support includes research in El Salvador on early childhood curriculum implementation, involving 1,114 schools. An exchange was held between El Salvador and Chile in relation to the strengthening of early education, with a focus on comprehensive quality improvement and with a gender equality perspective, together with the articulation and transition between educational levels, and the evaluation processes of the education system.				
<b>Education Out Loud (EOL)</b>	Education Out Loud (EOL) supports the El Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología (MINEDUCYT) programs (i.e. Family Orientation), and strengthens the Salvadoran Network for the Right of Education (RESALDE) that is coordinated by Fundación Ayuda en Acción, and composed by Plan International, FUSALMO, Save the Children, among others.				

## Annex 2. Strength of evidence ratings for the El Salvador case study

Question	Rating	Description of sources of evidence
1. Did the GPE model help with policy dialog, identification of system bottlenecks, and solutions to address these bottlenecks for better education outcomes?		<p>Sources include interviews with LEG members, government officials, the Grant Agent, and the Coordinating Agency.</p> <p>We also reviewed the Compact, the ITAP report, and the Engagement Memo that was an input for the Compact.</p> <p>Findings were supported by evidence from multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>
2. Do the priority reforms demonstrate potential for transformation?		<p>Sources include interviews with LEG members, government officials, the Grant Agent, and the Coordinating Agency.</p> <p>We also reviewed the Compact, the SCG, the Multiplier and the GEA.</p> <p>Findings were supported by evidence from multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>
3. What is El Salvador's readiness to implement its priority reform?		<p>Sources include interviews with LEG members, government officials, the Grant Agent, and the Coordinating Agency.</p> <p>We also reviewed the Compact and the notes of the first JSR.</p> <p>Findings were supported by evidence from multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>
4. Domestic financing		<p>Sources include government officials, some LEG members, the Grant Agent, and the Coordinating Agency.</p> <p>We also reviewed the Compact. We did not have access to recent investment data in education, an issue highlighted by development partners and LEG members.</p> <p>Findings were supported by evidence from multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>
5. Gender equality		<p>Sources include some government officials, and some LEG members, the Grant Agent, and the Coordinating Agency.</p> <p>We also reviewed the Compact, the ITAP report, the GEA and the gender and equity policy developed by the Ministry,</p> <p>Findings were supported by evidence from multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>

## Annex 3. Depiction of El Salvador's priority reform theory of change



## Annex 4. Summary of El Salvador's enabling factors

Enabling Factor	Priority Level	Identified bottlenecks	Planned activities to address bottlenecks in the PC and priority reform	Remaining gaps
Data and evidence	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Information System for Salvadoran Educational Management" (SIGES) implemented by MINEDUCYT in 2019 is not yet fully operationalized</li> <li>Need for gender sensitive instruments, data collection processes, and analysis. Not all data is disaggregated by gender. No monitoring or follow up instruments with a gender approach. Data on reasons for drop-out, such as pregnancy or gender-based violence, would be important to gather and analyze systematically.</li> <li>Challenges in the collection, verification, and use of data for policy making. Limited coherence in use of various tools and administrative records, weak data record management, data inaccuracies due to out of data census data</li> <li>Lack of systematically collected learning data collected at pre-primary, primary, and middle school levels.</li> <li>Lack of integration of data about the education system with data from related sectors (e.g., health, safety) has resulted in disparate reports and use of data.</li> <li>Limited capacity to gather, verify and use data within the SIGES system. Need for capacity development of staff at all levels, within the Ministry.</li> <li>Need for enhanced capacity for test development and standardization and use of learning outcomes data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full deployment of the SIGES.</li> <li>Investment in MINEDUCYT capacity building to generate quality data to support the implementation of SIGES at central and local levels, conduct a situation analysis of public and private ECE centers, generation of data on strategic issues such as school drop out and teenage pregnancy. (SCG funded)</li> <li>Inclusion of gender sensitive indicators in education data.</li> <li>Implement a learning assessment framework in elementary and middle school for the areas of language, mathematics, and socioemotional development (MTL and GEA funded / World Bank funding)</li> <li>Improve capacity for the development of learning assessments and diagnosis of gender bias in the design of learning assessments</li> <li>Analysis of the situation regarding the violation of the rights of girl-mothers and adolescent mothers in family circles</li> </ul>	ITAP recommendation to integrate data from related sectors not clearly addressed.

Gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of gender and sexual violence around educational centers; lack of application of detection mechanisms and administrative monitoring in the education system.</li> <li>• Prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices against indigenous children and families not adequately addressed in plans. The lack of services and inclusion of children and youth with disabilities.</li> <li>• The Política de Equidad e Igualdad de Género (PEIG) not fully implemented at the school or institutional level. Requires operational planning tools and accountability and monitoring mechanisms to translate into reduced gaps between female and male students in the face of deeply entrenched sexist cultural norms.</li> <li>• Need to strengthen procedures, tools, and mechanisms to incorporate cross-cutting issues of gender and intersecting factors to reach national goals. The complex inter-sectoral nature of the PEI 2019-2024 requires operational planning tools and accountability mechanisms, such as defined roles and responsibilities, and harmonization between school and central level.</li> <li>• Weak institutional capacity, poor coordination at a school level - many initiatives collide and create saturation without translating ambitious national policies into outcomes.</li> <li>• Sector policies and budgets have previously reinforced gender inequalities. Program budgeting and monitoring must systematize tools that enable improved distribution of benefits to marginalized groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of a teaching model with gender equity and equality, with the aim of eradicating attitudes and practices of sexual discrimination in the national education system.</li> <li>• The compact emphasized the need for strategic plans to include gender equality and equity as a guiding principle.</li> <li>• Analysis of early childhood curriculum foundations and roadmap (ESPDG)</li> <li>• Analysis of learning assessment results with a gender perspective.</li> <li>• MINEDUCYT established a Gender Management Unit, initially funded by FOMILENIO. There is currently an Institutional Women's Unit (set up in January 2024) whose purpose is to promote, advise, monitor and coordinate the implementation of the principle of equality, equity and non-discrimination, as well as to ensure compliance with the regulations in favor of women's human rights in policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education. Science and Technology.</li> <li>• Updating the education sector plan (SCG)</li> <li>• Capacity building for the design of assessments without gender bias (Multiplier Grant, previous model).</li> </ul>	<p>No explicit reflection in the compact on how policy and planning addresses discriminatory practices against indigenous children and families – this may be implicitly addressed by actions focused on addressing discriminatory attitudes more broadly.</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision of SIGES modules to incorporate data that guarantee the collection of information with a gender perspective (SCG).</li> </ul>
Sector coordination	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong commitments to coordinated action across government need to be matched by policy commitment with targeted actions, coordinated allocation of financial resources, and regular monitoring. Historically there is a lack of universal long term education policies or financing that would allow the sustainability of the processes of continuous improvement.</li> <li>• Dispersion of national and international cooperation to support processes in gender and sexuality education. It is necessary to generate guidelines and coordinate efforts to achieve a true inclusive system that promotes equity and equality. There is no funding for the systematic approach to gender and comprehensive sexuality education.</li> <li>• Need to determine budget allocations in an appropriate and coordinated manner.</li> <li>• Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP has increased slightly. According to data, in 2020 investment was 4.1% of GDP and by 2021 it is 5%. UNESCO recommends increasing public investment in education to reach 7% or 8% of GDP, which represents a great challenge for the country as it implies doubling the budget committed to the sector.</li> <li>• The ITAP would suggest that the LEG consider the practice of other local education groups who have introduced a self-assessment / peer review process to monitor the success of the group in improving dialogue, coordination, and collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint sector review planned for 2022-2025 (ESPDG and MLT)</li> <li>• The priority reform includes plans to create synergies amongst NGOs, schools, families, the private sector, and public institutions</li> <li>• The priority reform includes clear links between the actions of various government portfolios and the institutions leading efforts in different areas.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No joint sector review completed. The first review should establish a clear set of measurable indicators to measure progress towards PEI strategic objectives.</li> </ul>		
Volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic financing for education	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Volume:</b> Government spend on education has consistently exceeded 4% in recent years and there is a commitment to 5.5% for 2021 and beyond, although there are concerns that the achievement of this may be affected by the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. Government reporting suggests execution rates for 2020 and 2021 are close to 100%, but historic records show this has fluctuated between 85% and 90% suggesting that there may be some room for improvement. This also points to the need to provide a single reliable source for finance data, including trend data. ITAP recommends future annual monitoring reports are amended to enable MINEDUCYT monitoring how well financial expenditure aligns to planned activities.</li> <li><b>Equity:</b> There is inequity in the distribution of teachers across schools. Disparities are apparent in educational outcomes for children from poor, rural background. No recent public expenditure review providing details of the extent to which education spending is pro-poor. The ITAP recommends that MINEDUCYT explores options for more effective targeting of subsidies to poorer households as well as measures to increase safety in schools and improve the quality of learning especially for girls.</li> <li><b>Efficiency:</b> Repetition and drop-out are a challenge throughout basic education. High repetition between grades 1 to 7 reflect lack of readiness for transition. Need to improve the flow of students through the education system in a more efficient manner. Inefficiencies in teacher allocations, particularly in small, rural schools set up to address challenges in long distances to school. It may not be feasible to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The priority reform emphasizes the importance of creating a governance, monitoring, and evaluation structure within the MINEDUCYT to oversee funding sources, their utilization, and their alignment with identified program priorities, which could indirectly impact on accountability and potential volume of public expenditure on education.</li> <li>Conduct a study on the efficiency of public spending in El Salvador (SCG funded)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No explicit activities to address bottlenecks relating to inefficiencies in domestic financing, although actions identified may provide an important step in generating information needed to improve efficiency,</li> <li>The compact identifies two major challenges in education spending equity: coverage disparities and universal provision of certain programs (such as school feeding and supplies) to students who may not necessarily require such assistance. But it does not specify any activities to solve inequalities.</li> </ul>

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improve the efficiency of these small schools without any intervention having a detrimental impact on equity and drop-out. ITAP recommended further research on the optimum size, of schools' number of teachers, and funding to small rural schools to ensure a focus on equity and scope for integrating children who are currently out of school.

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## Annex 5. Stakeholder map and list of respondents

Table 1. Stakeholder map

Type/ group of stakeholders	Stakeholder (Names, specific titles, and roles)	Role played in system (Including role played in the compact development process, if applicable)
<b>Government</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT)	MINEDUCYT is the primary institutions responsible for education in El Salvador. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT) of El Salvador is responsible for overseeing and improving the country's education system, fostering scientific and technological advancements, and ensuring access to quality education for all citizens.  It is currently headed by Mauricio Pineda.
	First Lady Office	The role of the First Lady Office, Gabriela Rodríguez de Bukele, in El Salvador is to lead social initiatives focused on improving the welfare of children, families, and vulnerable populations, and to support various social and community development programs
	Instituto Crecer Juntos	This institute was recently created (January 2023), it guides and supervises early childhood services. It has the mandate to develop the integral model for the attention of early childhood.
	Consejo Nacional de la primera infancia, la niñez, y la adolescencia (CONAPINA)	It is the governing institution for the rights of early childhood, childhood and youth that guarantees the rights of children and adolescents, in co-responsibility with the family, the State and society, through the articulation of the National Protection System and the effective defense through protection mechanisms and the promotion of policies, plans and programmes.
	Ministry of Health	It is a government institution whose main objective is to coordinate and provide health care for Salvadorans. It is currently headed by Dr. Francisco Alabí Montoya, a Salvadoran physician.  Not involved in the compact development, but it is a key actor in the deployment of the reform.
	Ministry of Finance	The Ministry of Finance of El Salvador is a state institution whose mission is to "define and direct the fiscal policy that favours the stability and sustainability of public finances, in order to contribute to the economic growth and welfare of El Salvador.  Not involved in the compact development, and none of the government stakeholders mentioned the Ministry as a key actor.
<b>El Salvador Local Education</b>	Local Education Group	The Local Education Group (LEG) is led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Type/ group of stakeholders	Stakeholder (Names, specific titles, and roles)	Role played in system (Including role played in the compact development process, if applicable)
Group (SL-LEG)		(MINEDUCYT) and consists of ca. 40 members of multilateral agencies, academia, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of civil society.
El Salvador Local Education Group “Petit Comité”	Local Education Group – “Petit Comité”	<p>The LEG "Petit Comité" was set up to facilitate coordination, discussion and input between the LEG and the Strategic Facilitation Team. The president of the Petit Comité participates in that team, on behalf of the LEG. This committee should not exceed 7 members, whose members are appointed for a six-month period.</p> <p>The Petit Comité includes (at the time of the field work) Unesco (president), Save the Children, Plan International, ESEN and FEPADE. The meetings are supported by the coordinating agency (Unicef).</p>
Coordinating Agency	UNICEF	<p>The agency within the local education group responsible for coordinating members of the local education group and serving as a communications liaison with the GPE Secretariat.</p> <p>Key role in ensuring that GPE support is adequately managed and aligned with broader education sector developments. Support the LEG and the Petit Comité.</p> <p>It had a key role in the compact development</p>
Grant Agent	World Bank	<p>The grant agent is the body designated to receive the transferred funds and to be accountable for the use of these resources. The managing or grant agency will then disburse those funds to the implementing partners, typically the government, and provide support and oversight, as appropriate to the context, for the use of the funds and the implementation of the activities.</p> <p>It had a key role in the compact development and EFA, considering that they can provide high level technical advisory support.</p>
Other Development Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNESCO</li> <li>• IDB</li> <li>• Fundación Ayuda en Acción</li> <li>• ACNUR</li> <li>• European Union</li> <li>• USAID</li> <li>• World Vision</li> <li>• Plan Internacional</li> <li>• Save the Children</li> <li>• ESEN (Escuela Superior de Economía y Negocios)</li> </ul>	<p>Participate and contribute to SL-LEG meetings</p> <p>Some implement GPE-funded or other activities in the education sector, in alignment with ESP priorities</p>

Type/ group of stakeholders	Stakeholder (Names, specific titles, and roles)	Role played in system (Including role played in the compact development process, if applicable)
Civil Society Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FUSADES</li> <li>• FEPADE</li> <li>• FUSAL</li> <li>• FUSALMO</li> </ul>	<p>CSOs are LEG members</p> <p>The CSOs operate in El Salvador mostly through implementation of various activities in the educational sector in the country.</p>

**Table 2. List of respondents**

#	Stakeholder's Name	Role	Organisation
1	Anne Guison Dowdy	Senior Evaluation Office, Results and Performance Team	GPE
2	Katherina Hruskovec-Gonzalez	Country Team Lead	GPE
3	Ana Marta Najarro	Planning Director , GPE focal point	MINEDUCYT
4	Jaime David Ayala	Consultant	UNICEF
5	Marta Navarro Montes	Education Specialist	UNICEF
6	Dr. Carolina Rovira	Education Consultant	WB
7	Alan Rico Serrano	Education Specialist	WB
8	Romina Kasman	Education Specialist, Head of Education Sector	UNESCO, Multicountry office in San José, Costa Rica
9	José Mauricio Pineda	Minister of Education	MINEDUCYT
10	Max Miron	Manager Strategic Planning	MINEDUCYT
11	Yeny Rivas Medrano	Manager of Gender Unit	MINEDUCYT
12	Juan Maragall	Education Specialist	IDB
13	Ericka Alvarado	Education Specialist	Fundación Ayuda en Acción
14	Alfonso Viquez	Education manager / youth specialist	FUSALMO -Fundación Salvador del Mundo
15	Celia Moran	Program Quality and Impact Director	Save The Children
16	Cristina Pérez	Program manager	Plan International
17	Karla Segobia	Executive Director	FUSAL
	Jennifer Moran	Head of Operations of the Early Childhood Program	

#	Stakeholder's Name	Role	Organisation
18	David Lopez	Programs coordinator	ESEN – Escuela Superior de Economía y Negocios
19	Dr. Helga Cuellar Marchelli	Director of Social Studies Department	FUSADES
20	Hector Matal	Senior Education Specialist	USAID
21	Bessy Escolero	Project Manager	FEPADE
22	Yolanda Cativa	Project Officer	European Union Delegation
23	Alexandra Posada	Head of Projects and Cooperation	Office of the First Lady
24	Alexander Granados Paz	National Director of. Secondary Education	MINEDUCYT
25	Edgard Abrego	General Director of Educational Levels and Modalities	MINEDUCYT
26	Rosa Virginia Sánchez	Head of Education Sector	Instituto Crecer Juntos

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