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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

FINAL REPORT REVISED MARCH 2024

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FINAL REPORT REVISED MARCH 2024

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ACRONYMS

BUNEXE	Bureau for National Exams
CASAS	Commission for Adapted Schooling and Social Support
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
CRPD	Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWD	Children with Disabilities
DANE	National Administrative Department of Statistics
DHS	Demography and Health Survey (Haiti)
DIGESTYC	General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses
EHPM	Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples (El Salvador)
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
ENCI	National Strategy for International Cooperation
EPH	Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (Honduras)
ERCE	Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study
FEM	Flexible Education Model
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEIH	Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (Colombia)
GIFMM	Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICBF	Colombian Institute of Family Welfare
ICFES	Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank

IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEA	International Evaluation Association of School Achievement
IELA	Inclusive Education Landscape Assessment
IHFOSED	Haitian Institute of Training in Educational Sciences
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LAC EduTrends	<i>Summary analysis of educational trends in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): Update 2022</i>
LEE	Laboratorio de Economía de la Educación, Javeriana University
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual +
MEN	Ministry of National Education
MENFP	Ministry of Education and Professional Development
MINEDUCYT	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MOE	Ministry of Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIR	Net Intake Rate
ODK	Open Data Kit Application
ONEC	National Office of Statistics and Census
OREALC	Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean
PISA	OECD Program for International Student Assessment
PND	National Development Plan
PPT	Temporary Protection Permits

Q1- Q5	Quintile One through Quintile Five
RQ	Research Question
RV4	Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SACE	Education Center Administration System
SART	Early Warning and Response System
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
SEDESOL	Secretary of Social Development
SEIP	Own Indigenous Educational System
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SIGE	Système d'Information sur la Gestion de l'Education
SIGES	Sistema de Información para la Gestión Educativa Salvadoreña
SIMAT	Sistema Integrado de Matrículas
SIR	System in a Room
SIUCE	Unified Information System for School Coexistence
TERCE	Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USI	Unit of Statistics and Information

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document outlines the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Inclusive Education Landscape Assessment (IELA), financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. DevTech Systems Inc. conducted the assessment between April and September 2023, with a focus on evaluating the landscape of inclusive education in four countries: Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras. USAID defines inclusive education as a system of education, accompanied by policies, and practices, that aims to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background or abilities. This approach is particularly focused on improving the learning and skills of marginalized groups, such as girls, children affected by armed conflict or humanitarian crises, children with disabilities, children in remote or rural areas (including indigenous populations), and married adolescents (USAID, 2018a; USAID, 2018b).

The purpose of the IELA is to provide the Ministries of Education, USAID, and their implementing partners in each of the four target countries with the following information:

1. Any available information about the state of education of selected marginalized populations.
2. The main barriers to generating and accessing data for their enrollment and education outcomes from the perspective of education stakeholders and selected marginalized groups.
3. Policies, practices, and school environment settings that enable or create barriers to equitable access to quality education, and inclusive education, from the perspective of education stakeholders and selected marginalized groups.
4. Opportunities for aligning interventions designed to address the barriers identified in this study with existing programs that other multilateral organizations and other bilateral and multilateral donors are implementing and/or funding.
5. Recommendations for USAID, national and local governments to improve access to quality education for marginalized groups.

This report refers to inclusive education from a holistic perspective drawing from USAID's conceptualization of this term. Although the context of each country is unique, this report conducts a cross country examination of the practices that enable and inhibit learning tailored to diverse populations' needs.

METHODOLOGY

The LAC IELA employed a mixed-methods research approach. The inquiry worked at two levels: 1) a broad overview and synthesis of trends on inclusive education across the four selected countries, and 2) a multi-case study that includes country-level cases of data, policies, practices, and other factors around inclusive education from within these countries.

The study's quantitative component gathered and synthesized available literature and secondary data for each targeted country and analyzed data from national Education Management Information Systems

(EMIS) to estimate enrollment and access to education for marginalized groups where information was not readily available. The study’s qualitative component involved multi-country case studies engaging with key education stakeholders associated with three select underserved, marginalized groups in each of the four countries. The research team collected data from 271 informants (183 female, 88 male) using as data collection methods: System in a Room (SIR) sessions – eight sessions in total, focus group discussions (FGDs) – three sessions in total, and key informant interviews (KIIs) – 50 sessions in total. This approach captured key stakeholders’ perspectives on policies, practices, factors affecting inclusive education, and recommendations for addressing barriers.

The focus on three prioritized groups and four countries was primarily dictated by resource limitations, precluding a thorough analysis of all groups across the Latin American and Caribbean regions. This strategic choice allowed for a more in-depth exploration within the scope of the study’s resources.

As shown in Table I, on page 24 of Section III, in Colombia, the study focused on urban and rural pregnant girls, Venezuelan migrant children, and indigenous and Afro-Colombian youth. El Salvador’s emphasis was on rural girls, children with disabilities, youth, and returned migrants or internally displaced people (IDPs). In Haiti, the study concentrated on lower socioeconomic status (SES) urban and rural children, youth with disabilities, and returned migrants and IDPs. In Honduras, the study targeted children from lower SES backgrounds, those with disabilities, and migrants and IDPs.

The research team addressed key questions on the availability and outcomes of school enrollment data for selected groups (research question [RQ] 1); barriers faced by national EMISs in data collection (RQ2); policies and practices that mitigate unequal access to quality, inclusive education (RQ3); the impact of school environments on marginalized learners’ access to education (RQ4); community and family influence these learners’ educational access (RQ5); and the role and efficacy of multilateral organizations and donors in the LAC region’s inclusive education landscape (RQ6).

MAIN RESULTS BY RESEARCH TOPIC

RQ 1. School Enrollment and Education Outcomes. The research team found that enrollment data disaggregated by marginalized groups is limited, i.e., most countries have gross enrollment information disaggregated only by geographical region (rural and urban) and sex, but information by marginalized group is limited and not consistently available every year. Regarding children with disabilities, UNICEF (2021) reports that the estimated 19.1 million children with disabilities in LAC are 49 percent more likely to never have attended school than their peers. To analyze access, the research team used data from UNESCO to analyze the percent of primary completion rate and out-of-school children for selected marginalized groups with available data across the four prioritized countries.

- Using data from a household-level survey, UNESCO calculates that the **average primary completion rate** is 94 percent for Colombia, 92 percent for El Salvador, 89 percent for Honduras and 53 percent for Haiti. Among vulnerable groups, girls are more likely to complete their primary education than boys; in all countries, girls have a slightly higher primary completion rate than the country average. In all countries except for Colombia, children and youth from the poorest socioeconomic backgrounds have lower completion rates. Richer

countries demonstrate better primary completion rates. Haiti, being the poorest of the four countries studied, has notoriously lower completion rates.

- Regarding **out-of-school children**, data from UNESCO for the four countries indicates that girls and boys show similar results, i.e., for both groups, values associated with this indicator are similar to those of country-averages (around four to five percent for Colombia, El Salvador and Honduras, and eight percent in Haiti). In all countries, children from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be out-of-school than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This is especially evident in Haiti where 21 percent out of school children are categorized as being from the poorest SES category.

Regarding **school attendance**, data shows that across the four countries, **children from rural areas attended school less than their urban counterparts**. The differences are higher in Haiti, where the most recent school attendance data (2017) shows that almost 74.1 percent of rural children attended primary school compared to 87.6 percent of urban children. However, due to increased gang violence since 2021, around 1,700 schools are closed across the country. Similarly, across the four countries under study, children from with lower SESs (quintile one [Q1]) attended school less than children from higher quintiles. In Colombia, 94.3 percent of children from Q1 attended school compared to 97.6 percent from Q5.¹ In El Salvador, the difference between Q1 and Q5 is also of three percentage points (96.3 Q1 versus 97.6 Q5), while in Honduras the difference is of 6.7 percentage points. (89.4 Q1 versus 96.1 Q5). Meanwhile, in Haiti, the difference is a startling 30.1 percentage points (61.1 Q1 vs 91.2 Q5).² Key informants in Haiti indicate that there is an issue of violence against children in vulnerable situations, including verbal, physical violence/abuse in schools, that makes parent reconsider school enrollment.

In terms of learning achievement, marginalized groups tend to score lower in standardized assessments when compared to those from non-marginalized groups. The research team's calculations using UNESCO's Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) 2019 microdata show:

- Third graders from lower SES categories score significantly lower in reading than those from higher SES categories across Colombia, Honduras, and El Salvador. In Colombia, third graders from Q5 on average score 786 points on ERCE Reading while third graders from Q1 score on average 654 points. This is equivalent to a gap of 132 points, or a 20 percent difference. The gap in El Salvador between Q1 and Q5 is 121 points (equivalent to 18 percent) and in Honduras the gap is 97 points (equivalent to 7 percent).
- Girls consistently outperform boys across the three countries with available data. By third and sixth grade, girls usually show stronger reading performance than boys. In LAC, according to

¹ An economic quintile is a measure of a population's socioeconomic status. It divides the population into five groups based on income, with each group representing approximately 20 percent of the population. The first quintile represents the poorest 20 percent of the population, while the fifth quintile represents the wealthiest 20 percent.

² Data for Colombia CEPAL 2021, El Salvador, Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 2022, and Honduras CEPAL 2019, and Haiti DHS 2016- 2017.

USAID's *A Summary Analysis of Education Trends in Latin America and The Caribbean – 2022 Update* (USAID, 2022), thirteen countries out of sixteen showed significant gender differences favoring girls on the third-grade ERCE reading test.

- Overall, ERCE reading scores show that sixth grade migrant learners have consistently lower scores than non-migrants. In Colombia, migrants have a 3.6 percent lower ERCE reading score than non-migrants. In El Salvador this gap is equivalent to 4.8 percent, and in Honduras to 4.1 percent. This gap is slightly higher for girls than for boys (i.e., non-migrant boys and migrant boys tend to perform more similarly).
- Sixth grade children from indigenous communities perform consistently lower than children from non-indigenous communities. The average ERCE reading score for sixth grade learners was 11 percent, 7 percent, and 6 percent higher for children from non-indigenous communities compared to those from indigenous communities in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras, respectively.
- Children whose first language is different than the official language of instruction in the classroom perform consistently lower in reading according to ERCE reading scores. The average ERCE reading scores for sixth-grade learners were 10 percent, 5 percent, and 8 percent higher for children learning in a first language compared to those not learning in their mother tongue in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras.

In the case of Haiti, descriptive findings from 2022 sixth grade national assessments show similar trends for selected marginalized groups. For example, students across the board perform better in their mother tongue language; girls tend to outperform boys in language subjects; students in bilingual households score better across all subjects; and, while performance varies significantly by department, rural areas lag behind urban areas.

Except for in the case of Colombia, there is limited data on standardized learning outcomes post-COVID. Average OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results for Colombia were about the same as in 2018 in mathematics, reading, and science. The OECD PISA 2022 country summary for Colombia shows that there are no statistically significant changes between 2018 and 2022 results, as PISA results have been remarkably stable for a long period of time, with only small and mostly non-significant fluctuations since 2009.

RQ 2. Education Management Information Systems. The results in this report show that all countries, except for Haiti, have education data from 2018 onwards regarding enrollment by sex, location (urban/rural), SES quintiles, and for learners with disabilities, yet this data is not available from a single source and often requires additional analysis. Enrollment data by race/ethnicity and migratory status is only collected in Colombia and El Salvador. Countries in this study are not reporting school enrollment data for girls with early pregnancies. None of the countries report data on out-of-school children. While the EMIS in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras collect similar types of data, the level of detail varies. In the four countries, management information systems for different sectors -education, health, and migration- function independently, without the ability to share or cross-reference data. Such compartmentalization not only hinders a unified analysis of the variables impacting educational outcomes

but reinforces exclusion of the most marginalized. Moreover, when available, EMIS data often remains inaccessible to the public, local institutions, and schools, with its use predominantly confined to the ministry level. When data is available in statistical reports the data is not widely disseminated, which becomes a barrier to informed decision-making. According to respondents in this study, the main barrier to collecting this data is limited access to technology infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, which limits the capacity of teachers and school administrators to keep data up to date. Informants across all countries report the need to provide more training to schools to improve data quality.

RQ 3. Inclusive Education Policies and Practices. Overall, all countries have established education policy frameworks in favor of inclusive education, except for explicit inclusive education guidelines for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual + (LGBTQIA+) community. Using the World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) framework, the research team assigned policy development levels for each country and each target group. Colombia's education inclusive policies are advanced, EL Salvador and Honduras are emergent, and Haiti has a mix of emergent and latent policies. In El Salvador and Colombia, a legal framework supporting returning migrants exists. Colombia has a long-standing policy on education for indigenous and Afro-Colombian children and educational attention for ethnic groups. While policies are in place, putting this into practice has been a challenge. Key barriers include limited coordination, limited reach and sustainable financing, lack of consensus of legal definitions (e.g., what constitutes a disability), lack of national guidelines/curriculum to train teachers in inclusive education to implement policies in the classroom, red-tape and complex bureaucratic processes to meet school requirements for enrollment and graduation, and stigma and discrimination even when the policy is known to school staff and parents.

RQ 4. School Environment as Determinants of Quality Education. Across all countries, informants identified several school- and classroom-level barriers that prevent marginalized groups from receiving quality education. Among these are: lack of nearby upper primary and secondary schools, school fees, lack of basic school infrastructure (drinking water, electricity, internet) and adequate didactic materials (particularly for ethnic minorities, migrants and IDPs, and learners with disabilities), the absence of assistive technologies,³ the lack of knowledge of sign language, instruction in language different than mother tongue, lack of content relevance, lack of accommodations such as onsite childcare facilities, ramps, and universal design for learning. Stakeholders across all countries also identify challenges at the teacher level. In Haiti and Honduras, informants reported an explicit insufficient teacher supply, particularly in rural areas and schools catering to learners from lower SESs. In all countries informants reported a lack of teacher training and preparedness and insufficient specialized support staff to address inclusive education issues. Informants reported that school meal programs, free tuition, cash transfer programs and flexible education programs increase school access and retention for the most marginalized.⁴ Colombia has created 32 flexible educational models that assume teaching-

³ This includes assistive devices, which refer to input technology such as adapted keyboards and computer input controls, speech input, dictation software and output technology, such as screen readers and magnifiers, three-dimensional printers, and Braille note-takers.

⁴ References to explicit informants are provided in the results section of the report.

learning processes within formal education, with school and semi-school alternatives, such as Walking in Secondary School, Escuela Nueva, Learning Acceleration, and UNICEF's Learning Circles.

RQ 5. Family and Community Determinants. Respondents across all countries mentioned positive and negative family and community practices and beliefs that affect children's access to quality education. As positive contributors to marginalized children's education, SIR participants in Colombia mention the key role families play in the transmission of values setting "a good example", promoting good habits in children, including the use of technology, adequate food at home, among others (SIR 2), as well as ensuring emotional help and support, and facilitating home study (SIR 4). In Honduras and El Salvador, respondents agreed that community organizations providing after school programs or services tailored for children with disabilities and for pregnant adolescents have played a key role in keeping children in school and providing them with learning opportunities. Respondents across all countries believe a key barrier to education is **household poverty, with a greater impact on rural areas, ethnic groups, migrant families, and families with pregnant adolescents**. Households without resources could make the decision not to send their children to school (Colombia MEN, 2022a, p. 25). The lack of resources implies difficulties in paying for transportation, uniforms, materials, school supplies, and books, but it can also be an incentive for child labor due to the need to generate income for the home. It can also cause girls to drop out of education due to the need to cover unpaid care at home. An informant in Colombia pointed out that "children are not allowed in schools without full uniform or in flip flops or shorts. So, the children are sent back, which is further triggering to avoid sending them to school." In El Salvador, respondents report that boys drop out of school quite frequently because they are more motivated by migration, either by family reunification or as an option to meet the basic needs of their family. Other informants stressed that early marriages are sometimes used as a way to mitigate the economic needs of the family, especially if the family has daughters.

Across all countries, **violence through gangs and/or armed conflict, and insecurity stands out as a primary community-level obstacle** affecting both the attendance of marginalized children and the ability to remain in school. In Colombia, this takes the form of violence, and armed conflict in addition to household poverty, and the "double impact" of making potential victims vulnerable to armed groups' recruitment of children and adolescents. In El Salvador, the government has established a 'State of Exception' since March 2022 in response to an increase in homicides, which grants authorities power to arrest anyone suspected of gang activity and suspends several constitutional rights. In Haiti, FGD informants reported widespread gang violence, recruitment of children by gangs, weaponization of hunger, indiscriminate attacks against the population, obstruction of humanitarian access and assistance, and lynchings. In Honduras, according to SIR participants, insecurity arises from pervasive violence and high crime rates, which threaten children's safety and foster a climate of fear discouraging families from allowing their children to travel to school, especially on foot.

RQ6. Multilateral Support. The study highlights many cooperation initiatives mainly implemented and/or funded by bilateral donors and multilateral entities. **Projects relevant to inclusive education include** but are not limited to: in Colombia UNICEF/Learning Circles initiative, USAID/Together we Learn, IADB/*Aprendamos todos a leer*, Save the Children/Reading Clubs; in El Salvador GPE/World Bank/Growing Up and Learning Together; Save the Children/Equitable, Inclusive and Quality Education

for Migrant and Internally Displaced Children, USAID/ *Proyecto Aprendo para Brillar*/ Innovative Education Project, among others; In Haiti IADB's investment in the Education Sector Plan, and USAID's RAPID project for an integrated library/*Bibliothèque Roger Dorsainville*; USAID; and in Honduras The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank funding for conditional cash assistance for poor households; and USAID's funding for the Honduras Local Governance Project to promote the use of the Open Data Kit. **In terms of challenges**, informants perceive a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices in project implementation and a lack of a culture of evaluation (Colombia) as well as programs being one size fits all without considering local adaptations (Colombia, Haiti, Honduras). Across all countries, informants perceive a lack of alignment and coordination across donors and among implementing partners and local institutions disregarding existing practices, leaving gaps, and/or resulting in the duplicating of efforts. Other challenges include little community participation in project design and implementation (El Salvador and Haiti), and the perception that programs promoted by multilateral organizations operate in the short or medium term with little investment in sustainable partnerships to continue implementation and with few possibilities of achieving sustainability (Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors of this study developed recommendations from the insights gained from secondary data and key informant responses to interviews and SIR discussions. These are detailed in Section IV of this report. Some of the main recommendations include:

Prioritizing Marginalized Populations for Education Investments. Results from this assessment indicate that one of the greatest challenges to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] Four), is to respond to the diverse learning needs of marginalized groups. For groups with available data on learning outcomes, the research found that learners from lower socioeconomical status categories demonstrate wider gaps when compared to country averages, followed by learners from indigenous and ethnic minority groups, those whose languages of instruction don't align with their mother tongue languages, learners from rural areas, and migrants. However, children with disabilities, girls with early pregnancies and internally displaced children and youth also face challenges that the research team was not able to quantify in terms of learning outcomes. Governments and international organizations should prioritize resources and offer technical cooperation to bridge these populations' educational service and outcome gaps and meet SDG4 in the next six years. Governments in this study should consider strengthening their domestic revenue mobilization and increasing the share of expenditure for inclusive education while international organizations should prioritize development assistance to close the gap in education services and outcomes between marginalized groups and the rest of the population. Investments to foster inclusion are critical across the education system, encompassing governance, regulatory frameworks, EMISs, student assessments, and support for educators, classrooms, families, and communities.

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Strengthening the EMIS. Governments and international organizations should consider refining their EMISs. Up to date, reliable, relevant, and easily accessible information about the education status of the marginalized groups examined in this study is difficult to access or incomplete. USAID could play a leading role in supporting these governments to understand what is working in partner country EMISs and what is needed to ensure that data on marginalized populations is collected, analyzed, and disseminated, and connected with information systems from other sectors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of education. A national intersectoral task force to document the current state of data-sharing across government agencies could be established. The task force could determine where data-sharing exists and when links are critical. The task force could also identify policy and technical challenges and promising national and international practices and develop a national plan of action to cross-reference data aligned with the national education strategy. An international benchmarking tool such as the World Bank SABER tailored for education data on equity and inclusion could support this process across countries.

Updating Inclusive Education Laws and Policies. In countries where inclusive education policies are not established or advanced, it is critical to update legislation to respond to the current needs of marginalized groups including clear definitions of the protected groups and their rights. These policies need to develop in tandem with national education strategies to implement them in coordination across sectors and with adequate financing. USAID could support this process by furthering the policy framework analysis started in this study to identify policy gaps and bring promising policies from other countries with similar context for their consideration and development.

Develop an Inclusive Education National Curriculum for Teachers and Students. All countries should consider a curricular reform to mainstream inclusive education to ensure all students have the accommodations they need and to reduce stigma and rejection. This reform requires the development of an overarching curriculum for general inclusive education teaching practices and curricular content for training teachers in specialized education to address the needs of the different marginalized populations (e.g. deaf and hard of hearing, blind, post- traumatic stress, etc.). USAID has

started this process in countries like Morocco with the Inclusive Teacher Training Activity and should draw on its lessons to support the LAC governments in this study.

Adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a central part of the national inclusive education policies and designing targeted interventions for specific marginalized populations. UDL is a set of principles to guide the design of learning environments aimed at the inclusion of all learners, irrespective of the kind of barriers to learning that they face.⁵ USAID can support dialogues with the four governments to discuss UDL and how tools such as the UDL Toolkit can be applied to help all children read, particularly those marginalized and vulnerable.⁶ In addition, governments can capitalize on the existing programs that respondents mentioned in this study – including after school programs, education services for children with disabilities, support services for adolescent girls, and the flexible educational models in Colombia and Honduras – by determining what works and investing on scaling these efforts up.

Invest and Coordinate Efforts to Remove Learning Barriers for Children with Disabilities (CWD). USAID could support national governments with conducting nuanced and robust diagnoses of the extent of the issues mentioned in this report to ensure CWD enroll and succeed in school. This assessment could inform the development of the national curriculum for inclusive education and teacher training practices. USAID could also support the government with convening different relevant stakeholders to promote collaboration.

Increase the Supply of Teachers in Remote Areas and Schools that Cater to the Poorest Children. This is particularly for countries that show evidence of teacher shortages. The government, in Honduras and Haiti for example, should conduct a full assessment of the teacher supply and demand and consider (1) revising teaching requirements to allow expansion strategies such as allowing qualified candidates to work and earn before completing teacher training qualifications; (2) promoting teacher mobility; (3) improving the status and social standing of the teaching profession to attract more candidates; and (4) providing targeted incentives to retain teachers and bring new teachers into the profession.

Develop a Comprehensive Intersectoral Strategy to Tackle Education Exclusion. Given the intersectionality between poverty and educational exclusion, especially for marginalized groups that face the double or triple challenge of being poor, with a disability, identifying as an ethnic minority, a migrant and/or a girl with an early pregnancy, multi-sector interventions are necessary. The ministries of education need to be actively involved in the design and implementation of poverty reduction plans that include demand-side incentives such as cash and non-cash transfers and other benefits/safety nets to families (unemployment benefits, tax exemptions, pensions, etc.) to ensure children attend and remain in school. The government should also consider developing social sector strategies that include access to

⁵ <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/universal-design-learning>

⁶ <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/universal-design-learning-help-all-children-read>

health interventions in school and service referencing for parents including skill training and employment programs.

Establish Community Engagement and Education Campaigns. After conducting a mapping of communities where patriarchal norms are limiting girls' access to education, and in collaboration with local partners, USAID could develop a program to promote family and community engagement in schools and the importance of education. The program could also include a component of mentorship programs that connect girls with female professionals who can provide guidance and support throughout their educational journeys and create safe spaces within schools or community centers where girls can access resources, receive academic help, and build a network of like-minded peers.

Mitigate the Effects of Community Violence with School-Based Support. As part of a national violence prevention strategies, governments in the four countries should consider partnerships with local organizations to train school staff in using trauma-informed education approaches, including compassion and clear behavioral expectations, and by promoting mental health and a positive school climate. USAID in collaboration with local partners, could develop interventions to prioritize mental health by training school staff to conduct mental health screenings for students and providing ongoing education to staff and students about trauma, including how to find help or provide support to those in need.

Establish a Harmonized Coordination Plan and Platform. Governments should revise their national strategies for international cooperation in education and require that these respond directly to the goals and needs in the national education strategy. A single source digital platform could enable collaboration amongst partners to ensure alignment with the national priorities and amongst each other. Standardized reporting formats allow for easier data comparison and identification of areas for collaboration or streamlining efforts. Governments should consider establishing regular joint planning workshops where representatives from different development agencies can discuss proposed projects, identify potential overlaps, and explore opportunities for joint implementation or complementary initiatives.

Empower Local Stakeholders with Capacity Building. USAID can support this initiative by conducting comprehensive needs assessments in collaboration with local governments and community leaders to ensure programs address locally-identified priorities and foster a sense of ownership. Training workshops for local stakeholders on project management, data collection, and monitoring & evaluation techniques should also be considered to empower active local participation in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, local advisory boards with representatives from civil society organizations, women's groups, and community leaders could ensure programs are culturally appropriate and responsive to local needs.

Strengthen M&E with Collaborative Frameworks. International donors and multilateral should ensure their M&E frameworks are aligned with international goals and indicators including the SDGs / SDG4 and with national education priorities. Multilaterals should budget and include independent program evaluations as a standard project practice from its design. For this purpose, multilaterals should commission independent evaluations conducted by reputable research institutions to assess the long-

term impact and effectiveness of development programs. These evaluations should involve local stakeholders in data collection and analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The USAID-commissioned report *Summary analysis of educational trends in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): Update 2022 (LAC EduTrends)* (USAID, 2022) highlighted gaps in access to quality education for: girls, children from rural communities, migrants, and children living in poverty (USAID, 2022). However, national data on access and learning outcomes to delve deeper into these disparities was limited beyond the education status of children in rural/urban settings and their income quintiles. The study was unable to consistently report educational data in LAC disaggregated by race/ethnicity, immigration status, language of instruction, persons with disabilities, girls in early/forced marriages and with early-age pregnancies, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual + (LGBTQI+) people. Data to obtain a clear and detailed picture of inclusion and education in LAC is still a work in progress.

The LAC region presents important inequalities that affect access to quality inclusive education opportunities for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. **The income Gini index** for the region fell from 0.527 in 2003 to around 0.46 in 2020.⁷ In 2022, after the COVID pandemic, the average Gini index for LAC showed a slight reduction, moving from 0.46 to 0.45 in 2020 (OECD, 2023). According to recent regional comparisons by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (2023), comparable data as of 2020 shows that the region presents the highest income disparities in the world, above Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and other regions. These income inequalities translate into educational inequalities. In the 21 countries of the region, the chances that children and young people from the richest 20 percent of the population will complete upper secondary school are, on average, five times higher than those of students from the poorest 20 percent (UNESCO, 2020).

Education systems are influenced and shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political structures, therefore reflecting historical and current patterns of inequality and discrimination, with the risk of perpetuating these disparities. Thus, while unequal and intolerant societies can create unjust, segregated, and discriminatory education systems, more equitable and inclusive education systems can contribute to creating more just and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2020). However, a significant number of students are not reaching their full learning potential (World Bank, 2018). Available data for the most marginalized populations in the LAC region shows:

- **Children and youth with disabilities** of all types present five times higher illiteracy rates than people without disabilities (22.1 percent vs 4.3 percent illiteracy rates) (Garcia More, et. All, 2021). Survey data collected by the World Bank (2021), describe the importance of fostering an enabling home environment for learners with disabilities, especially during school closures, such as those brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic. An enabling home environment requires financial security, access to the internet and devices for remote learning; physical health and nutrition, among others. There is no indication that these conditions

⁷ The Gini Index/ coefficient is a way to measure how wealth or income is distributed in a society. It goes from 0 to 1, with 0 representing perfect equality (everyone has the same amount) and 1 representing perfect inequality (one person has everything, everyone else has nothing). The higher the number, the greater the wealth gap.

improved during the pandemic due to increased income inequalities and challenging socioeconomic conditions faced by many LAC countries during this time.

- **Displaced populations:** according to UNHCR (2023), as of the end of 2022 over 21 million people across LAC were displaced, representing an increase of 25 percent from the previous year. Alongside Colombia, Venezuela, Northern Central America, and Mexico, there are significant displacement crises occurring in Nicaragua and Haiti. While this report did not find disaggregated data by age, ongoing conflicts, such as in Haiti, evidence how forced displacements negatively affect women and children. As of January 2024, nearly 314,000 people have been uprooted in Haiti, with a little above half of them (170,000) estimated to be children.
- **Ethnic minorities'** access to secondary school is not as widespread as access for the non-indigenous population, with approximately 30 percent of indigenous adolescents out of school and many of them receiving low-quality education (UNICEF, 2017). Additionally, UNESCO's 2019 Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) report highlights how students from indigenous communities have systemic disadvantages in learning outcomes. Sixth-grade students from indigenous communities scored on average 22 percentage points less on ERCE tests than their non-indigenous peers. This disparity fluctuated between countries going from 22 percentage points in Honduras to 117 in Costa Rica. Importantly, this disparity persisted even after controlling for socioeconomic differences among students were controlled.
- **Language of instruction:** Around 40 percent of the world's population does not access education in a language they understand (UNESCO, 2016). Children whose first language does not align with the official language of instruction in the classroom normally exhibit lower performance than those learning in their mother tongue. A study of Amerindian languages in LAC showed that there are between 400 and 450 languages in the region, and a much greater number of dialects or variants of those (López, 1999).⁸ Data analyzed by the research team for Colombia, Honduras and El Salvador shows that learners whose mother tongue differs from their language of instruction perform between 4.7 to 9.5 percent below average scores in sixth grade reading. Additionally, in regions such throughout Haiti and the San Andrés archipelago in Colombia, while Creole languages are widely spoken by the population, the formal languages of instruction often differ, posing significant educational barriers.
- **Children living in rural areas** receive, on average, 3.7 fewer years of schooling than their urban peers with urban children averaging 10.4 years of education compared to an average of 6.7 years for rural children. Further, repetition and dropout rates are higher for students from rural communities than urban communities (UNESCO, 2021).

⁸ Amerindian languages are those that originated and developed on the American continent. These languages existed from the first human settlement until before the arrival of Europeans, Africans and Asians. Although many of them became extinct over time, there are still about 400 to 450 in the LAC region.

- **LGBTQI+ children and youth** in seven countries of the region said that they faced hostility at school; students with higher levels of victimization were at least twice as likely to miss school (UNESCO, 2020).
- **Children/youth in early and forced marriage and/or with early-age pregnancies:** as of 2018, one in four young women in the region married for the first time or became part of a couple before the age of 18, highlighting challenges around the vulnerability of young women in the region (UNICEF, 2022a).

Inequality in access to quality education in LAC is persistent between and within groups. Horizontal inequality occurs between different socially and culturally formed groups, for example, students with disabilities have less access to quality education; while vertical inequality occurs within groups, for example, socioeconomic status (SES) differentials or even intra-SES differences.

The purpose of this Inclusive Education Landscape Assessment (IELA) is to provide USAID/LAC and LAC Missions in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti with information about the education status and enablers and barriers that selected marginalized populations face to accessing quality primary education. Missions in these countries prioritized three marginalized groups based on: largest evidence gaps, need for information, and potential for use of the results. The aim is that USAID/LAC and USAID LAC Missions will use this information to inform ongoing and planned Mission and regional education activities. Specific research questions are discussed at the end of this section.

The study uses a mixed methods approach consisting of a comprehensive desk review with a summary of descriptive statistics and four country case studies using key informant interviews and System in a Room (SIR) consultative approach with key stakeholders. A detailed description of the methods and tools is found in Section 3.

1.1. DEFINITIONS

USAID views **inclusive development** as an *equitable development approach built on the understanding that every individual and community, of all diverse identities and experiences, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies. Their engagement throughout the development process leads to better outcomes. USAID promotes a nondiscriminatory, inclusive, equitable, and integrated development approach that ensures that all people have access to a country's services, opportunities, and legal protections, and are able to take part in their societies. This approach requires a concerted effort to include those who face discrimination, marginalization, underrepresentation, and/or have been made vulnerable. These intentional and proactive efforts ensure that all individuals are fully included and can actively participate in and benefit from development processes and activities with the goal of achieving equal outcomes for all.* (USAID, 2023)

USAID defines **inclusive education** as a *comprehensive system providing education to all students across all stages, including early childhood through post-secondary, offering tailored support, and fostering equal opportunities irrespective of students' backgrounds or abilities. The approach aims to widen access to quality education for marginalized groups such as girls, children affected by conflict or crises, those with disabilities, and those in remote areas, including indigenous populations and married adolescents* (USAID, 2018a). Key to this concept is ensuring accessibility, affordability, safety, appropriate accommodations, and bias-free

language in education settings, promoting a learning-conducive environment. UNESCO also defines inclusive education as the “process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth, and adults through greater participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and by reducing and eliminating exclusion. It implies changes in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that encompasses all children of the appropriate age range and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.” Inclusive education seeks to build inclusive and resilient societies (World Bank, 2021). Inclusive education is a real implementation of the basic human right to education. It is not just about achieving universal access to education, but universal access to meaningful and useful knowledge and learning for all.

USAID (2018c) defines **marginalized group** as *People who are typically denied full access to legal protection or social and economic participation and programs (such as police protection, political participation, access to healthcare, education, employment, etc.), whether in practice or in principle, for either historical, cultural, political, or other contextual reasons. Such groups may include but are not limited to: women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, displaced persons, economic migrants, indigenous individuals and communities, youth and the elderly, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, people in lower castes, and people of diverse economic class and political opinions. These groups often suffer from discrimination in the application of laws and policy and/or access to resources, services, and social protection, and may be subject to persecution, harassment, and/or violence. They may also be described as “underrepresented,” “at-risk,” or “vulnerable”.*

USAID defines **quality education** as *a dynamic process that equips students with critical skills like literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, and socio-emotional competencies anchored in safe, relevant, and evidence-based practices (USAID, 2018a; USAID, 2018b). The USAID framework underscores the significance of strengthening local institutions, utilizing data for informed decisions, improving learning outcomes, and enhancing the capacities of educators. It also stresses the involvement of families and communities as vital to the educational ecosystem (USAID, 2018b).*

USAID (2023) defines **disability** as *an evolving concept, and results from the interaction between persons with impairments (including but not limited to persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments) and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Persons may be born with their disability, or they may acquire it later in life. A person’s disability may not always be apparent and due to stigma, not all may choose to self-identify. Persons with disabilities are part of every group and may experience increased discrimination due to intersections with disability and other facets of their identity. Note that some persons with disabilities prefer “functional conditions,” “conditions,” or similar terms, instead of “impairments.”*

USAID (2023) defines **intersectionality** as *the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, etc.) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized or underrepresented individuals or groups. An intersectional approach recognizes that many elements of a person’s identity can impact how they experience the world. In combination with systems of inequality, these intersecting identities can lead to varying degrees of power and privilege that, in turn, create unique power dynamics, effects, and perspectives impacting individuals’ place in society, experience of, and potentially access to development interventions. Further, an intersectional approach advances efforts to address the specific inequalities faced by women and girls, as they make up approximately half of the population in any given country.*

Additional education and inclusion definitions used in this report include:*

Age-specific enrolment ratio. *Enrolment of a given age or age group, regardless of the level of education in which pupils or students are enrolled, expressed as a percentage of the population of the same age or age group. An example is global indicator 4.2.2, the participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age).*

Pre-primary education (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] level 0). *Programmes at the initial stage of organized instruction, primarily designed to introduce very young children, aged at least 3 years, to a school-type environment and provide a bridge between home and school. Upon completion of these programmes, children continue their education at ISCED 1 (primary education).*

Primary education (ISCED level 1). *Programmes generally designed to give pupils a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics, and an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, sciences, art and music.*

Pupil/teacher ratio. *Average number of pupils per teacher at a specific level of education.*

Qualified teacher. *Teacher who has the minimum academic qualification necessary to teach at a specific level of education in a given country.*

Out-of-school number. *Those not enrolled, defined over the following populations: Children of official primary school age. Adolescents of official lower secondary school age. Youth of official upper secondary school age.*

Out-of-school rate. *Those of the official age group for a given level of education not enrolled, expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group.*

Equality. *A state of affairs or result whereby all members of a group enjoy the same inputs, outputs or outcomes in terms of status, rights and responsibilities.*

Equity. *A process or actions aimed at ensuring equality.*

Exclusion. *Any form of direct or indirect prevention of access.*

*Definitions drawn from the *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020- Inclusion and Education All Means All*. For additional information see the [Glossary Section](#) of the report.

I.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The report addresses the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. Education access and learning achievement. What information on school enrollment and learning outcomes is readily available disaggregated beyond sex? For those marginalized groups where data are readily available, what are the outcomes? How many children are out of school and who are they?

RQ 2. Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). What are the barriers that the national EMISs face to collect data on education for decision making from underserved populations, including but not limited to, people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minority groups, LGBTQI+ populations, and others?

RQ 3. Inclusive education policies and practices. According to the key stakeholders in the sample and the desk review, what policies and practices create barriers to equitable access to quality education and which ones work to mitigate inequitable access to quality, equitable, and inclusive education (e.g., language of instruction policies, policies around accessibility and screening for/identification of learners with disabilities, school/teacher placement and incentive policies, migration and internally displaced people (IDPs) education policies, differentiated instruction policies, pedagogical accommodations and modifications, etc.) and why?

RQ 4. School environment as determinants of quality education. According to the key stakeholders in the sample and the desk review, what teacher, school, and classroom environment factors do key stakeholders in the sample report affect marginalized learners' access to quality, equitable, and inclusive education and why?

RQ 5. Family and community determinants. According to the key stakeholders in the sample and the desk review, what community, household, and well-being factors and attitudes do stakeholders in the sample report affect marginalized learners' access to quality education and why?

RQ 6. Multilateral support. What have other donors and multilateral organizations done to address inclusive education in LAC and what are they doing to collaborate and align efforts with each other to support the national education inclusive education? What has worked well, and what has not?

I.3. TARGET GROUPS

This study focused on the following marginalized populations across the four countries. In Colombia, the study included urban and rural girls experiencing early-age pregnancies, migrant children and youth (especially from Venezuela), and children and youth from ethnic minority groups (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian). In El Salvador, the research team focused on girls from rural areas, children and youth with disabilities, and returned migrants/IDPs due to violence. In Haiti, the study examined children from lower socioeconomic status categories from urban and rural communities, children and youth with disabilities, and returned migrants and IDPs. Honduras' participants were children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, including those in rural and urban areas with a potential overlap with indigenous communities, alongside with children and youth with disabilities, and migrants and IDPs.

I.4. REPORT STRUCTURE

The rest of the report is structured as follows: Section 2 details the study methodology; Section 3 presents the results focusing first on regional findings and conclusions and then presenting the country case studies. Section 4 presents recommendations by research question.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods research integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to capitalize on their strengths and provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of research phenomena by connecting variables within their contextual framework (Creswell, 2014).

For the quantitative analysis, the research team drew on data from UNESCO's ERCE 2019 and the OECD's (Program for International Student Assessment) PISA for the years 2018 and 2022. In addition, the team leveraged country-specific EMISs, international and national statistics and demographic and health surveys (Haiti) and to derive estimates for enrollment and attendance of marginalized groups, filling in the gaps where data was otherwise limited or unavailable.

The qualitative inquiry worked at two levels:

- 1) a comprehensive **desk review** and synthesis of trends on inclusive education in Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras. For the desk review, the country teams assembled diverse materials, including local and national reports, academic papers, reports from the Ministries of Education, reports from multilateral organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the World Bank, and contributions from various donors. All gathered resources were systematically cataloged and stored in a OneDrive repository for streamlined access and analysis.
- 2) **four country case studies**. The case study approach in this research provides a deep and comprehensive analysis of inclusive education in Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras, offering rich, and holistic insights. This method reveals the complexities of educational exclusions and their operational dynamics within specific contexts, significantly informing donors' decision-making. Acknowledging that reality is socially constructed, the case study embraces multiple perspectives to capture the fluidity of human behavior and relationships within historical and social frameworks deliberately eschewing generalization in favor of context-specific understanding (Merriam, 2009).

2.2. INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments to conduct the case studies included: key informant interviews (KIIs), FGDs in Haiti, and the SIR consultative approach through workshops with each marginalized group in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras. The SIRs brought together diverse stakeholders representing the education system and the various perspectives of the prioritized target groups. Through a series of participatory discussions and activities SIR participants collaborated to map out each target group's barriers to access quality education and proposed collective solutions. This method was optimal to address RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5 related to stakeholders' perceptions of the determinants of education.

2.3. SAMPLE

USAID selected the countries based on Mission interest and Mission/country ability to use the IEELA results to inform current or future programming. Mission staff prioritized three target groups based on where the largest evidence gaps existed, need for information, and potential for use of the results. The sampled countries and targeted marginalized groups targeted to address research questions three to five are detailed in TABLE I.

TABLE I: MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS BY COUNTRY

COUNTRY	MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls with early pregnancies • Children and youth from ethnic minority groups • Migrants (especially Venezuelan migrants)*
El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls (especially from rural areas) • Children and youth with disabilities** • Returned migrants/IDPs due to violence**
Haiti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from lower socioeconomic status categories (this includes rural communities and urban communities) • Children and youth with disabilities* • Returned migrants and IDPs **
Honduras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from lower socioeconomic status categories (this includes rural communities and urban communities, and will likely overlap with indigenous communities) • Children and youth with disabilities* • Migrants and IDPs**

Notes: * Migration populations refers to: i) migrants in transit: those who pass through the country, but do not settle; ii) permanent migrants; iii) IDPs.

**This definition refers to, but is not limited to: i) physical disabilities; ii) intellectual disabilities; iii) psychosocial disabilities; iv) long-term sensory disabilities; v) multi disability; and vi) Autism Spectrum Disorder.

DevTech collected primary data through KIIs and SIR workshops. TABLE 2 presents the number of participants in the sample for both the interviews and the SIRs by country. As shown in TABLE 2, a total of 272 individuals participated in the study.

TABLE 2: SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVES BY DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

COUNTRY	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWEES	SYSTEM IN A ROOM /WORKSHOPS	TOTAL SAMPLE 272
Colombia	30	4 (103 participants)	133
El Salvador	16	3 (51 participants)	67
Haiti	7	3 (9 participants)*	16
Honduras	11	1 (45 participants)	56

*This interaction was through an online FGD given the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Haiti.

Next, TABLE 3 provides a description of stakeholders, in addition to key informants from each country’s prioritized groups.

TABLE 3: STAKEHOLDERS AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

METHOD	SESSIONS	MODALITY	PARTICIPANTS	STAKEHOLDERS IN ADDITION TO PRIORITIZED GROUPS
COLOMBIA				
SIR	4	In person	103 Total 39 Men 64 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIR 1: Indigenous and Afro-Colombian, mestizos, and community leaders located in different rural areas of the country. SIR 2 & 3: Indigenous and Afro Colombians located in urban areas, Venezuelan migrants, representatives of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, school directors, teachers, students, parents, representatives of the local government.
KII	22	5 in person 17 virtual	30 Total 7 Men 23 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIR 4: Girls and youth with early-age pregnancies, school directors, teachers, students, parents, representatives of the local government (Secretariats of Health, Inclusion, and Women), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with this population, and a representative of a higher education institution.

METHOD	SESSIONS	MODALITY	PARTICIPANTS	STAKEHOLDERS IN ADDITION TO PRIORITIZED GROUPS
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government: National Ministry of Education, Colombian Institute for Family Well-being, Local education Secretariats, Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education NGOs: Juntos Aprendemos, ProAntioquia, Entrepreneurs for education, Visible Hands Multilateral agencies and International NGOs: UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, International Plan, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee and Family Compensation Fund of Antioquia COMFAMA. Higher Education Institutions: Javeriana University, University of Antioquia

EL SALVADOR

SIR	3	In person	51 Total 9 Men 42 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIR 1: Teachers, representatives of NGOs focused on people with disabilities, persons with disabilities, mothers, young girls. SIR 2: Representatives of Angelitos (NGOs focused on people with disabilities), Comus (NGOs focused on development), and Cordes (NGOS focused on Women’s rights), people with disabilities, parent, municipal officer.
KII	11	Virtual	16 Total 5 Men 11 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIR 3: Fedisal (World Organization for Early Childhood Education), Paradise Down Foundation (NGOs focused on people with disabilities), Omep (NGOs focused on marginalized populations), and NGOs focused on people at social risk, AND HIGHER EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES. Government: Ministry of Education. Local foundations and associations: Los Angelitos Association, Fe y Alegría.

METHOD	SESSIONS	MODALITY	PARTICIPANTS	STAKEHOLDERS IN ADDITION TO PRIORITIZED GROUPS
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local NGOs: Ciazó (rural development), Feminist Concentration for Development, Alliance for Development Foundation. International NGOs: Save the Children Multilateral Agencies: UNFPA and UNICEF

HAITI

FG	3	Virtual	8 Total 5 Men 3 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FGD 1: Non-governmental actors from local foundations and associations – Representative of the Association for People with Disabilities, based in Cap-Haitian, Department: North but with a national reach.
KII	7	Virtual	7 Total 4 Men 3 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative of the Association for the Blind based in Port-au-Prince, Department: West, North but with a national reach. Representative of the Foundation Maurice Sixto, based in Port-au-Prince, Department: West, but with a national reach. FG 2 : Representatives of the Haitian Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation Professionnelle) : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Coordinator of Private Education and Partnerships Director of Commission for Adapted Schooling and Social Support (Commission de l'Adaptation Scolaire et de l'Appui Social) Director of the Statistics and Information Unit

METHOD	SESSIONS	MODALITY	PARTICIPANTS	STAKEHOLDERS IN ADDITION TO PRIORITIZED GROUPS
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FG 3: Local organization: FOKAL Multilateral agencies: World Bank, UNICEF • Government: State Secretary to the Integration of People with Disabilities, Commission for Adapted Schooling at the Haitian Ministry of Education • Local foundations and Associations: Haitian Association for the blind, Maurice Sixto Foundation, Association for People with Disabilities, Enpak Association
HONDURAS				
SIR	I	In person	45 Total 14 Men 31 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIR I: Government: Ministry of Education. NGOs, school 'principals and teachers; unions; parents; students and representatives from the academic sector • Government: Ministry of Education, Secretariat of Social Development
KII	II	6 virtual 5 in person	11 Total 5 Men 6 Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local organizations: National Federation of Parents of Children with Disabilities, private institutions for the rights of girls, boys, adolescents, and young people, Visión Mundial (World Vision) • Higher Education: University Observatory of National and International Migrations • Multilateral agencies: International Organization for Migration

KIIs and SIR discussions for the study were audio-recorded, transcribed, and organized around each research question and interview prompt. Through a rigorous qualitative analysis, the research team identified and summarized trends and patterns, using precise quotations for clarity. While ensuring the confidentiality of participants, the report references the organizational affiliation, or the specific SIR involved without disclosing individual identities. The categories that emerged from the research questions, according to the three groups studied by country are detailed in TABLE I.

2.4. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RESEARCH QUESTIONS

School enrollment and learning outcomes.

To respond to RQ1, the team researched any available school enrollment and learning outcomes data for the following groups as per the scope of work USAID provided for this study:

- a. Children and youth with disabilities of all different types;
- b. Migrants;
- c. Children from indigenous communities;
- d. Children whose first language does not align with the official language of instruction in the classroom;
- e. Children from rural communities;
- f. Children from lower socioeconomic status;
- g. Children and youth who are L/G/B/T/Q/I+; and
- h. Children/youth in early and forced marriage and/or with early-age pregnancies.

To obtain data on these populations, the research team used UNESCO's Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC) 2019 ERCE, which evaluates student performance across Latin America, OECD's 2018 and 2022 PISA, which appraises OECD's member countries' 15-year-olds' skills application every three years, national statistics and for Haiti, Demography and Health Survey (DHS) data. Despite efforts to secure updated post-pandemic information, the data's representativeness of the entire population remains limited. For a full description of the indicators and data sources used, see Section 3's Regional Findings and RQ1 subsections for each country.

Policy development classification rubric.

To respond to RQ3, the research team conducted a comparative analysis of policies and practices in Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras. This analysis adapted the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) (2011) policy classification rubric with the goal of determining how each country's legal framework promotes or hinders inclusive education. The team followed this three-step process:

1. **Determine the policy levers and indicators.** As shown in TABLE 4, the team analyzed two policy areas or levers: the legal framework and its practical application. For the latter, the team selected 'level of coordination across sectors and stakeholders' as the indicator for effective service delivery.
2. **Research policy levers for each country's target group.** Selected country legal frameworks were categorized based on the identified target groups, highlighting how laws and regulations protect marginalized children and youth and facilitate access to quality education. Data for analysis

came from comprehensive desk reviews, and interviews with key informants from government organizations. Insights from the SIR exercises also informed the research experts in the field, and participants engaged in SIRs also had first-hand information about policy implementation. Furthermore, the study examined and assessed programs that have been successful in mitigating educational barriers faced by marginalized populations.

3. **Classify legal frameworks into four levels of development:** latent, emerging, established, and advanced. As shown in TABLE 5, latent refers to an early development stage signaling that the country has a non-existing legal framework to promote inclusive education for the specific target group. Emerging refers to a minimal legal framework, established, to a functioning legal framework with sustained financing, programs, and coordination, and advanced refers to a robust set of laws and regulations to promote inclusive education. This analysis offered insights into the varying approaches adopted by the four countries to address policy goals and levers. Section 3, “Results”, shows the levels of inclusive education policy development classification by country.

TABLE 4: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY CLASSIFICATION RUBRIC

POLICY GOAL	POLICY LEVER	SCOPE OF INDICATORS
Establishing a legal framework	Legal Framework	Extent to which laws and regulations are in place to protect marginalized children and youth and promote access to quality education
	Coordination	Coordination encompasses inter-institutional collaboration and communication across various entities to ensure efficient service provision. It involves creating mechanisms for cohesive interaction among educational institutions (both state and non-state actors) and other sectors, including health, nutrition, and social protection. This integration aims to execute programs and policies cohesively, allowing for the sharing of information, resources, and expertise among institutions to comprehensively address the needs of children, youth, and their families (World Bank, 2011).

TABLE 5: LEVELS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY GOAL	LEVELS OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT			
	Latent	Emerging	Established	Advanced
Establishing a legal framework	Legal framework non-existent, ad-hoc financing, few institutions, low sectoral and inter-institutional coordination	Minimal legal framework, few programs with sustained financing, low inter-institutional coordination, higher sectoral coordination	Many programs with sustained financing, functioning intra- and inter-institutional coordination.	Developed legal framework for inclusive education, sustained financing for attaining inclusive education goals, robust inter-institutional coordination.

School environment as determinants of quality education.

To respond to RQ5, the research team assessed the following areas with stakeholders to identify what teacher, school, and classroom environment affect marginalized learners’ access to quality, equitable, and inclusive education and why:

1. Enrollment and attendance policies/practices;
2. Language use in the classroom (for Haiti and Honduras only);
3. Teachers’ knowledge, skills, and fluency in language(s) of instruction (for Haiti and Honduras only);
4. Differentiated instruction policies/practices and other components that affect quality of teacher instruction in the classroom;
5. Education technology, including assistive technology, access, and use;
6. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), including socio-emotional learning, incorporation and use in education policy and standards, formal and non-formal curriculum, teaching and learning materials, educator training, resource/EdTech use/development, instruction and pedagogy, student assessment and expression; and
7. Teacher/peer positive and negative treatment of marginalized groups. This can include stigma/bullying/safety considerations and other barriers or enablers like mentorship that might implicitly or explicitly keep learners in or push learners from school or make it easier or difficult for them to learn.

2.5. LIMITATIONS

The research team identified limitations at the regional and country levels. At the regional level, the team identified three key limitations. First, reliance upon available data; second, utilization of existing literature, and third, diversity within the LAC context.

The first limitation has to do with **variability and representativeness in the available secondary data**. As stated in the methods section, and the regional and country findings section, available datasets and sources vary by country. Out of the four countries analyzed, only Colombia, El Salvador and Honduras participated in ERCE, making nationally representative learning outcome data unavailable for Haiti. The research team used ERCE data as the main source of learning outcomes results by marginalized group. However, the sample for the ERCE assessments is not designed to be representative of these groups (except for differences by gender and geographic area). Only Colombia has participated in the 2018 and 2022 OECD PISA, while El Salvador started in 2022, and data by the targeted groups was not consistently available even within countries. It is also important to note that the most recent DHS in Haiti, which includes data on children with disabilities, dates from 2016-2017. This further complicates obtaining current and relevant data for this group. While it is out of the scope of this study to make cross country comparisons, even attempting to determine the extent of school enrollment and attendance for the different groups with precision was difficult. In order to address this, the research team made its own tailored calculations using secondary datasets including DHS for Haiti (school enrollment for persons with disabilities, urban/rural and SES quintiles) and the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) for Colombia (migrants and ethnic minority group's school attendance).

The second limitation is the reliance on **extant literature on inclusive education** in the region, which is not extensive. To address this limitation, DevTech engaged local researchers familiar with the local context and language to search not only national datasets and peer reviewed datasets and reports, but also published and unpublished reports and documents in Spanish or French, including those gathered directly from system-level leaders in the country case contexts. Additionally, targeted KIIs, SIRs, and in the case of Haiti, FGDs complemented what was available from the desk review. Finally, similar techniques at the regional level were used to search the regional literature on these topics to supplement the country case material and provide data for the country case studies.

The third limitation is the **diversity of the LAC context**, which makes a synthetic report and themes complex. This study only captures information from four countries that are not necessarily representative of the different realities in the LAC region. Moreover, while the research team, both regional and local, made every possible attempt to have all representatives of the system in the room, the sample does not necessarily represent the broader population. The findings are unique to the specified participants and conclusions about a wider group should be made with caution. The study has been purposeful in mentioning the studied countries by name instead of making general claims about LAC when this is not possible. The research team conducted careful analysis of both the key themes and similarities from across the country cases in relation to the stakeholders' perceptions of barriers and enablers to inclusive education and regional analysis, as well as careful attention to distinctions and differences across contexts to avoid overgeneralization.

2.5.1. COUNTRY-LEVEL LIMITATIONS

In researching inclusive education across Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras, the local teams navigated logistical and technical challenges particular to each country's social, political, and security landscapes. Despite this, the teams managed to adapt and gather data on the state of inclusive education.

Colombia

- The Colombian case study was subject to comprehensive research questions, and limited time and a limited sample, affecting primary data collection and analysis. The research team responded by increasing the number of KIIs to include various stakeholders from the government, educational sectors, and civil society. It utilized virtual interviews to make the most of the time available. To address the difficulties of conducting in-depth fieldwork, particularly among priority groups such as ethnic and migrant communities, the team facilitated a substantial in-person SIR session in Medellin, ensuring the direct involvement of participants from across the nation. Nonetheless, broader geographical coverage would have further enriched the study.
- The research team, with support from the USAID Mission, prioritized three key groups during the study. However, during data collection, children with disabilities and those impacted by forced displacement were frequently highlighted as groups necessitating further attention. Consequently, the team included information on these groups in the analysis and the final report when possible.
- The SIR methodology presented potential biases due to participants' varied ages and roles, which could cause the conditioning of some of their statements, particularly in the case of the SIR on early-age pregnancy. Mitigation included careful facilitation, language use, and the formation of subgroups to ensure focused attention, particularly for children and adolescents.

El Salvador

- Due to a complicated political atmosphere, the team prioritized civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with interventions directly in communities and neighborhoods over government agencies. This strategy provided a closer look at dynamics at the community-school level as the NGOs served as gatekeepers, rather than providing official discourse about the situation at-hand.
- The study faced data collection hurdles due to challenging geography and poor transport, compounded by high levels of irregular migration. Nonetheless, the research team successfully conducted three SIR sessions, gathering valuable insights on inclusive education from diverse participants, including parents, teachers, and local organizations. These sessions, held across two separate departments, provided comparative data for inclusive education in rural and urban settings.
- Despite time constraints impacting attendance, the study team achieved a strong representation at the SIR sessions. Although government representatives were notably absent, other participants could express their opinions more freely. To address the lack of government

perspective and capture their approach to inclusion, the team reviewed official documentation and conducted virtual interviews with two Ministry of Education offices, thus ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the institutional framework for inclusion.

Haiti

- Due to political instability and unprecedented levels of insecurity, the data collection process for IELA in Haiti required a different data collection approach compared to the other countries in the sample.⁹ The social, political and security context in Haiti at the time of data collection, led to the decision to conduct the study exclusively based on virtual focus group sessions and KIs to reduce the human risks of attacks, kidnappings, and to respond to the limited capacity of movement in Port-au-Prince due to fuel shortages.¹⁰ The study’s design allowed adaptation to communication channels and informant availability, with educational data from the Ministry of Education’s Statistics Unit and displacement data from International Organization for Migration (IOM) official reports.

Honduras

- One of the main limitations the local team dealt with was the limited access to databases of institutions responsible for generating statistical information on the target groups. Furthermore, these databases – including those of the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Statistics, the National Institute of Migration, and university observatories – offered information that was incomplete, imprecise, outdated and generally not disaggregated by marginalized group. The disparities between the data reported by different institutions are another limitation. For example, the state tends to provide more conservative data, while NGOs, academia and cooperators report higher figures.
- The study depended heavily on secondary data sources and some of the data reflected in report are not representative of the universe of the groups studied.
- Some of the participants consulted in the interviews and the SIRs, especially those who recently joined their position, lacked specific and updated information about the groups consulted. This lack of information may also be associated with the imprecision and disparity of the databases that report information on the groups studied.

⁹ At the time of the data collection between May and June 2023, incidents of violence -including increased rates of kidnappings, and episodes of “Peyi Lòk”/ “Country Locked” where businesses and administrations are forced to be closed- were occurring in different areas of the country, and in particular in Port-au-Prince.

¹⁰ In Haiti SIRs were conducted virtually and with smaller groups due to social and political context. The choice was to organize them under the form of themed focus groups using the same RQ as the other countries, and Jamboards as a support for interactive works and input. In addition, the groups were organized to liberate participants’ speech. For example, government representatives were consulted separately.

III. RESULTS

3.1. REGIONAL FINDINGS

This section presents an analysis of the main findings for the study RQs at the regional level. First, it presents the context around inclusive education in LAC including high-level challenges that vulnerable, marginalized groups face. Second, this section compares available data related to access to education and learning outcomes for the four countries prioritized in this study (Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti and Honduras) and discusses the main challenges and barriers that the countries face to collect education access and learning outcomes data through their EMIS. Third, it provides a snapshot of the regulatory framework in the four countries around policies that promote inclusive education; the role of the school environment, family, and community contributions to quality education for marginalized populations; and the multilateral landscape around inclusive education. The rest of the results section focuses on the country case studies.

3.1.1. EDUCATION ACCESS IN LAC

In Latin America, school enrollment has significantly increased thanks to the implementation of literacy policies, as well as policies that guarantee access to primary education. The IELE research team analyzed overall access to the education systems in the region using indicators such as **first grade net intake rate** (NIR) and persistence to last grade of primary published by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics.¹¹ The NIR in the first grade of primary education indicates the level of access to primary education and the education system's capacity to provide access to primary education.

A high NIR indicates a high degree of access to primary education for official primary school entrance age children. As shown in FIGURE 1, with a 75.3 percent NIR rate for the LAC region in 2018, NIR increased by almost 3 percentage points between 2013 (72.4 percent) and 2018. At a rate of 75.6 percent for 2018, girls have a slightly higher NIR than boys (75 percent). When looking at the data by country, UNESCO data shows that in 2018, Colombia had a NIR of 69 percent, El Salvador had NIR of 57 percent, and Honduras has a NIR of 70 percent, all falling below the regional averages. This indicates that the three countries' level of access to primary education and the education system's capacity to provide access to primary education is below the regional averages. There is no data on Haiti. While there is no official NIR data for the region post COVID-19, reports from UNDP (2022) indicate that, in late 2021, the attendance rate among school-age children in LAC was 92.2 percent, representing a clear improvement compared to the regional attendance levels recorded in mid-2021 (84.4 percent), but still 4.4 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels. Historic attendance data for selected countries shows the following:

- For Colombia, data from the Ministry of National Education (MEN) shows that absenteeism for learners between 6 and 10 years old slightly increased from 3.6 percent in 2019 to 4.6 percent in 2020 to 5.7 percent in 2021. For learners between 11 and 14 years old it decreased from 5.2

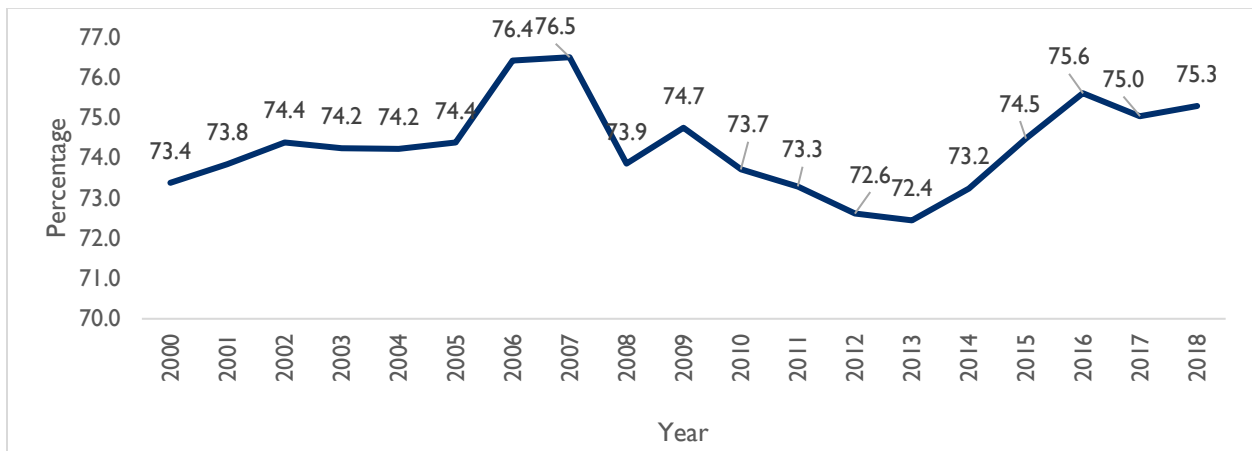
¹¹ According to UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, first grade net intake rate is defined as the new entrants to the first grade of primary education who are of the official primary school entrance age, expressed as a percentage of the population of that age.

percent in 2019 to 4.4 percent in 2020 and then increased to 5.5 percent in 2021. Overall, there was an increase in absenteeism between 2019 and 2021 for learners between 6 and 10 years old, but the change is relatively small. There is virtually no change for the same period for learners between 11 and 14 years old.

- For El Salvador, data from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT) shows that absenteeism for learners between 7 and 15 years old went from 6 percent in 2019 to 6.8 percent in 2020 to 7.1 percent in 2021. Absenteeism during this period is comparable to that of 2013-2017 period.

These examples demonstrate that, even though the pandemic may have affected access indicators, governments found ways to mitigate national-level impacts on access statistics, at least as measured by attendance rates. Data available by marginalized group is available in sections 3.2 to 3.5 of this report.

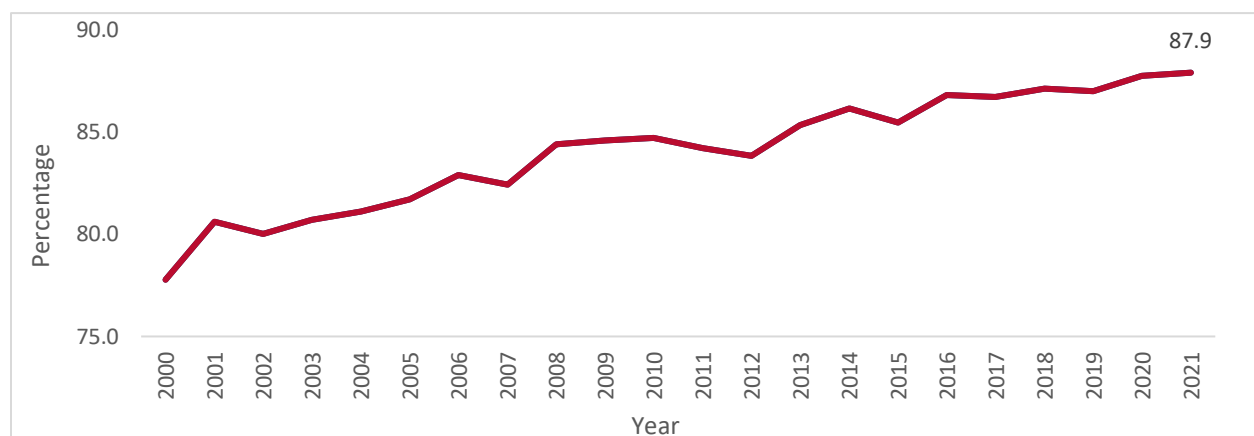
FIGURE 1: LAC, FIRST GRADE NET INTAKE RATE, 2000 – 2018



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics.

Furthermore, school enrollment in the region and perseverance in school until the last grade of the primary level have also been increasing over the last decades, as shown in FIGURE 2.

FIGURE 2: LAC: PERSISTENCE TO LAST GRADE OF PRIMARY, 2000-2021



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics.

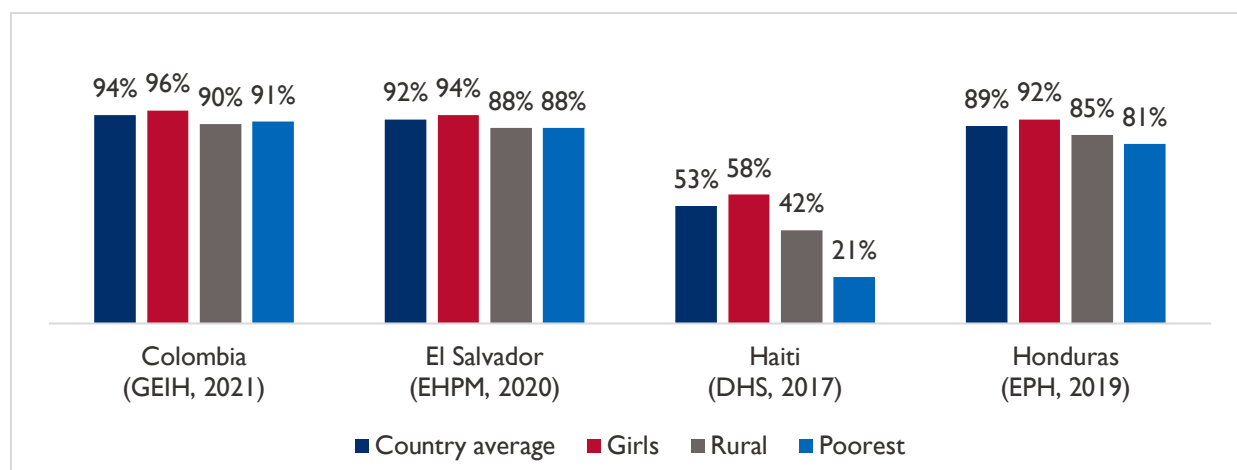
Persistence to the last grade of primary is the percentage of children enrolled in the first grade of primary school who eventually reach the last grade of primary education. The cohort survival rate measures an education system’s holding power and internal efficiency. Rates approaching 100 percent indicate high retention and low dropout levels. Overall, the LAC region averaged 87.9 percent for the year 2021, with basically no change compared to pre-COVID-19, with 2020 averaging a rate of 87.7 percent. At 86 percent, boys have on average a slightly lower persistence rate than girls (89 percent). When looking at the results by prioritized countries, Colombia had a 97 percent rate in 2020, El Salvador had an 85 percent rate in 2020, Honduras had an 89 percent rate in 2021 and no data was available for Haiti. Although no data is available after COVID-19 for Colombia and El Salvador, according to the World Bank, they did experience small increases of 1 to 3 percentage points from 2019 to 2020. Honduras, on the other hand, experienced a decline from 77 percent in 2019 to 73 percent in 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic), but had a high 16 percentage point increase to 89 percent in 2021.

3.1.2. DATA ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION BY TARGET GROUP

Data about the quality and performance of the education system for the target groups, such as net enrollment rates, percent of learners that complete their primary education, or percent of out-of-school children, are not openly available on websites run by each Ministry of Education. The research team calculated or found data already calculated from other sources that used country-level household surveys. The team also looked for any enrollment data available per country by relevant groups using data available from different sources.

Primary completion rate. FIGURE 3 summarizes data for the four prioritized countries. UNESCO calculates the primary completion rate as the percentage of (1) children and young people aged three to five years above primary school graduation age and (2) young people aged 15-24 years, who have completed primary school.

FIGURE 3: FOUR COUNTRIES, PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, 2017-2021



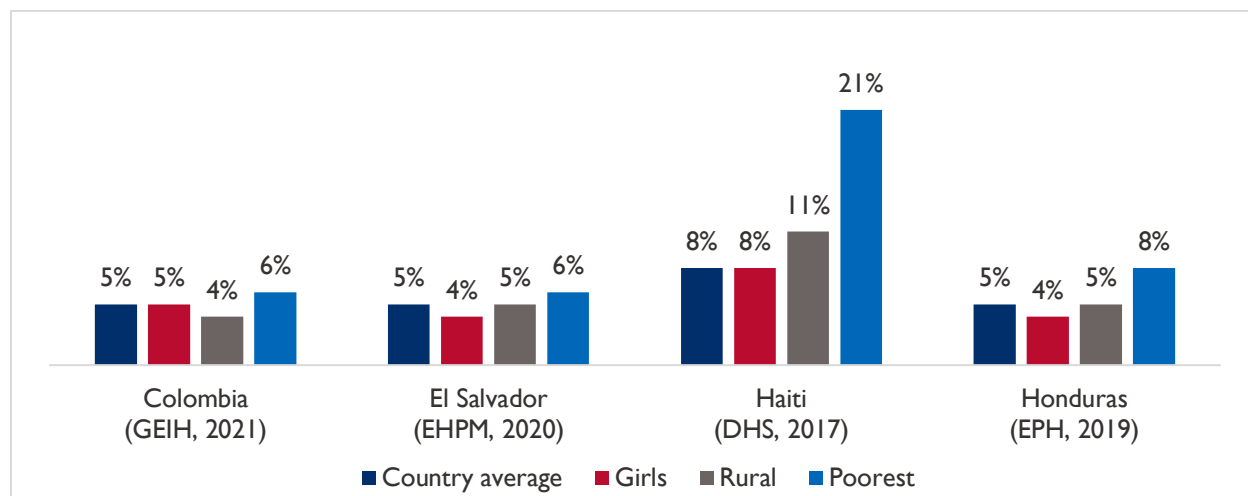
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Education Inequalities Dashboard (<https://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators>). Calculations from UNESCO using survey data for each country.

Note: GEIH – Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares; DHS – Demography and Health Survey; EHPM: Encuesta de Hogares de Proósitos Múltiples, EPH: Encuesta Permanente de Hogares.

UNESCO calculates the data with information from household surveys. Among vulnerable groups, girls are more likely to complete their primary education than boys. In all countries except for Colombia, children and youth from the poorest socioeconomic backgrounds present lower completion rates. Richer countries, as measured by their [gross domestic product \(GDP\) per capita](#), have better primary completion rates. Haiti, being the poorest of the four countries, has notoriously lower completion rates.

Out-of-school children. UNESCO calculates the indicator “Out-of-School Children” as the percentage of children of primary school age who are not in school. FIGURE 4 summarizes the results for targeted countries. Data available includes results by gender, socioeconomic status and geographic area (urban/rural). Girls and boys have similar results in most countries. In all countries, children from the poorest socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be out-of-school than those from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds. This is more prominent in Haiti with 21 percent of children from the poorest SES categories out of school.

FIGURE 4: FOUR COUNTRIES, PERCENT OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN, 2017-2021



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Education Inequalities Dashboard (<https://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators>). Calculations from UNESCO using survey data for each country.

Enrollment. TABLE 6 summarizes information from several data sources on school enrollment by country and marginalized groups. Overall, this report did not capture information on early-age pregnancies or LGBTQI+ populations in any country. For countries with time series information on **gross enrollment**, the research team found that the number of learners enrolled decreased between 2019 and 2022. The research team cannot confirm if this is the case for Haiti, as they did not find accurate enrollment information. However, the participation of vulnerable groups in the education systems, measured as the percent of learners from a particular vulnerable group (such as girls, learners from rural areas, learners with disabilities) remained consistent for the same period when compared to the total number of learners enrolled. The percent of learners with disabilities in the education system varies by country, with 1.95 percent in the case of Colombia, 0.97 percent in El Salvador, 1.65 percent in Honduras, and 0.35 percent in Haiti. This number only accounts for those enrolled in the education system and does not consider children and youth outside the education system.

TABLE 6: ACCESS INDICATORS BY COUNTRY AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

COUNTRY	EARLY PREGNANCY / LGBTQI+	ETHNIC MINORITIES	MIGRANTS	DISPLACED	DISABILITIES	URBAN/RURAL	SES QUINTILES	OUT OF SCHOOL	
Colombia	Indicator	N/A	Number of learners enrolled in primary and secondary education (Sistema Integrado de Matriculas [SIMAT], 2021)	Percent of Venezuelan migrants (7 to 12 years old) attending school (GEIH, 2023)	Number of displaced learners enrolled in primary and secondary education (DANE, 2022)	Number of learners enrolled in primary and secondary education (SIMAT, 2021)	Percent of learners enrolled by geographic area (DANE, 2022)	Proportion of children (7 to 12 years old) attending school – 1 st and 5 th Quintile (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe(CEPAL), 2021)	Percent of out-of-school children (GEIH, 2021)
	Value	N/A	965,225	Female: 94.7% Male: 90.3%	Total: 518,536 Female: 256,301 Male: 262,235	194,962	Urban: 75.9% Rural: 24.1%	1 st Quintile: 94.3% 5 th Quintile: 97.6%	General: 5% Girls: 5% Rural: 4% Poorest: 6%
El Salvador	Indicator	N/A	Number of learners enrolled in primary education (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2022) – In thousands	Number of learners enrolled in primary education (MOE, 2022) – In thousands	N/A	Number of learners enrolled in primary education (MOE, 2022) – In thousands	Percent of learners enrolled in primary education by geographic area (MOE, 2022)	Proportion of children (7 to 12 years old) attending school – 1 st and 5 th Quintile (EHPM estimate, 2022)	Percent of out-of-school children (EHPM, 2020)
	Value	N/A	51.06 thousand	2.86 thousand	N/A	6.71 thousand	Urban: 48.36% Rural: 51.64%	1 st Quintile: 96.3% 5 th Quintile: 99.3%	General: 5% Girls: 4% Rural: 5% Poorest: 6%
Haiti	Indicator	N/A	N/A	N/A	Number of displaced learners (MOE, 2023) – 25 schools from Port-au-Prince only	Number of learners enrolled in primary and secondary education (MOE, 2022) – In thousands	Enrollment rate in primary (6 to 11 years old) (DHS, 2017)	Enrollment rate in primary (6 to 11 years old) (DHS, 2017)	Percent of Out-of-School children (DHS, 2017)

COUNTRY	EARLY PREGNANCY / LGBTQI+	ETHNIC MINORITIES	MIGRANTS	DISPLACED	DISABILITIES	URBAN/RURAL	SES QUINTILES	OUT OF SCHOOL
	Value	N/A	N/A	3,889 children and adolescents (49.6% are girls; 82% are attending school, while 9% are out of school). 170,000 estimated country-wide	Both: 74.83% Female: 76.63% Male: 73.06%	Urban: 87.59% Rural: 74.05%	1 st Quintile: 61.13% 5 th Quintile: 91.22%	General: 8% Girls: 8% Rural: 11% Poorest: 21%
Honduras	Indicator	N/A	N/A	N/A	Number of children and youth with disabilities of all types between 1 st and 10 th grade (SACE, 2022)	Percent of learners enrolled by geographic area (MOE, 202) – general	Proportion of children (7 to 12 years old) attending school – 1 st and 5 th Quintile (CEPAL, 2019)	Percent of out-of-school children (EPH, 2019)
	Value	N/A	N/A	N/A	Total: 30,309 Female: 13,351 Male: 16,958	Urban: 50.9% Rural: 49.1%	1 st Quintile: 89.4% 5 th Quintile: 95.6%	General: 5% Girls: 5% Rural: 5% Poorest: 8%

Attendance. The research team also consolidated data on school attendance from different sources. Annex A summarizes some of the main findings regarding school attendance data (the proportion of children attending school) by country and by marginalized groups. The research team accessed recent micro-data that allowed them to report on several disaggregates. For Colombia, data includes migrants, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, children and youth with disabilities, among others. For El Salvador and Honduras, data includes socioeconomic status and geographic area. For Haiti, data includes disaggregates by geographic area. The differences in data presented by country are due to the differences in data sources, which include own calculations, or calculations from CEPAL. As noted in Annex A, the research team identified the following findings at the regional level:

- Consistent with data presented above, children from rural communities show lower attendance rates than those from urban communities for all countries.

- Children from the lowest SES households (first quintile) also show lower attendance rates than those from higher quintiles. Gaps between both quintiles range from around three percent in Colombia and El Salvador to six percent in Honduras.
- In the case of Colombia, learners with disabilities have a notoriously low attendance rate when compared to learners without disabilities. Those with disabilities attended school 70.71 percent of the time, and those without disabilities attended 97.66 percent of the time.

3.1.3. REGIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Standardized learning outcome data presented in this study draws from ERCE and PISA (for Colombia only). The research team did not find quantifiable learning outcomes data for Haiti.

The attendance of children and young people in the education system does not guarantee learning outcomes, as many complete primary school without having achieved basic reading and writing skills, particularly those from more marginalized groups. Results from the ERCE study conducted in 2019 in third and sixth grade in the areas of mathematics, reading, and science in the countries of this study show that, overall, more marginalized groups achieve lower education outcomes on most tests. For sixth grade reading, the research team found the following using UNESCO ERCE 2019 data:

- In **Colombia**, children from the poorest quintile performed 15.4 percent below average; children from rural communities performed 6.6 percent below average; children from ethnic minorities and indigenous populations performed 9.8 percent below average; migrants performed 3.6 percent below average; and children whose language of instruction differs from their mother tongue performed 9.5 percent below average.
- In **El Salvador**, children from the poorest quintile performed 15.2 percent below average; children from rural communities performed 7.7 percent below average; children from ethnic minorities and indigenous populations performed 6.4 percent below average; migrants performed 4.7 percent below; and children whose language of instruction differs from their mother tongue performed 4.7 percent below.
- In **Honduras**, children from the poorest quintile performed 11.5 percent below average; children from rural communities performed 5.1 percent below average; children from ethnic minorities and indigenous populations performed 5.5 percent below average; migrants performed 3.9 percent below average; and children whose language of instruction differs from their mother tongue performed 7.3 percent below average.

These differences are higher when comparing marginalized children with their non-marginalized counterparts instead of looking at country averages. Girls tend to outperform boys in literacy skills, while boys outperform girls in numeracy skills. However, the degree to which these differences are statistically significant varies by country and level (third or sixth grade). In the case of Haiti, descriptive findings from 2022 sixth grade national assessments show similar trends for selected marginalized groups. For example, students across the board perform better in their mother tongue language; girls tend to outperform boys in language subjects; students in bilingual households score better across all subjects; and, while performance varies significantly by department, rural areas lag behind urban areas.

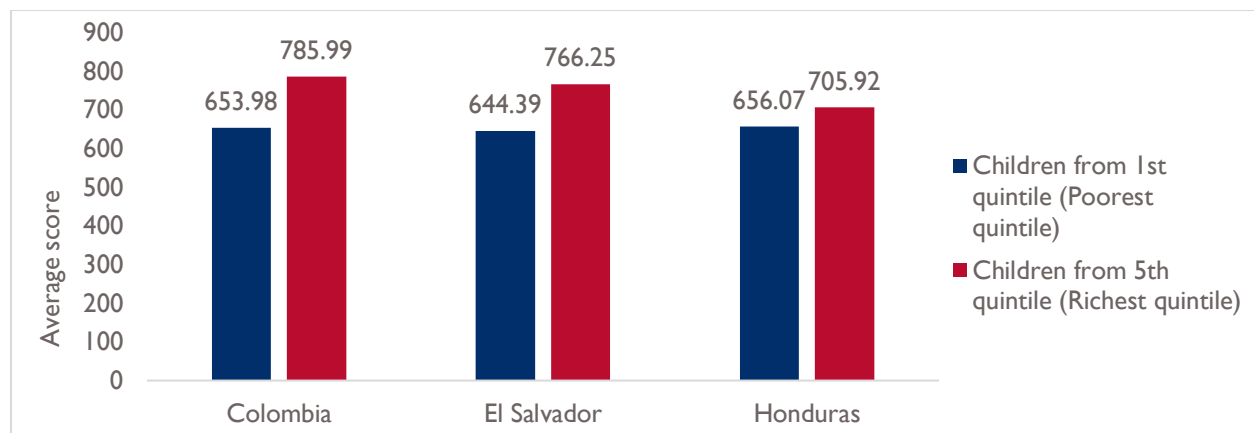
Except for Colombia, there is limited data on standardized **learning outcomes post-COVID**. Average PISA 2022 results for Colombia were about the same as in 2018 in mathematics, reading, and science. The OECD PISA 2022 country summary for Colombia shows that there are no statistically significant changes between 2018 and 2022, as results in PISA have been remarkably stable over a long period of time, with only small and mostly non-significant fluctuations since 2009.

The following section provides information for Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras for third grade in reading, plus third grade results for ethnic minorities, migrants and learners whose first language is different than the language of instruction. Annexes B5, C1, and D1 include additional information for third and sixth grade by country, and add results in mathematics, which demonstrate similar trends to those for reading.

THIRD GRADE READING ERCE RESULTS BY ECONOMIC STATUS

As shown in FIGURE 5, learners from lower SES households achieve lower reading scores than those from higher SES households across the three sampled countries with available data. At 132 points, Colombia has the greatest differences between the poorest quintile and the richest quintile (equivalent to a 20 percent difference between quintiles). El Salvador has a 121-point difference (equivalent to 18 percent), and Honduras has a difference of 97 points (equivalent to 7 percent).

FIGURE 5: COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS. THIRD GRADE STUDENTS ERCE AVERAGE SCORES IN READING BY QUINTILE, 2019



Source: DevTech calculations from microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

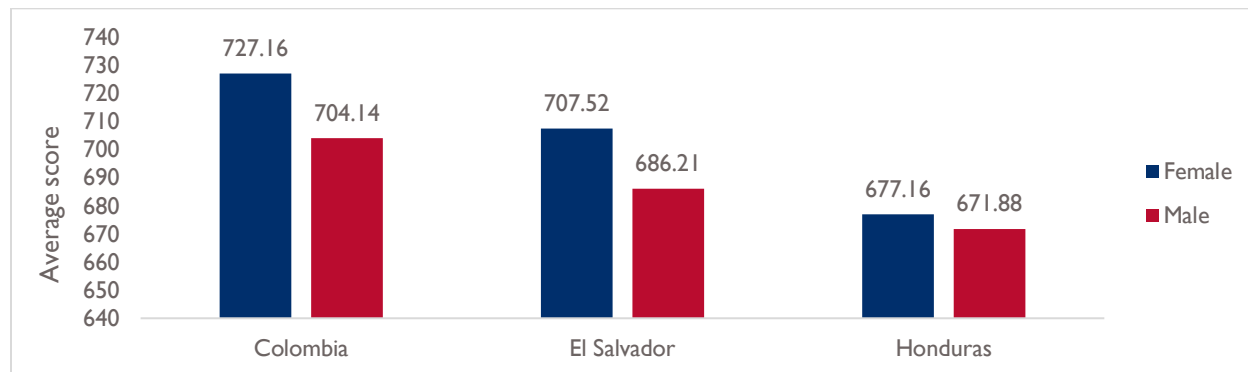
As noted by the OECD (2018), long-standing research finds that the most reliable predictor of a child’s future success at school – and, in many cases, of access to well-paid and high-status occupations – is his or her family. Children from low-income and low-educated families usually face many barriers to learning. Less household wealth often translates into fewer educational resources, such as books, games, and interactive learning materials in the home. Parents of higher SES are more likely to provide their children with financial support and home resources for individual learning. As they are likely to have higher levels of education, they are also more likely to provide a more stimulating home environment to promote cognitive development. Advantaged parents may also provide greater psychological support for their child in environments that encourage the development of the skills necessary for success at school.

THIRD GRADE READING ERCE RESULTS BY GENDER

As shown in FIGURE 6, when looking at gender differences, **girls consistently outperform boys across the three countries with available data.** By third and sixth grade, girls usually show stronger reading performance than boys. In LAC, according to the LAC EduTrends Report (USAID, 2022), 13 countries out of 16 showed significant gender differences favoring girls on the Grade 3 ERCE

reading test. As noted in the figure, Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras are among the countries where there are significant differences in performance. Furthermore, gender differences in reading performance are also evident among older students. In most ERCE 2019 participating LAC countries, gender differences in favor of girls in reading are statistically significant in sixth grade.

FIGURE 6: COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS. THIRD GRADE STUDENTS ERCE AVERAGE SCORES IN READING BY GENDER, 2019



Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

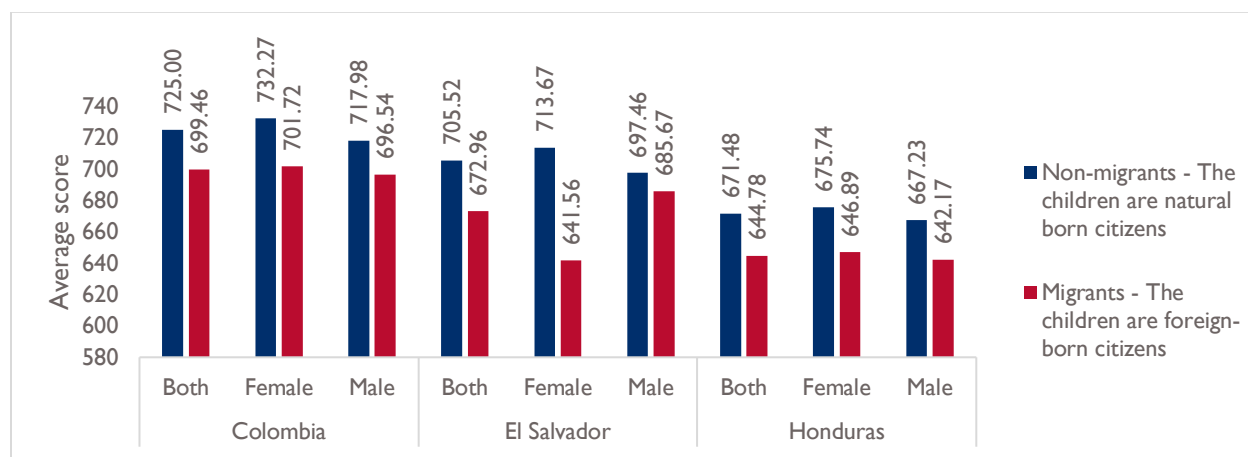
SIXTH GRADE READING ERCE RESULTS BY OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Other reading outcome results for marginalized populations are shown in FIGURES 7 to 9, including migration status, ethnic minorities, and learning in a language of instruction that differs from the learner’s first language.

For example, FIGURE 7 shows sixth grade learners’ reading outcomes for migrants from Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras. For this particular case, UNESCO ERCE considers any learners that are foreign-born citizens as a proxy for migrants. Overall, **ERCE reading scores show that migrants have consistently lower scores than non-migrants.** For example, in Colombia non-migrants have a 3.6 percent higher score than migrants, a 4.8 percent higher score in El Salvador, and a 4.1 percent higher score in Honduras. This gap is slightly higher for girls than for boys (i.e., non-migrant boys and migrant boys tend to perform more similarly).¹²

¹² The sample from UNESCO is not designed to be representative of migrant populations. Thus, results cannot be generalizable. Furthermore, UNESCO includes data for migrant learners that are at school, not for those outside the education system. Out-of-school migrants face greater challenges, and are more likely to perform lower given that they are out of school.

FIGURE 7: COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS. SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS ERCE AVERAGE SCORES IN READING BY MIGRATORY STATUS, 2019



Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

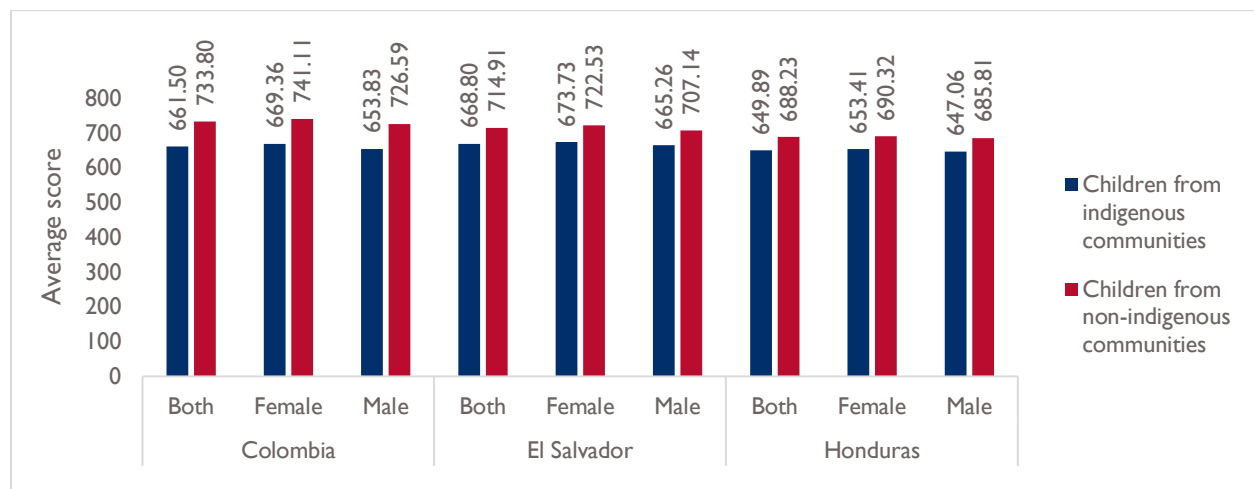
As summarized by Finch H, Hernández Finch M. and Avery B (2021), there have been a number of studies examining the academic performance of children from immigrant families, particularly in comparison with their native-born peers. Generally speaking, immigrant students have lower mean reading, math, and science achievement test scores across the 34 OECD nations. This achievement gap has been identified consistently across several nations that have quite different immigrant populations. Between the potential factors identified by researchers that were associated with the achievement test score gap for immigrant students, researchers have found that individual/family level variables were associated with lower achievement test performance for immigrant students, including lower income. Likewise, cultural barriers along with lower parental education attainment were associated with lower relative educational test performance on the part of immigrants vis-à-vis native-born students.

According to data for all countries participating in the 2019 ERCE, almost 50 percent of migrant families are in the lowest two socioeconomic level quintiles, compared to the homogeneous distribution of non-migrant families. For this reason, migrant status accompanied by high levels of vulnerability are variables that, together, could account for the low academic results of students. The results of the ERCE 2019 also show that the educational level of the parents, especially the mother, influence the academic performance of the students, so that this increases at the same time as the degree of education completed by the parents. In fact, the academic performance of migrant children increases by 129 points when the mother has a master’s or doctoral degree, compared to when the mother has only completed basic education. Additionally, parents’ expectations about the level of education their children will achieve also have a major impact on school performance, as high expectations can be translated into practices that support and motivate the student. ERCE compared the learning outcomes of students based on this variable, showing that parents from higher income groups have higher expectations: while, on average, 53.9 percent of parents believe that their child will achieve higher education, only 34.6 percent of migrant parents have this expectation.

As recognized by UNESCO (2021), although migrant status is associated with lower academic performance, this factor is no more decisive than the socioeconomic level and educational level of the parents, since it more clearly explains the circumstances in which learning takes place. This point is especially important since it indicates that it is not the mobility situation itself that determines lower results, but rather its permanent connection with structural elements such as exclusion and unequal educational opportunities, and therefore it is on these structural issues that public policy should focus.

Additionally, **ERCE results for learners from indigenous communities show that children from indigenous communities perform consistently lower than children from non-indigenous communities**, as shown in FIGURE 8. The average ERCE reading score for sixth grade learners was 11 percent, 7 percent and 6 percent higher for children from non-indigenous communities compared to those from indigenous communities in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras, accordingly.

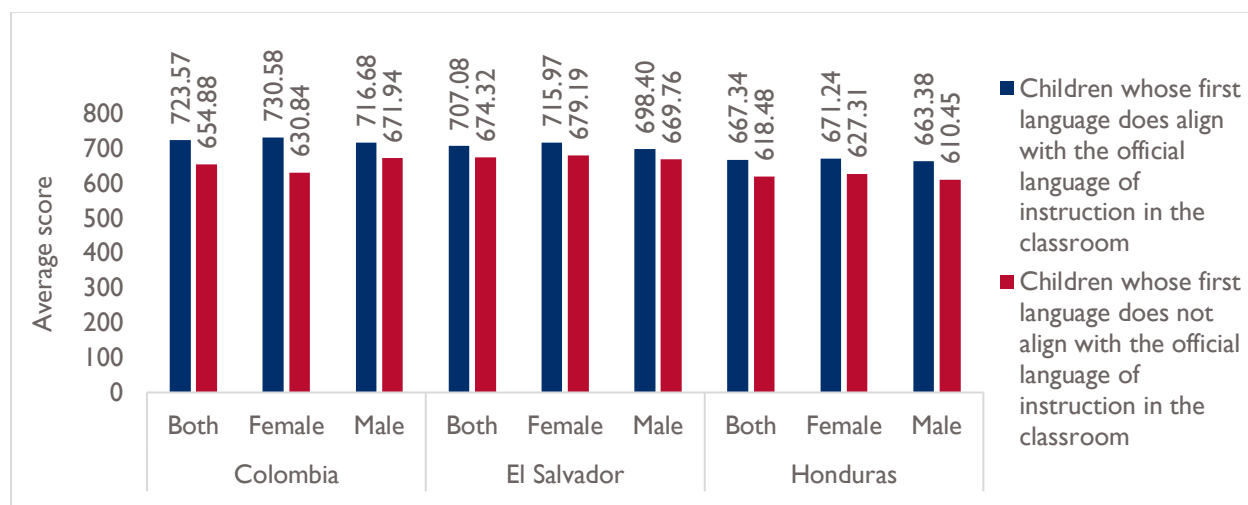
FIGURE 8: COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS. SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS ERCE AVERAGE SCORES IN READING – INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, 2019



Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

The IELE also looks at results for children whose first language does not align with the official language of instruction in the classroom. As reported by UNESCO (2022), research shows that education in a child’s first language is a key factor for inclusion and quality learning, and it also improves learning outcomes and academic performance. Learning in a language that learners use and understand is crucial, especially in primary school, to avoid knowledge gaps and increase the speed of learning and comprehension. And, most importantly, multilingual education based on learners’ first language empowers all learners to fully take part in society. It fosters mutual understanding and respect for one another and helps preserve the wealth of cultural and traditional heritage that is embedded in every language around the world.

FIGURE 9: COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS. SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS ERCE AVERAGE SCORES IN READING – LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION, 2019



Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

As shown in FIGURE 9, **children whose first language does not align with the official language on instruction in the classroom perform consistently lower in reading according to ERCE reading scores. The average ERCE reading score for sixth grade learners was 10 percent, 5 percent and 8 percent higher for children learning in their first language compared to those not learning in their first language in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras, accordingly.**

3.1.4. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Information systems in education are key tools for decision-making. With them, governments, educational institutions, and specialists obtain valuable information on the status and quality of education, who participates, and who is left out. Therefore, the information they generate must be up to date, reliable, and accurate.

EMISs from the countries in this study collect and report national data on school enrollment, retention rates, approval or pass rates, learners and teachers characteristics, among other educational data. However, all systems face significant challenges with regard to providing information for specific groups. As shown in FIGURE 10, education system level performance data (school enrollment rates, attendance rates) disaggregated for the target groups are partially available in the different countries, but it lags at least two years. Most education system performance information found by the research team was not sourced from EMIS platforms. To report performance indicators, countries depend on household survey data. These are typically conducted every two to three years, and have different levels of representativeness. Comparability across countries is limited due to differences in data sources and methods of calculations.

The results in this report show that all countries, except for Haiti, have education data from 2018 onwards related to enrollment by sex, urban/rural, SES quintiles, and learners with disabilities.

Enrollment data by race/ethnicity and migratory status is only collected in Colombia and El Salvador. Countries in this study are not reporting school enrollment data for girls with early-age pregnancies.

FIGURE 10: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT/ATTENDANCE RATES (2021 – 2022, HAITI 2017), DATA AVAILABLE BY COUNTRY

	Early Pregnancy	Ethnic M.	Migrants	Displaced	Disabilities	Urban/Rural	SES Quintiles	Out of school
Colombia	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
El Salvador	Red	Blue	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Haiti	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Honduras	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Legend	Red	No data		Blue	Data available			

Source: Authors’ calculations based on EMIS, national statistics DANE, SACE, MOE, and UNESCO, CEPAL and OECD datasets. DHS 2016-2017 for Haiti.

In the four countries studied, **management information systems—including those for education, health, and migration—function independently, without the ability to share or cross-reference data.** Such compartmentalization not only hinders a unified analysis of the variables impacting educational outcomes but reinforces exclusion of the most marginalized as the limited data available about these populations might be registered in other sector’s information systems. In Colombia, the state records data about migrant children, yet this data is not triangulated with EMIS data. In El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti, data from the health sector about children with disabilities is not cross-referenced with data from the education system. Likewise, data that NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) collect are also not integrated in the education system.

Rigid EMIS frameworks do not account for learners’ data from non-linear educational trajectories: In the four countries, EMIS are tailored for students with uninterrupted educational paths within a single institution. They do not have the flexibility to account for migration, displacement, or interrupted schooling – common in these contexts – leaving mobile student populations untracked in the system. Data within the education systems also lacks integration. Haiti’s EMIS is not yet aligned with departmental education directorates, lacking modules for gender, disability inclusion, and tracking of out-of-school children.

Data about certain marginalized groups is missing in the system. While early warning systems to detect learners at risk of dropping out are in place in some countries (Honduras), and legislation to encourage families to keep children in school in others (El Salvador), none of the countries collect data

on out-of-school children. Cultural norms influence the type of data EMIS collects. In El Salvador, data about the education status of LGBTQI+ community is not collected. The pushback on “gender ideology” or reference to gender hinders even further any attempts to identify and monitor education trends about this marginalized group.

The EMIS data, though collected, often remains inaccessible to the public, local institutions, and schools, with its use predominantly confined to the ministry level. When data is available in statistical reports the data is not widely disseminated, which becomes a barrier to informed decision-making. To obtain data for this study, the research team encountered difficulties accessing the online EMIS for Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras. In Colombia, the Sistema Integrado de Matrículas (SIMAT) database (school enrollment database) is not publicly accessible, and Ministry of National Education (MEN) takes a prolonged timeframe in disseminating the information it collects.

According to respondents in this study, the **main barriers to collecting this data is limited access to technology infrastructure** (electricity, tablets, and internet), particularly in rural areas, which limits the capacity of teachers and school administrators to keep data up to date. Informants also reported staffing constraints. In EL Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras, informants reported **high staff turnover** and, across all countries, they reported the **need to provide more training to school administrator staff and teachers** in order to improve data collection and monitoring. In Colombia, some informants indicated the “people in charge of the process do not understand the importance of doing it with the expected rigor and precision.” As teachers do not see the value added of submitting the data, they become less proactive in following the Ministry of Education’s instructions.





The instruments used for data collection are not adapted to the cultural context, thus providing inaccurate information to measure academic and socio-emotional learning progress. In Colombia, Honduras, and Haiti, informants reported that tests administered to ethnic minorities are either not available in their mother tongue languages or are not aligned with the educational pedagogy and vision of these groups. In Colombia, the government has started a process of collaborating with indigenous populations to address this need.

3.1.5. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Legal frameworks mandating equitable access and inclusion to quality education for all exist in the four countries at varying levels. TABLE 7 shows a summary of the legal frameworks for inclusive education by target population. Colombia has an advanced legal framework covering all marginalized groups selected for this study. Coordination mechanisms to put policies into practice are mostly emerging. El Salvador has an established legal framework for the protection of girls and an emergent legal framework for learners with disabilities and migrants. Interinstitutional coordination in El Salvador is mostly emerging. Haiti’s legal framework and interinstitutional coordination is emerging for children with disabilities and those in the lowest quintile, and latent for migrants. Interinstitutional coordination in Haiti is mostly emerging. Finally, Honduras has an established legal framework for learners living in poverty and emerging for those with disabilities and for migrants. Interinstitutional coordination in Honduras is emerging.

TABLE 7: SUMMARY OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BY TARGET POPULATION

Colombia	Early Pregnancies	Ethnic Minorities	Migrants
Legal Framework	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced
Interinstitutional Coordination	Established	Emergent	Emergent
El Salvador	Girls	Disabilities	Migrants
Legal Framework	Advanced	Emergent	Emergent
Interinstitutional Coordination	Emergent	Emergent	Latent
Haiti	Living in Poverty	Disabilities	Migrants
Legal Framework	Emergent	Emergent	Latent
Interinstitutional Coordination	Emergent	Emergent	Latent
Honduras	Living in Poverty	Disabilities	Migrants
Legal Framework	Established	Emergent	Emergent
Interinstitutional Coordination	Emergent	Emergent	Emergent

Latent  Emergent  Established  Advanced 

Source: Authors' elaboration adapting World Bank SABER framework.

Key barriers for putting policies into practice include:

Limited coordination. Even when legislation is in place, low levels of coordination across sectors and at the different levels from central government to local service delivery hinder putting policies into practice. In Honduras, laws for the protection of migrants exist, yet in practice, programs have minimal mechanisms for coordination with non-state stakeholders to enforce them.

Limited reach and sustainability. Despite having comprehensive policies to support access to education, such as Haiti's school feeding policy, which provides meals to around 800,000 students annually, not all students are reached, and the programs are heavily reliant on external funding. Another example includes national guidelines to implement laws protecting people with disabilities. In Haiti, adaptation processes for people with visual and hearing disabilities involved the preparation of national exams, which incorporated specialized technicians and devices such as braille machines. However, these adapted exams are limited to children in Port au Prince and exclude children from rural areas.

Complex and lengthy bureaucratic processes. This is the case of policies protecting migrants in Colombia. While mechanisms such as the temporary protective statute for Venezuelan migrants and temporary protection permits exist to grant migrants access to education, the process to apply and receive these permits is lengthy and complex making it an unviable option for some families. Moreover, the government requires learners to regularize their immigration status by eleventh grade to receive a high school diploma.

Lack of national curriculum and teacher’s professional development in inclusive education.

While the regulatory framework to recognize indigenous populations’ education practices and the development of their own indigenous education system exists in Colombia, these laws are not adequately put into practice. There is an absence of teacher colleges specializing in ethno-education. While coordination with ethnic minorities is emerging, a formal national curriculum for teacher instruction is pending. The same situation applies to teacher training for learners with disabilities, or programs to sensitize teachers to work with migrant learners or girls with early-age pregnancies.

Stigma and rejection. Even when a policy framework is established, stigma and rejection from the schools, teachers, and other students, or families’ fear of stigma and rejection, prevent students from marginalized backgrounds from attending school. In Colombia, the law established a national system of schools that guarantee pregnant girls’ participation in school, yet stigma and rejection discourages and prevents them from attending.

Lack of consensus on legal definitions. In Honduras, the Law on Equity and Comprehensive Development for Persons with Disabilities has been in place since 2005, yet there is a lack of standardized definition and criteria to certify disability, therefore discouraging schools to accommodate learners with disabilities and learners from attending school. Likewise, in Haiti, while the regulatory framework mandates school admission for all learners (including learners with disabilities), school staff considers the legislative framework too general and that there is a need for additional decrees for school principals to accept learners with disabilities.

3.1.6. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF EDUCATION QUALITY

Schools and classrooms. Across all countries, informants identified several school and classroom level barriers that prevent marginalized groups from receiving quality education. Among these are: lack of nearby upper primary and secondary schools; school fees; lack of basic school infrastructure (drinking water, electricity, internet); lack of adequate didactic materials (particularly for ethnic minorities, migrants and IDPs, and learners with disabilities); absence of assistive technologies;¹³ lack of knowledge of sign language; instruction in language different than mother tongue; lack of content relevance; lack of accommodations such as onsite childcare facilities, ramps, universal design for learning; and lack of teacher training and preparedness to address inclusive education issues, social stigma and the compounding factors associated with living poverty. Informants reported that school meal programs, free tuition, cash transfer programs, and flexible education programs increase school access and retention for the most marginalized. Colombia has created 32 flexible educational models that assume teaching-learning processes within formal education, with school and semi-school alternatives, including Walking in Secondary School, Escuela Nueva, Learning Acceleration, and UNICEF’s Learning Circles.

Teachers. Stakeholders across all countries also identify challenges at the teacher level. In Haiti and Honduras, informants reported an **explicit insufficient teacher supply**, particularly in rural areas and

¹³ This includes assistive devices, which refer to input technology such as adapted keyboards and computer input controls, speech input, dictation software and output technology, such as screen readers and magnifiers, three-dimensional printers, Braille note-takers.

schools catering to learners from lower SES categories. In Honduras, 49.1 percent of students in the public system are from rural areas (SACE, 2020), and regions with the highest poverty levels often have significant indigenous or Afro-descendant populations. In Haiti, schools are affected in many areas by teachers having left, being internally displaced, or being unable to reach the area.

Another prevailing issue across all countries is the **lack of teacher preparation**. As previously discussed, countries in this study are missing a national comprehensive teacher training curriculum for inclusive education. Teachers lack the awareness and understanding of the varied types of disabilities, the psychological needs of migrant children, and pedagogical cultural practices to instruct ethnic minorities. They also lack awareness of how these categories can impact learning; knowledge of assistive technologies and their integration into the learning process; and skills to adapt teaching methods and materials for the diverse needs.

Additionally, classroom teachers are often overwhelmed, highlighting the **necessity for support from staff trained specifically for these challenges**. This absence of support staff burdens teachers, who are expected to address all aspects of student needs and inclusion, often without adequate training or resources. Consequently, the responsibility for managing all facets of inclusion falls disproportionately upon teachers and sometimes the school director, who often takes on teaching duties.

3.1.7. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS

Families. Respondents across all countries mentioned positive and negative family and community practices and beliefs to be associated with children’s access to quality education. As positive contributors to marginalized children’s education, SIR participants in Colombia mention the key role families play in the transmission of values setting “a good example”, promoting good habits in children, including the use of technology, adequate food at home, among others (SIR 2), as well as ensuring emotional help and support, and facilitating home study (SIR 4). In Honduras and El Salvador, respondents agreed that community organizations providing afterschool programs or services tailored for children with disabilities and for adolescents with early age pregnancies have played a key role in keeping children in school and providing them with learning opportunities.

Respondents across all countries believe a key barrier to education is **household poverty, with a greater impact on rural areas, ethnic groups, migrant families, and families with pregnant adolescent girls**. Households without resources could make the decision not to send their children to school (Colombia MEN, 2022a, p. 25). The lack of resources implies difficulties in paying for transportation, uniforms, materials, school supplies, and books, but it can also be an incentive for child labor due to the need to generate income for the home. It can also cause girls to drop out of education due to the need to cover unpaid care at home. An informant in Colombia pointed out that “children are not allowed in schools without full uniform or in flip flops or shorts. So, the children are sent back, which is further triggering to avoid sending them to school.” In El Salvador, respondents report that boys drop out of school quite frequently because they are more motivated by migration, either by family reunification or as an alternative to meet the basic needs of their family. Other informants stressed that, early unions are sometimes used as a way to mitigate the economic needs of the family, especially if the family has daughters.

Fear of discrimination against students with disabilities and pregnant girls is another key barrier to education that respondents identified in all four countries. In Haiti, informants elaborated on this fear also coming from school violence and bullying against children with disabilities.

Cultural beliefs and practices. Patriarchal attitudes deeply ingrained within family structures present significant obstacles to girls' education, especially in rural areas. In El Salvador, SIR stakeholders reported "The prevailing machismo mindset dictates that girls prioritize household responsibilities over academic pursuits. This cultural expectation is firmly rooted in the belief that domestic roles and caregiving within the home take precedence over a girl's schooling."

Communities. Across all countries, violence through gangs and/or armed conflict, and insecurity stands out as a primary community-level obstacle affecting both the attendance of marginalized children and the ability to remain in school. In Colombia, this takes the form of violence and armed conflict in addition to household poverty resulting in the "double impact" of making children and adolescents vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups; gender-based violence, particularly during and post-pandemic, and adjustments that incoming migrants need to make to host communities. In El Salvador, the government has established a 'State of Exception' since March 2022 in response to an increase in homicides, which grants authorities power to arrest anyone suspected of gang activity and suspends several constitutional rights. In Haiti, FGD informants reported widespread gang violence, recruitment of children by gangs, weaponization of hunger, indiscriminate attacks against the population, obstruction of humanitarian access and assistance, lynchings, and attacks against UN agencies. In Honduras, according to SIR participants (including government officials, representatives from the academic sector, school principals, teachers, unions, parents, and NGO representatives) insecurity arises from various sources, including pervasive violence and high crime rates, which not only threaten children's safety but also foster a climate of fear that discourages families from allowing their children to travel to school, especially on foot.

3.1.8. MULTILATERAL SUPPORT

The study highlights many cooperation initiatives mainly implemented and/or funded by bilateral donors and multilateral entities. Main development agencies and donors are supporting education for all in Colombia, including UNICEF, USAID, IDB, Save the Children, UNCHR, the Norwegian Refugee Council. In El Salvador, supporting multilaterals include the Global Partnership for Education, the World Bank, Save the Children, USAID. In Haiti they include the World Bank, UNICEF, IDB, USAID; and in Honduras they include the World Bank, the World Food Program, IDB, and IOM. **Current projects relevant to inclusive education include in the region include:** in Colombia, UNICEF/Learning Circles initiative, USAID/Together We Learn, IDB/*Aprendamos Todos a Leer*, Save the Children/Reading Clubs, UNCHR/Refugee and Migration in Schools, Norwegian Refugee Council/School Dropout in High Conflict-affected Areas; in El Salvador, GPE/World Bank/Growing Up and Learning Together; Save the Children/Equitable, Inclusive and Quality Education for Migrant and Internally Displaced Children, USAID/*Proyecto Aprendo para Brillar*/ Innovative Education Project, among others; In Haiti, IDB's investment in the Education Sector Plan, and USAID's RAPID project for an integrated library/*Bibliothèque Roger Dorsainville*; and in Honduras, the World Bank and the World Food Program's support for free school meal programs; the World Bank and IDB's funding for conditional cash assistance

for poor households, USAID's funding for the Honduras Local Governance Project to Promote the Use of the Open Data Kit (ODK).

In terms of challenges, informants perceive a lack of rigorous M&E practices in project implementation and the lack of a culture of evaluation (Colombia) as well as programs being one-size-fits-all without considering local adaptations (Colombia, Haiti, Honduras) and being narrow in scope (Honduras) e.g. tackling a single issue (providing internet) without addressing the systemic needs (the lack of meeting basic conditions in educational centers in rural areas and/or in students' homes, such as electrical connection, technological equipment and adequate maintenance services). Across all countries, informants perceive a lack of alignment and coordination across donors and among implementing partners and local institutions, disregarding existing practices, leaving gaps, and/or duplicating efforts. Other challenges included little community participation in project design and implementation (El Salvador and Haiti), and the perception that programs promoted by multilateral organizations operate in the short or medium term with little investment in sustainable partnerships to continue implementation and with few possibilities of achieving sustainability (Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti).

3.2. COLOMBIA OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

3.2.1. EDUCATION SYSTEM SNAPSHOT

Colombia is a diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural country, with a population of 51.512 million people (DANE, 2018). The education system has a total enrollment of 9,981,588 students (Student Enrollment System, SIMAT, 2021). The General Law of Education defines the Colombian educational system as organized into progressive curricular standards and cycles, leading to academic titles and degrees. The system comprises three levels: preschool, basic education (primary and lower secondary), and upper secondary education. Compulsory education in Colombia spans ages 5 to 15, encompassing at least one year of preschool and nine years of primary and secondary education. However, the law does not mandate the provision of Grades 10 and 11 in secondary education, which particularly impacts adolescents in rural areas, potentially limiting their access to education at this level and leading them to enter the workforce prematurely (Restrepo & Agudelo, 2022).

3.2.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA

In Colombia, key informants and SIR participants shared views on inclusive and quality education that largely align with USAID's 2018 policy, emphasizing access, equity, skill development, and inclusivity while recognizing the crucial role of local community engagement. They concurred on the need for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, to have access to quality education and be able to develop essential skills such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and socio-emotional abilities for personal growth and societal participation. Inclusivity was highlighted as particularly important for marginalized groups.

However, distinct emphasis was placed on holistic development, stressing the importance of education in fostering the comprehensive growth of individuals across cognitive, emotional, physical, sexual, and social realms, enabling them to set life goals and make independent decisions. Colombian participants also underlined the importance of education being applicable and adaptable to students' needs and preferences. They further outlined specific quality determinants, including accessibility, articulation, continuity, applicability, and adaptability. These nuances reflect a tailored approach to education that caters to Colombia's specific context and needs.

3.2.3. MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS

This section of the report analyzes the results for Colombia, focusing on three targeted populations, as referred in TABLE I in the Methodology Section: (1) girls with early-age pregnancies; (2) children and youth from ethnic minority groups; and (3) Venezuelan migrants.

Group 1. Girls with early-age pregnancies. In 2022, UNICEF reported that in Colombia, 23 percent of women aged 20 to 24 had been married or entered a domestic partnership before reaching the age of 18, with 5 percent doing so before the age of 15. Over the past 25 years this trend has increasingly affected women from ethnic groups, rural areas, and low SES communities (UNICEF, 2022a).

Between 2010 and 2021 in Colombia, young mothers aged 10 to 19, many of whom entered early marriages, registered 1,137,796 births. Additionally, 422,104 births from unmarried girls and adolescents

were reported. Specifically, girls aged 10 to 14 accounted for 65,959 of these births, with 34,433 occurring within early marriages, according to DANE. In 2021 alone, there were 8,821 reported cases of sexual violence against girls aged 10 to 14 and 3,393 cases involving adolescents aged 15 to 19, marking an increase of over 40 percent from the previous year, as documented by UNFPA (2022). This increase is attributable to multiple factors. As referenced by the Javerian University Laboratory of Economics of Education (LEE), one significant factor is the heightened exposure to abuse and violence within homes during the COVID-19 lockdowns (LEE, 2022). Additionally, in rural areas, illegal armed groups are increasingly perpetrating abuse against girls (Governmental Official, SIR2). Colombian Law links early pregnancies with sexual violence and classified them as a sexual crime (UNICEF, 2022a).

Group 2. Children and youth from ethnic minority groups (indigenous and Afro-Colombian). In 2021, within Colombia's total student body of 9,981,588, the enrollment data revealed substantial participation from ethnic communities across both urban and rural educational environments. Specifically, urban schools registered 104,999 indigenous students and 158,233 Black students, while their rural counterparts enrolled 366,948 indigenous and 105,699 Black students. Additionally, the numbers showed that 140,692 Afro-Colombian students attended urban schools, with 82,884 in rural institutions. Literacy challenges persist within these communities, with an illiteracy rate of 8.3 percent and only 27.7 percent having completed primary education (MEN, 2022b, p.62). The MEN recognizes ethnic background as a factor increasing the risk of school dropout. This is especially pronounced in the Amazon region, where dropout rates range from 7 percent to 10 percent (MEN, 2022, p.28). More information can be found on this in Annex B.

Group 3. Venezuelan migrants. In 2021, according to SIMAT data, 489,082 Venezuelan children and youth enrolled in Colombia's educational system. Of these, one percent were in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, 14 percent in transition classes, 55 percent in primary schools, and 24 percent in secondary schools. Moreover, 95.6 percent of these Venezuelan migrant students attended official or state-contracted educational institutions (non-private), representing 4.9 percent of all students in Colombia. Additionally, 69.8 percent of these students lacked formal immigration status, indicating their presence in an irregular situation, while 30.2 percent had regularized their status. Geographically, 21 percent resided in rural areas compared to 79 percent in urban settings.

Additional information on children with disabilities. While this country case study primarily focuses on selected target populations, the situation of children and youth with disabilities in Colombia merits attention. Several KII and SIR participants mentioned them as a priority group. Thus, the research team has made a point to include information about this group when available and relevant. According to UN agencies (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 3n5-36), 63 percent of individuals with disabilities report feeling excluded from educational opportunities. This stems from a lack of commitment within the educational community plays a role (accounting for 35 percent of the exclusion) and insufficient mobility support or accommodations (accounting for 20 percent of the challenges faced). Additionally, only 70.7 percent of children with disabilities aged 5 to 17 are enrolled in school, with the absence of essential special educational services cited by 29.3 percent as a barrier to attendance (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 39). The training and readiness of educators to include students with disabilities requires development, underscoring the need for further research. For additional details on this topic, refer to the report's Annex B2, which includes the number of students with disabilities;

Annex B3, which includes the distribution of individuals with disabilities by age and sex; and Annex B4, which includes approval, dropout, and failure rates among people with disabilities.

3.2.4. EDUCATION ACCESS AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT (RQ1)

ACCESS DATA

The following table summarizes information presented in this report about the prioritized marginalized groups for Colombia:

TABLE 8: COLOMBIA, ENROLMENT IN FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM BY PRIORITY GROUPS, 2019-2021

GROUP	2019	2020	2021
Total enrollment Education System	10,159,214	10,022,656	9,981,588
Learners with Disabilities	224,663 (2.2% of total)	204,276 (2.0% of total)	194,962 (2.0% of total)
Learners from Ethnic Minority Groups	956,810 (9.4% of total)	938,889 (9.4% of total)	965,225 (9.7% of total)
Venezuelan Migrants	206,013 (2.0% of total)	364,042 (3.6% of total)	489,082 (4.9% of total)

Sources: total enrollment, learners with disabilities and ethnic minority groups taken from DANE microdata. Data on Venezuelan migrants extracted from eltiempo.com (2022), adapted from SIMAT (2022).

As noted in the table, gross school enrollment data has experienced small decreases from 2019 to 2020 (1.3 percent reduction), and then from 2020 to 2021 (0.4 percent reduction). However, when looking at the participation of marginalized groups, such as learners with disabilities and learners from ethnic minority groups, these have stayed relatively stable during the years. Enrollment for migrant populations, in particular Venezuelan migrants, has been consistently increasing, resulting in an increase of 17 times between 2018 (34,030 enrolled) and 2022 (583,550). In 2022, Venezuelan migrants represented 5.8 percent of the total enrollment.

PRIMARY EDUCATION – ERCE LEARNING RESULTS

The research team analyzed learning results from the 2019 ERCE study, which was administered to 8,625 boys and girls (4,158 in third grade and 4,467 in sixth grade), to measure what students knew and were capable of doing, according to the national curriculum, analyzed in four levels of performance. The overall results, compared with the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE) results from 2013, are shown in TABLE 9

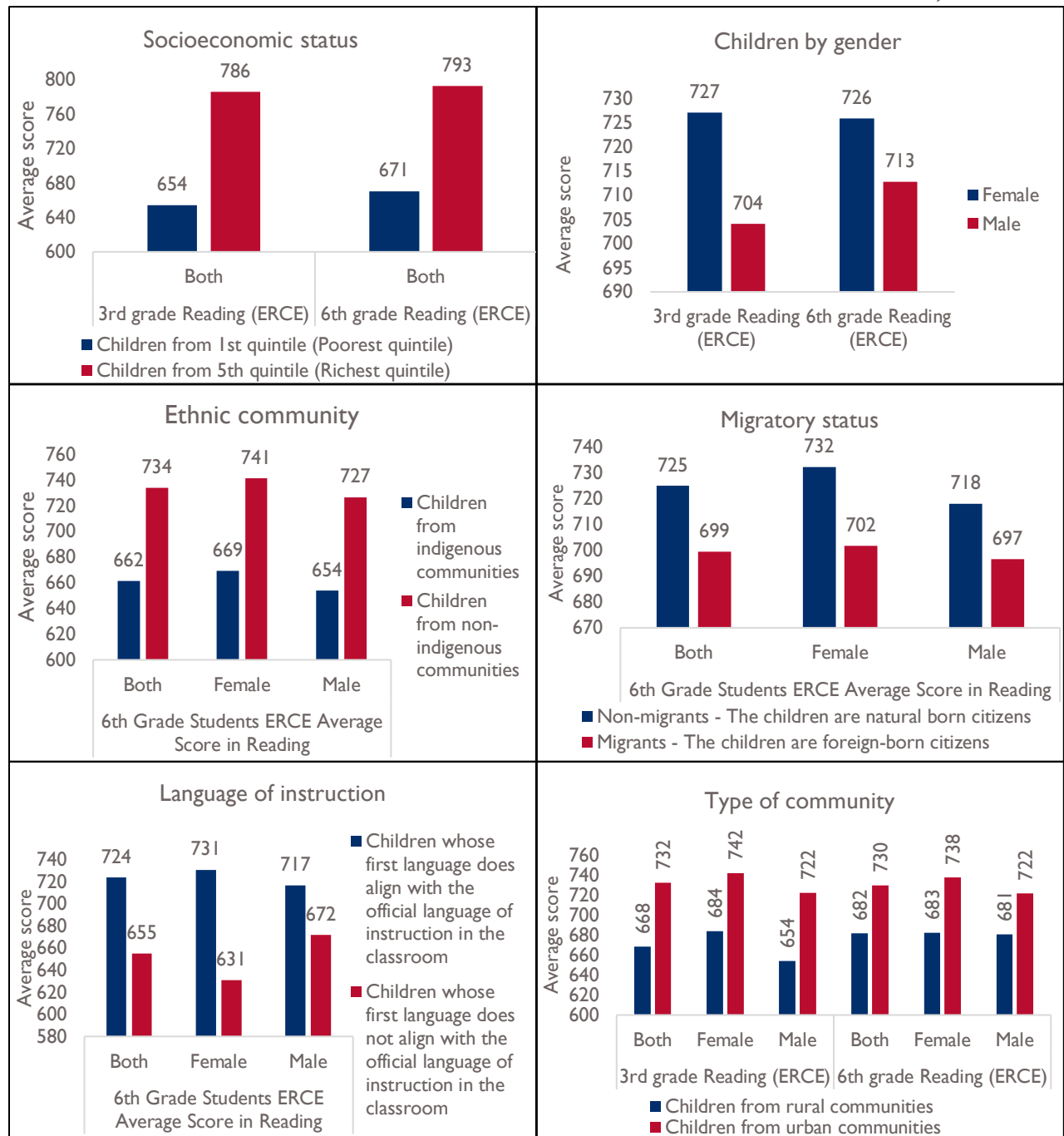
TABLE 9: COLOMBIA, ERCE RESULTS, 2019

GRADE	CURRICULUM AREA	AVERAGE SCORE	COMPARISON WITH REGIONAL AVERAGE	COMPARISON WITH TERCE	GENDER DIFFERENCES
3 rd grade	Reading	716	+19*	+2*	23 points higher among girls*
	Math	705	+7	+11*	9 points higher among boys
6 th grade	Reading	719	+23	-7	13 points higher among girls*
	Math	707	+10	+2	6 points higher among boys
	Natural Sciences	711	+9*	-22*	1 point higher among girls

Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 study report for Colombia. Note: The asterisk * indicates whether the differences are statistically significant.

Based on TABLE 9, the learning results show an average that is above the regional average. However, if compared to the results of 2013, no progress is observed for reading and there is a statistically significant decrease in sciences. Next, FIGURE 8 shows the learning results, according to the grade and study areas of the ERCE scores obtained by boys and girls by different group categories.

TABLE 10. COLOMBIA. ERCE READING SCORES BY MARGINALIZED GROUP, 2019



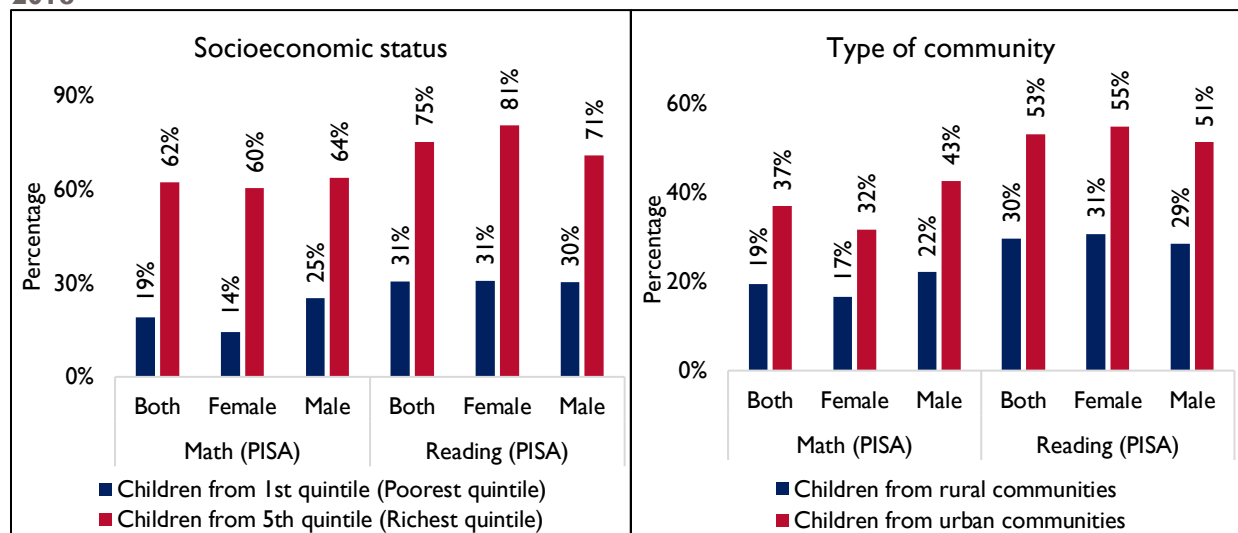
Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019

Overall, girls have higher average reading scores than boys; children from rural communities show lower average reading scores compared to children from urban areas. By socioeconomic level, children from the poorest quintile show lower reading performance than children from the 5th quintile. Annex B5 includes information for ERCE results in mathematics.

SECONDARY EDUCATION – PISA LEARNING RESULTS

The learning results of secondary education learners are analyzed using results from PISA 2018 and PISA 2022 data released in December 2023. The research team accessed PISA 2018 microdata for results by socioeconomic status as shown in FIGURE 11.

FIGURE 11: COLOMBIA, PROPORTION OF SECONDARY LEARNERS ACHIEVING, 2018



Source: Own calculations with microdata from OECD PISA 2018

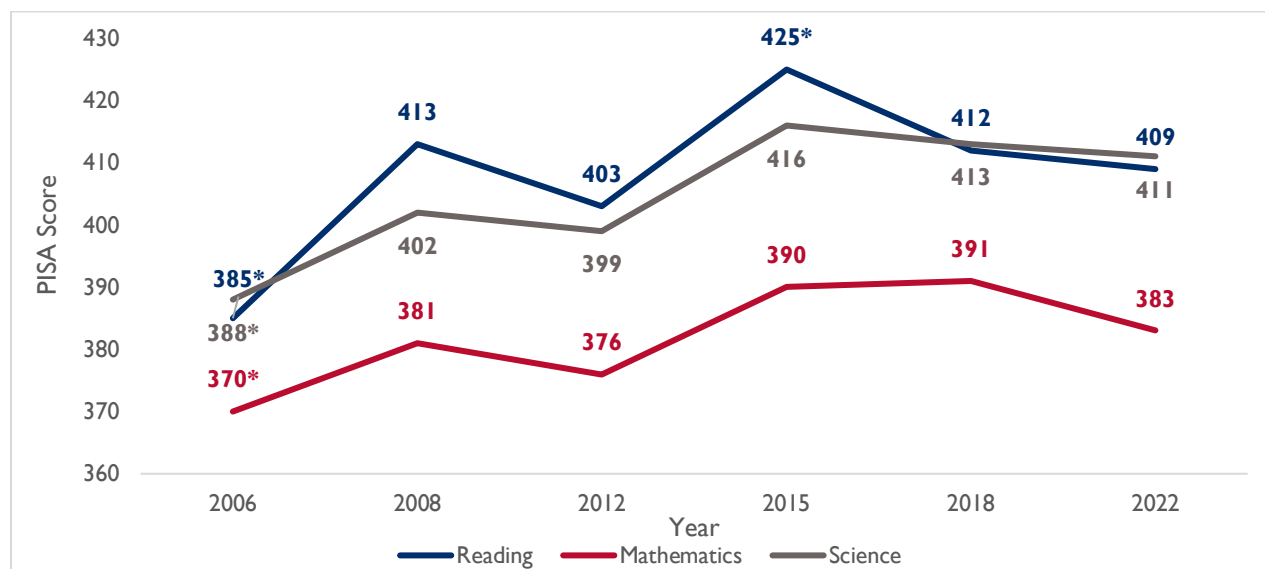
The PISA tests show that **a higher proportion of learners from urban communities reach a minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics than children from rural areas.** In terms of gender gap, the largest gap is in urban communities. When looking at the differences by income quintile, 18.9 percent of learners in the first quintile reach a minimum proficiency in mathematics, while for children in the fifth quintile, this figure is 62.2 percent (more than triple). Similarly, only 31 percent of learners in the first quintile achieved the minimum level reading proficiency, compared to 75 percent of learners in the fifth quintile (more than double). The difference is greater when girls are compared between quintiles (31 percent for the poorest quintile and 81 percent for the richest quintile). Similar to primary (the third grade of primary) grade outcomes, **as learners advance in their education and reach secondary education, gaps in performance do not disappear for marginalized groups.** Even though ERCE and PISA are not directly comparable, the share of learners that meet performance standards for reading in sixth grade in Colombia was around 20 percent for learners from the first quintile and 72 percent for fifth quintile. This suggests that the gap for the first quintile may reduce a little bit over time, but is still present.

Using PISA 2022 data, the research team looked at whether there are statistically significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting 2020 and 2021. OECD summarizes the results as follows:

- Average PISA 2022 results for Colombia were about the same as in 2018 in mathematics, reading, and science. As a whole, there are no statistically significant changes between 2018 and 2022.

- Results in PISA have been remarkably stable over a long period of time: after 2009, in all three subjects, only small and mostly non-significant fluctuations were observed.
- Over the most recent period (2018 to 2022), the gap between the highest-scoring students (10 percent with the highest scores) and the weakest students (10 percent with the lowest scores) narrowed in mathematics, while it did not change significantly in reading and science. In mathematics, high-achievers became weaker, while performance did not change significantly amongst low-achievers.

FIGURE 12: COLOMBIA, PISA SCORES TIME SERIE, 2006-2022



Source: Own adaptations using PISA 2022 Colombia Notes from OECD (2023). Values with asterisks indicate mean-performance estimates that are not statistically significantly above/below PISA 2022 estimates.

While the research team did not access PISA micro-data to look into specific vulnerable groups, the fact that there are no changes as a group and that performance gaps between the highest-scorers and weakest students either narrowed or did not change suggests that sub-group performance did not experience significant changes either .

3.2.5. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (RQ2)

Colombia’s Sistema Integrado de Matrículas (SIMAT), managed by the MEN in collaboration with 97 Educational Secretariats,¹⁴ is a comprehensive digital platform for student enrollment. It systematically records detailed student information: identity, demographics, school level, residence, area location, nationality, socio-economic status, disability, and migrant status. The system tracks various dropout rates, including interannual and intra-year, and manages school place assignments and enrollment

¹⁴ Education secretariats in Colombia manage local educational services, ensuring they are delivered efficiently, effectively, and transparently. This entails planning, organizing, coordinating resources, and overseeing control mechanisms.

monitoring. Furthermore, SIMAT registers total student numbers, grade levels, and public and private school enrollments, incorporating ethnic group self-identification and academic performance outcomes. It also compiles data on the migrant student population, detailing numbers, nationalities, educational levels, locations, institution types, and immigration status (MEN, 2022a).

The Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES) administers national assessments across all educational levels and researches factors influencing educational quality. Active in developing assessments in mathematics, Spanish, social and civic sciences, natural sciences, and English, ICFES not only creates these standardized tests but also implements and analyzes them. The analysis categorizes student performance into four levels: low, basic, satisfactory, and advanced, providing critical data to inform educational improvements. Additionally, ICFES assesses citizenship skills, creative potential, and critical thinking. While SIMAT data determines exam eligibility, ICFES does not incorporate learning outcomes into SIMAT.

In 2013, the Colombian State established the Unified Information System for School Coexistence (SIUCE) to address inappropriate behaviors impacting the school environment. SIUCE's mandate is to identify, document, and monitor bullying incidents, school violence, and breaches of human, sexual, and reproductive rights across all educational institutions in the country (MEN, 2021). This system aims to foster a secure school environment conducive to comprehensive personal development. According to a key informant from a governmental agency, between 2020 and 2023, SIUCE recorded over 5,000 instances of various violence forms, including bullying, cyberbullying, and the exploitation of children in the micro-trafficking of psychoactive substances.

BARRIERS TO COLLECT AND USE DATA

General Barriers. According to key informants from governmental agencies, NGOs, and schools, the main barriers to obtaining detailed education statistics on specific student populations include:

1. **Lack of school infrastructure.** A significant obstacle to effective data collection within educational settings, particularly in rural areas, is the absence of necessary infrastructure, including electricity, computers, and internet connectivity in schools. According to a rural teacher who educates indigenous children, SIMAT data can be collected on paper and sent by boat to the nearest education secretariat. However, there is a risk that the information may be lost, and it is challenging to get it updated.
2. **Staffing constraints.** Numerous Colombian departments, education secretariats and schools lack adequate personnel to consistently track student progress, input data, and effectively manage the SIMAT. National budget restrictions hinder the ability of territorial entities to appoint or recruit staff for the administrative duties anticipated by the Ministry of Education at the central level.
3. **Fragmented data monitoring for:**
 1. **Out of school children.** SIMAT tracks data on students entering or leaving the education system but lacks records for those not enrolled. Furthermore, SIMAT fails to monitor students who permanently exit the system or those requiring pedagogical adaptations, presenting significant data collection and follow-up gaps.

2. **Mobile populations.** SIMAT has been designed to track students with stable enrollment in conventional educational pathways. As one key informant from a governmental agency noted, “It is a system designed for children to remain in the same school throughout the year.” However, this design lacks the flexibility needed to monitor mobile populations, such as ethnic community members, Venezuelan migrants, individuals displaced by violence, and rural families migrating for work. The system struggles to accurately track student movements and confirm dropouts, often delayed by informal family withdrawal processes.
3. **Flexible learning models.** Additionally, SIMAT does not accommodate non-traditional educational approaches, including flexible learning models or the Escuela Nueva Modality,¹⁵ which allow for advancement based on personalized learning timelines rather than the standard academic calendar.
4. **Restricted access to information.** The SIMAT database is not publicly accessible, and MEN takes a prolonged timeframe in disseminating the information it collects. It does not have an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out to design retention strategies. Additionally, MEN’s failure to guide Education Secretariats – and, in turn, schools – in effectively analyzing and utilizing the data hampers informed decision-making.

Girls with early-age pregnancies. There is a notable lack of coordination among institutions in sharing information across and within sectors. Adolescent pregnancy and maternity data gathered by the health system and education data for pregnant students recorded by the education system are not integrated. Moreover, the data collected within the education system through the SIUCE is not integrated with data collected from the educational database SIMAT. Additionally, some educational institutions do not report cases of sexual violence or harassment for fear of stigmatization. This reluctance is compounded by the fact that pregnancies in children under 14 years of age are classified as a crime, which have judicial implications and potentially damage the institutional image.

Children and youth from ethnic minorities. Collecting accurate data on learning outcomes from ethnic minorities has been a challenge. Although Colombia does not have a uniform education curriculum, it aligns to a single set of content standards. Despite attempts to adapt national tests for ethnic minorities, the standardized nature of these tests has sparked concerns among these groups. Ethnic minority participants from the SIRs and governmental officials interviewed argue that the tests do not reflect their unique educational systems aligned with their cultural worldviews. Nevertheless, collaborations between ICFES (the national testing institution) and indigenous communities are underway. These collaborations are meant to ensure indigenous people understand the content and rationale of the assessments and to

¹⁵ The Escuela Nueva, or "New School" model, is a Colombian education model that was created in the 1970s by Victoria Colbert, Óscar Mogollón, and Beryl Levinger. The model was designed to improve the quality and enrollment of education in rural schools. It emphasizes understanding over memorization and the development of interpersonal skills. In Escuela Nueva schools, students learn independently at their own pace.

integrate their knowledge and traditions into the broader skill set valued by the nation. This joint effort also aims to enhance the government’s understanding of ethno-education practices, facilitating the co-creation of more relevant and contextualized assessment questions.

Migrants (specifically Venezuelan migrants). Information systems function independently without cross-referencing data. The national school enrollment database, SIMAT, collects data on Venezuelan students who enter the educational system, but does not exchange information with the *Migracion Colombia* database. Additionally, SIMAT does not collect or keep records on out of school children and youth, which is often the case with Venezuelan migrants, especially those in conditions of irregularity. A key informant from a multilateral organization highlighted the challenge of untracked Venezuelan children and youth, stating, “There exists a population that is neither in school nor undergoing regularization, remaining unaccounted for, or known only through anecdotal evidence.”

As reported by the Manager of Migration as a Development Factor and Technical Lead of Education at UNICEF (2022), an important access barrier is that migrant families do not remain static. They spend two months or a certain period in one place and then they move. For this reason, they may be denied the option of enrollment because the schools have limited places and the rector, or the respective authorities consider that the chances of desertion are high. An additional aspect of concern is that 22 percent of migrant students are out of school, according to the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM). According to the same UNICEF representative, migrants tend to have competencies and skills below their age, and the education system doesn’t have an effective recovery mechanism.

3.2.6. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES (RQ3)

The 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia established education as a fundamental right for all citizens, irrespective of age, gender, or socioeconomic background. The constitution acknowledges and mandates the protection of the country’s ethnic and cultural diversity. Since the establishment of the constitution, Colombia has developed inclusive education policies to eliminate the barriers that marginalized populations face in accessing quality education. A flagship education and inclusion policy and example of inter-institutional collaboration is the “Policy Guidelines for Inclusion and Equity in Education: Education for All People without Exception” (MEN, 2021), developed in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Saldarriaga Concha Foundation. This policy aligns with global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (particularly SDG 4), UNESCO’s Education for All, the Ten-Year Education Plan 2016-2026, and the National Development Plan (PND) 2018-2022. Furthermore, the PND for 2022-2026 outlines critical objectives, including expanding access to early education and higher education, elevating the teaching profession, fostering educational spaces as hubs for community life and peacebuilding, and promoting territorial equity.

TABLE II presents a summary of Colombia’s policies for inclusive education and the level of progress of its legal framework and institutional coordination. As shown in the table, the IELA research team classified the legal framework to guarantee quality education for children from the lowest socioeconomic quintile (the poorest) girls with early-age pregnancies as advanced and the coordination among institutions to implement the existing policies as established. For children from ethnic minorities, the team classified the inclusive education legal framework as advanced and the institutional

coordination as emerging. Finally, for migrants, the team classified the inclusive education policy framework as advanced and the institutional coordination as emerging.

TABLE II. COLOMBIA. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES.

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
GIRLS WITH EARLY PREGNANCIES			Advanced	Established
National Council for Economic and Social Policy 147 of 2012	Establishes the general guidelines for the design, formulation, and development of a comprehensive strategy to reduce pregnancy in adolescence.	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. Outlines the rights of children to access information and education related to their health and development. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (Quality Education), promote access to sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education.		
Law 1620 of 2013	Introduces the National System of School Coexistence and Respect for Human Rights, Sexuality Education, and the Prevention and Mitigation of School Violence.	International Conference on Population and Development. Program of Action of 1994. Recognizes the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. Includes comprehensive sexual education for young people.		
CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS (INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-COLOMBIAN)			Advanced	Emerging

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
Law 1381 of 2010	Issues rules on the recognition, promotion, protection, use, preservation and strengthening of the languages of Colombian ethnic groups, their linguistic rights, and those of their speakers.	UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960 aims to combat discrimination in education on various grounds, including race, ethnicity, and language.		
Decree 804 of 1995	Regulates educational attention for ethnic groups.	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007: recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples, including their right to education.		
Decree 1122 of 1998	Introduces Afro-Colombian studies in the schools of the country.	International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 of 1989: It highlights the need for culturally appropriate education and the involvement of indigenous communities in educational decisions		
Decree 2500 of 2010	Authorizes and regulates that councils and traditional indigenous authorities could be hired to manage education in their territories.			
Decree 1953 of 2014	Creates a special regime in order to put the Indigenous territories into operation and the administration of the indigenous peoples' own			

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
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systems.

Decree 1930 of 2013	Adopts the National Public Policy for Gender Equality and an Intersectoral Commission for its implementation.	CRC convention on the rights of the child of 1990 that guarantees children and young people (aged 17 and under) free quality education.		
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VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS		Advanced	Emerging
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Decree 1216 of 2021	Temporary protection status for Venezuelan migrants. Allows access to the educational system for all populations, disregarding the migratory status	UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960 Aims to combat discrimination in education on various grounds, including race, ethnicity, nationality, and language.		
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Circular 16 of 2018	“Instructions for the care of boys, girls, and adolescents from Venezuela in Colombian educational establishments”: reaffirmed the constitutional right of minors who were in Colombia to access education, regardless of their immigration status.	UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families of 1960: recognizes the right to education for migrant children, emphasizing that they should have access to education on an equal basis with nationals of the host country.		
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Resolution 0971 of 2021	Permit for Temporary Protection: gives access to all public services, including education.			
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POLICIES BY TARGET GROUP

Girls with early-age pregnancies. The National Council for Economic and Social Policy of 2012 provides overarching guidance for a comprehensive strategy to reduce adolescent pregnancy. It has enabled the development of protocols, policies, and intersectoral strategies to prevent childhood and adolescent pregnancies, as noted by a key informant from a sexual and reproductive health agency. Then MEN collaborates with municipal education departments to support girls' and adolescents' continued education and identify gender-related risks like teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence (MEN, 2022b, p. 97).

Law 1620 of 2013 established the National System of School Coexistence and Training for Human Rights, Education for Sexuality, and the Prevention of School Violence. This multisectoral system involves national and territorial levels, partnering with institutions such as the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). It monitors pregnancies through the SIUCE (MEN, 2022b, p. 36). Despite policy efforts, a key informant from an NGO noted that young pregnant women continue to experience stigmatization. In conventional educational settings, pregnant girls often encounter rejection.

Children and youth from ethnic minority groups (indigenous and Afro-Colombian). The 1991 Constitution recognizes the importance of ethno-education for indigenous communities. It defines ethno-education as education provided to nationalities with distinct cultures, languages, traditions, and autochthonous jurisdictions. This type of education is guided by comprehensiveness, interculturality, linguistic diversity, community participation, flexibility, and progressivity (MEN, 2022b, p. 63). Law 1381 of 2010 further reinforces the recognition and protection of the languages of ethnic groups in Colombia. Decree 2500 of 2010 governs the contracting of educational services by certified territorial entities, indigenous councils, traditional authorities, and indigenous organizations, supporting the development of the Own Indigenous Educational System (SEIP). Decree 1953 of 2014 establishes a special regime for Operationalizing Indigenous Territories concerning the administration of indigenous people's education systems. Additionally, Law 70 of 1993 acknowledges the Afro-Colombian population's historical land occupation, traditional production practices, and collective property rights and promotes Afro-Colombian studies.

Despite constitutional and regulatory advancements, challenges persist in effectively implementing inclusive policies for indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. According to key informants from governmental agencies, the low learning achievements of children and young individuals from these communities are attributed to several factors: (1) The challenge of aligning the country's traditional educational system with the indigenous system and aligning ethno-education with the country's standardized evaluation methods. (2) The absence of teachers' colleges specializing in ethno-education. (3) The technological disparity between urban and rural/remote territories where indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities reside, where internet access and energy infrastructure are often lacking.

Venezuelan migrants. The arrival of Venezuelan migrants has posed challenges for Colombia, and the country has implemented a solidarity reception policy, with a significant focus on the education sector (MEN, 2022b, p. 89). Circular 16 of 2018, titled "Instructions for the care of children and adolescents from Venezuela in Colombian educational establishments," reinforces the constitutional right of minors in Colombia to access education, regardless of their immigration status. It also provides guidance to

educational institutions on the registration processes for Venezuelan minors lacking documentation. Furthermore, the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants, introduced through Decree 216 of 2021, facilitated the characterization and regularization of Venezuelan migrants, including the issuance of Temporary Protection Permits (PPT), outlined in Resolution 0971. The PPT grants access to all public services, including education at preschool, primary, and secondary levels, as well as food services and flexible pedagogical models. Key informants from NGOs, multilateral agencies, and Venezuelan migrants who participated in the SIR 2 and 3 also highlighted the significance of the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants in promoting the right to access education.

The gaps in the policies' implementation mentioned by stakeholders include:

- i. Limited dissemination of standards;
- ii. Frequent changes in regulations causing confusion;
- iii. Bureaucratic complexities in the regularization process and within the Colombia Migration platform; and
- iv. Insufficient information about the Venezuelan migrant population in DANE and some education secretariats in certain cities, leading to inconsistencies in interventions related to persistence, dropout rates, age appropriateness, repetition, and actual abandonment.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

To ensure the removal of barriers hindering access to quality education for marginalized children and youth, the MEN has implemented several programs:

1. The School Feeding Program provides school meals to all students officially enrolled in public schools, ranging from preschool to middle school.
2. Residences are established for children and adolescents residing in rural areas with limited mobility and limited access to educational facilities, enabling them to stay for the entire school year while receiving educational services (MEN, 2020).
3. Flexible educational models accommodate teaching and learning processes within formal education, offering full and part-time alternatives to meet students' varying time, geographical, and vulnerability-related needs (MEN, 2022a).
4. The single shift extends the school day to enhance educational processes and academic intensity.
5. The complementary school day offers pedagogical activities after regular school hours, promoting art, culture, environmental education, science, sports, and technology.
6. School transportation services are provided by territorial entities using available resources (MEN, 2022a, p.14, MEN, Ministry of Social Health and Protection, and Saldarriaga and Concha Foundation, 2021).

However, participants in the SIR 1, 2 and 3 only recognized the importance of three programs: school meals, school residences, and flexible education. School meals benefit all three targeted groups and are especially crucial in contexts to ensure minimum necessary nutrition. Also, a key informant from an NGO emphasized, “For many children in the Pacific region, the school meal is the only meal of the day.” School residences are particularly valuable for indigenous children and youth, allowing them to study the entire school year and receive essential services. Flexible education models are helpful for all three groups, but especially for extra-age Venezuelan migrants and early-age mothers who benefit from the flexibility to cater to their unique needs.

Key informants from governmental agencies, NGOs, multilateral organizations, and higher education representatives consulted for this report highlighted the following challenges in state efforts to ensure policy implementation:

1. Limited coordination: National guidelines face challenges in local implementation due to political centralization and insufficient technical and administrative capacity in various territories.
2. Policy continuity: The discontinuity of specific policies is a concern, attributed to changes in local and national governments over time.
3. Insufficient financing: Adequate funding to reach all relevant beneficiaries across the national territory remains a significant challenge.

3.2.7. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF EDUCATION QUALITY (RQ4)

The upcoming sections will analyze the impact of school environments on marginalized learners’ access to education (RQ4), emphasizing school, teacher, and classroom-level factors. They will also examine how community and family influences affect these learners’ educational access (RQ5), with a focus on each marginalized group.

SCHOOL-LEVEL FACTORS

Unsafe school environment. During this study, key informants and SIR participants identified several detrimental factors within educational institutions that compromise the school environment and student coexistence, increasing the risk of dropout. They include:

- Exclusion and disregard for diversity.
- Xenophobia directed at Venezuelan migrants leading to segregation despite legal mandates for their inclusion.
- The practice of sexting.
- Stigmatization of students from ethnic communities, specifically related to their language and rural heritage.

- Stigmatization of pregnant students judged either for their choice to continue the pregnancy or perceived as negative influences on their peers.
- Bullying mainly targeting children and youth who are displaced or affected by armed conflict.
- Conflicts arising from intolerance.
- Strained relationships between school leaders, teachers, and students.

To respond to these challenges, the MEN has implemented the SIUCE, which is designed to systematically gather data on environmental challenges within schools and facilitate targeted interventions. Also, specifically in Medellín, the Secretariat of Education has launched the Protective Educational Environments program. This initiative bolsters school coexistence efforts by providing public schools with guidance on effective school management. The program activates established protocols, offers psychosocial support, promotes health services, and advocates for adaptable class schedules and teaching methodologies tailored to meet student’s needs, with particular attention to the requirements of adolescent mothers.

Lack of alignment between the different educational levels. The lack of nearby basic secondary and upper secondary schools – especially in rural and small communities – is a key barrier for accessing, learning in, and completing secondary education. The MEN (2022a) reports that the transition points between educational stages – particularly from primary to basic secondary (notably in sixth grade) and from basic secondary to middle education (in ninth grade) – are critical periods for student dropout. This issue disproportionately affects children from ethnic minority groups in remote areas. A key informant affiliated with a multilateral organization disclosed during the interview that “In many remote areas of the country, schools only have up to fifth grade, and to continue, families have to send their children to the municipal capitals or far away,” incurring high economic costs and family disruption.

Other factors such as lack of motivation and external pressures also affect school completion. In ninth grade, students frequently lose motivation, aware that they may not have the opportunity to pursue technical, technological, or university education that aligns with their interests. Young girls who become pregnant often drop out to manage household duties or due to financial constraints and childcare needs. Additionally, young men face the risk of recruitment by illegal groups, which can force them to seek anonymity or refuge in other regions, further disrupting their education.

GIRLS WITH EARLY-AGE PREGNANCIES. During discussions within the SIR for girls with early-age pregnancies (SIR 4), pregnant students themselves highlighted several barriers to their education, including the absence of **childcare facilities, limited economic resources, and peer stigmatization**. Coexistence problems include segregation and stigmatization of pregnant youth because of their decision to pursue the pregnancy or because they are considered bad influences on other youth. During SIR 4, the Juanfe Foundation stood out as a public-private partnership model that connects pregnant high school teenagers with technical education and the workforce; as explained by one NGO representative, “adolescent mothers concurrently **complete their high school education while engaging in technical training programs**. This dual approach leads to them receiving job offers shortly after.” SIR 4 participants also highlighted that successful interventions provide holistic

support; they not only retain young women within the educational system but also offer them financial aid and psychosocial assistance and adapt institutional services to meet the specific needs of their children. This comprehensive care model is instrumental in promoting young mothers' educational continuity and workforce readiness.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES. **Stigmatization** of students belonging to ethnic communities because of their language and rural origin surfaced as one of the barriers to quality education. A systemic barrier for indigenous students in urban settings is the **absence of ethno-educational schools**. Ethno-education aids in preserving indigenous customs, traditions, and languages, contributing to higher retention rates. However, as participants in the SIR 3 (on ethnic groups) reported, while rural areas commonly offer this type of education, urban areas do not. Consequently, when indigenous populations are displaced by violence and forced to relocate to cities, they must enroll in mainstream schools. In these institutions, where instruction is in Spanish and not in their native languages, indigenous students face significant educational disadvantages.

VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS. In the context of school environments, exclusionary practices, disrespect for diversity, and xenophobia against Venezuelan migrants persist despite legal mandates requiring their integration. Additional challenges include: (1) the inconsistent enforcement of educational standards relative to policy directives, attributable to school administrators' unclear understanding of the norms; (2) the lack of a standardized assessment for incoming students to ascertain proper grade-level placement; and (3) while immigrant students may enroll and study regardless of their legal status, **the requirement to regularize their status by the eleventh grade to receive a high school diploma** constitutes a significant barrier to completion.

TEACHER-LEVEL FACTORS

Unqualified teachers. "There are 350,000 teachers in the country and having qualified teachers in all regions is a challenge" (governmental official). In Colombia, a significant challenge in education is ensuring all regions can access qualified teachers. A key informant from a governmental agency highlighted that individuals with the lowest performance on national tests often enter education faculties, which may lack rigorous training and selection processes. Once assigned to their posts, many teachers face the daunting task of instructing students across different grades and subjects without adequate preparation or experience. This is particularly problematic for students with disabilities, as teachers may not be sufficiently trained to make the necessary curricular adjustments.

The **recruitment and retention** of these teachers are critical issues that require local governments to improve educational infrastructure and working conditions. Teachers need incentives for service in high-need areas, alongside fair and improved financial compensation. A profound reform in the distribution of economic resources by the MEN to the territorial Secretariats of Education is essential to address these challenges. A key governmental official explained that the financial resources received by the Territorial Secretariats are predominantly allocated to teacher salaries, leaving minimal funds for teacher training, development of pedagogical networks, and learning communities.

GIRLS WITH EARLY-AGE PREGNANCIES. In addressing the needs of pregnant girls and young mothers, the socio-emotional support teachers provide is crucial in ensuring educational continuity.

Participants in SIR 4, focused on girls with early-age pregnancies, highlighted the pivotal role of empathetic and supportive educators. Despite gaps in their professional training, the commitment of teachers to the well-being of these students significantly contributes to their persistence in school and achievement of learning goals. For instance, the mother of a young mother recounted the impact of such support, expressing, “My principal had to leave, but I would have wanted to thank her in front of everyone. [...] The teachers and the psychologists always cared for the girl!” (adolescent mother).

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES. In rural regions of Colombia, where indigenous populations predominantly reside, the educational system faces a lack of qualified teachers and inadequate conditions for teaching. The MEN (2022a) acknowledges that this scarcity of educators is linked to higher dropout rates. Key informants and stakeholders from SIR 1 and 3 (on ethnic communities) 58riority58 that the challenges of remote rural schools—such as limited housing options, insufficient sustenance for teachers, and the resulting separation from their families—deter educators from accepting and retaining positions in these areas. Additionally, the frequent turnover of staff and the appointment of educators who may not be the most qualified exacerbate the issue, contributing to educational discontinuity and hindering the completion of education for children and youth from ethnic communities.

Despite the value of ethno-education, key governmental officials identified a significant barrier: the scarcity of teachers trained in ethno-education and intercultural approaches. This challenge is partly due to a shortage of teacher training colleges specializing in these areas. Institutions like the Pontifical Bolivarian University and the University of Antioquia in Medellín lead in this endeavor, alongside the National Open and Distance, whose online programs are well-received in regions including Amazonas and Casanare. Also, teacher selection often prioritizes community leader preferences over candidates’ actual qualifications for the role.

VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS. In addressing the educational needs of Venezuelan migrant students, teachers have been pivotal in creating a welcoming atmosphere and standing against discrimination. The insights from SIR 2 and 3 focused on migrant challenges, reveal that the nurturing interactions cultivated by teachers with Venezuelan students and their families have been instrumental in providing necessary support and understanding. These educators’ dedication to acknowledging the rich cultural heritage of the Venezuelan community and creating opportunities for students to share their stories has been instrumental in ensuring that these students feel a sense of belonging within the school setting.

CLASSROOM-LEVEL FACTORS

Flexible educational models to mitigate inequitable access for the three marginalized populations. The vulnerability of children and youth from minority ethnic groups, Venezuelan migrants, and those experiencing early-age pregnancies, challenges their ability to follow a standard educational path. Factors impacting their learning include delayed school entry, interruptions from migration or displacement, the necessity to work or manage household responsibilities, and financial barriers to educational access. These challenges often lead to disruption in their schooling, resulting in them falling behind and becoming over-aged for their grade, increasing the risk of school dropout (MEN, 2022a). To respond to the needs of these populations, Colombia has created 32 flexible educational models that assume teaching-learning processes within formal education, with school and semi-school alternatives

that adjust to the needs of students in terms of time, geographic location, and conditions of vulnerability (MEN, 2022a, p.73). Some of these models widely used in education for out-of-school youth and adults, and ethno-education approaches are Walking in Secondary School, Escuela Nueva, Learning Acceleration, and UNICEF's Learning Circles. The following section describes how these models are implemented for the selected target groups.

GIRLS WITH EARLY-AGE PREGNANCIES. SIR 4 participants cited the “Walking in Secondary School” model as a helpful in supporting girls with early-age pregnancies’ in continuing their education. This flexible education method targets over-age students in secondary education, enabling them to achieve critical learning outcomes for multiple grades within a single academic year. This approach is particularly beneficial for students with early-age pregnancies, providing the flexibility to balance childcare with their educational progression. By adopting a condensed curriculum that focuses on core competencies in language, mathematics, and natural and social sciences, this model accelerates the learning process, allowing students to complete six years of secondary education in four years. Moreover, it facilitates the continuation of education through either Flexible Education Models (FEMs) or conventional schools. Since its inception in 1990, this approach has supported 14,659 students in advancing their education despite age-related challenges (Restrepo & Agudelo, 2022). In SIR 4, young students with early-age pregnancies also mentioned online education as a helpful strategy to continue their studies while caring for their babies.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES. Escuela Nueva, established as Colombia’s first FEM by the MEN in 1960, has become an exemplar of educational adaptability, particularly in rural multigrade primary schools. It provides pedagogical adaptability, enabling educators to effectively support students, notably those aged 7 to 12, who are at risk of dropping out. Over the years, the program has become instrumental in supporting rural students, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian youths, helping them complete six years of primary education in an accelerated manner based on each school’s level of autonomy. Upon completion, these students are equipped to progress into secondary education through various educational pathways. From 1960 to 2022, it has served 547,609 rural students (Restrepo & Agudelo, 2022).

In addition to FEMs, in Colombia, indigenous people have their own Educational System (Sistema Educario Indigeno Propio [SEIP]) through which they seek to educate the population in their own native language and in accordance with their world views and cultural practices, while promoting respect for black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquera, and Rom peoples and communities. One of the indigenous participants in SIR I expressed the importance of indigenous people learning in their first language in this way: “In my community, during the primary education cycle, using our native language alongside Spanish in teaching helps preserve our language. It enhances the child’s learning, especially when the teacher is fluent in both languages”.

VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS. The Learning Acceleration model plays a crucial role in supporting overage primary students aged 10 to 17 from rural and marginalized urban areas in Colombia, and particularly over-age Venezuelan migrants, allowing them to complete six years of primary education more rapidly by focusing on core competencies in language and math. These students then obtain a primary certificate and progress into middle grades through either FEMs or mainstream schools. From 1990 to 2022 this model has served 37,784 students (Restrepo & Agudelo, 2022). However, the implementation of these

models presents significant challenges. A key informant from a multilateral organization highlighted the high costs associated with FEMs due to the need for specialized teachers and diverse processes, which can be prohibitive for many schools. This financial burden has led some institutions to forego offering such programs. It has prompted international cooperation organizations to reconsider their support despite the positive impact on student learning. Moreover, the MEN faces difficulties in fully adopting these models. Key informants from multilateral organizations also mentioned UNICEF's Learning Circles as a model that has shown success by providing extra-curricular leveling to children, subsequently integrating them into formal education settings as regular students once they meet the necessary conditions.

3.2.8. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS (RQ5)

FAMILY FACTORS

Family engagement represents a key contributor to education access, continuity, and learning achievements of children and adolescents. Families provide learners with support in the development of their life plan. Families' socio-economic conditions, home practices, behaviors, and migratory status directly determine children's participation and performance in school.

Families' socio-economic status. Youth with early-age pregnancies, Venezuelan migrant children, and youth from ethnic minorities often belong to the lower socio-economic strata, as shown in RQ1. Participants in the four SIRs and the literature (MEN, 2022a, p.25) agree that families grappling with poverty face additional hurdles, such as the inability to afford transportation, uniforms, and school supplies. This economic strain limits access to education and increases the likelihood of school dropouts and child labor as families prioritize immediate income generation over educational attainment. Thus, the intersection of low SES with these targeted groups creates a cyclical barrier to accessing and benefiting from education, perpetuating long-term socio-economic disparities.

Domestic violence based on gender, and the effects of the pandemic. In the interviews, key informants emphasized that the pandemic exacerbated cases of domestic violence, abuse, and neglect and this has affected the mental health of students as well as their academic and behavioral performance: "During the pandemic, with children confined to their homes alongside family, instances of abuse occurred. This led to a spillover of domestic issues into schools, as bullying and abuse manifested in educational settings. Children, stressed from home-life problems, became less tolerant of their peers. This is the current situation unfolding" (Governmental officials). The pandemic brought with it an increased amount of intolerance and a greater need for conflict resolution. Furthermore, mobility restrictions and isolation during the pandemic meant additional workloads at home for women and girls and evidence of major impacts related to gender-based violence (UN Women, 2021, p. 22).

Disconnect between educational institutions and families. Another significant aspect relates to the disconnection between educational institutions and families, particularly in rural settings. School administrators confirm, "Engaging with families scattered across rural regions presents considerable challenges."

By contrast, **involvement and support of families** were identified as protective factors. Participants from SIR 2 and 3 identified several family-related factors that positively influence the education of

marginalized children. They emphasized the family’s role in instilling values and setting a positive example, fostering beneficial habits in children, proper use of technology, providing adequate nutrition at home, ensuring emotional support, and facilitating a conducive home study environment rather than criticism.

GIRLS WITH EARLY-AGE PREGNANCIES. **Household poverty** can cause girls to drop out of education due to the need to cover unpaid care at home. In a 2018 National Survey, individuals aged 16-24 who had not completed high school cited various reasons for not graduating. While 19 percent attributed their non-completion to economic challenges necessitating work, 14 percent mentioned household responsibilities and a lack of resources as impediments. However, the data indicates a higher dropout rate among young women, with 29.4 percent leaving school to handle household chores and 10 percent due to pregnancies (MEN, 2022a). Another study showed that in Colombia, women dedicate more than double the time of men to **unpaid childcare** (DANE, UN Women, 2020, p. 3). This factor thus affects the retention of girls in quality education: “Families often lack resources for their children’s education, leading many to prioritize work. Older children in many areas take on caretaking and cooking responsibilities for younger siblings” (key informants from an international NGO).

Adolescent motherhood often leads to diminished sexual and reproductive rights and impacts immediate and future health and educational opportunities (UNFPA, 2020, p.4). Discussions in SIR 4 and statements from key informants highlight the **negative stereotypes** and discrimination adolescent mothers face within their families. However, those who receive their **families’ support** describe it as essential for their continued attendance at school. The family’s role as a support system for pregnant adolescents, helping them to overcome challenges associated with pregnancy, balancing schoolwork with prenatal appointments and emotional support, stands out as a significant protective factor (SIR 4).

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC GROUPS. The **economic challenges** of ethnic communities, especially in rural areas, are critical barriers to education. The cost of travel, school supplies, and the necessity for child labor prevent many children from attending school. A governmental official stated, “**poverty, particularly extreme poverty, limits educational access.** The expenses of schooling and child labor, prevalent in rural regions, hinder children’s ability to study. Hunger impedes learning, and many ethnic group children remain out of school for these reasons.” Additionally, another informant highlighted the harsh reality of school entry requirements: “Children without proper shoes are turned away for failing to meet uniform standards, which compounds their exclusion and perpetuates the cycle of poverty” (rural teacher at SIR 1).

VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS. The involvement of Venezuelan migrant children in education often takes a backseat as families prioritize immediate survival, leading to a disconnect with educational institutions. A key informant explained, “For some families of marginalized populations, especially Venezuelan migrants, **connecting with the school is not seen as a priority.**” Additionally, employment can pose a significant risk of school dropout among these children. Yet, insights from SIR 3 reveal that some Venezuelan families are deeply engaged with schools, underscoring the value of maintaining strong ties with school administrators and teachers. This contrast highlights the complex realities of this population and the need for tailored educational support.

COMMUNITY FACTORS

Violence caused by illegal armed groups and armed conflict, immigration, and the intersectionality between poverty with violence, gender, ethnicity, and rurality mentioned by key informants and SIR participants are barriers to access quality education.

Violence caused by illegal armed groups and armed conflict. Despite the signing of the Peace Agreement between the FARC-EP and Government of Colombia in 2016,¹⁶ violence and the presence of armed insurgents persist in much of Colombia's territory. While the implementation of the agreement partially moves forward, other organized armed groups and illegal armed institutions have caused the persistence of conflict dynamics through the social and political control of territories, and activities related to illicit economies such as the use of illicit crops and the illegal exploitation of mineral resources (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023, p. 16). Schools are targets of attacks and are used for military purposes and control of the civilian population by different armed agents, affecting the guarantee of the right to education of children and adolescents, and their protection (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023, p.38).

Intersectionalities and attitudinal barriers. Economic precariousness frequently occurs in territories affected by violence and armed conflict, affecting the three targeted groups. This “double impact” setting can make potential victims, especially children and adolescents, vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Discrimination resulting from the simultaneous presence of two or more different vulnerabilities/dimensions in the same person or group can be analyzed from what is known as an intersectional approach. In Colombia, ethnicity, urban/rural locations, and gender intersect with poverty and violence (DANE, 2022), creating barriers to education for vulnerable populations. These discriminations produce attitudinal barriers that affect access, retention, and educational achievements. For example, “many individuals harbor prejudices (about migrants, persons who are disabled, etc.), which are unseen barriers, but are very difficult to change. This is also related to stereotypes about disability” (Governmental officials).

GIRLS WITH EARLY-AGE PREGNANCIES. Violence caused by illegal armed groups and armed conflict. An intersection between territorial violence, gender violence and early pregnancies has been noted. In this regard, one governmental official from SIR 3 reported:

“Girls who live in the rural areas and are pretty, healthy, virgin are seduced or abducted. X or Y of the armed group falls in love with her and kidnaps her. Gang members take girls on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and they return the girls to their families on Monday, or Tuesday. These girls are not using birth control. When they become pregnant, they are forced to have abortions. If the mother is against it, they are threatened with displacement. So, the mother opts to keep quiet.” Families may choose silence over objection to protect themselves from further violence. Rural girls are caught in a vicious cycle of abduction and forced silence, facing compounded challenges such as gender-based violence and a lack of control over their bodies. They are often coerced into relationships by armed groups and face increased risks of recruitment, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based violence (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023).

¹⁶ For more information on the contents of the Peace Agreement, see: <https://portalparalapaz.gov.co/explicacion-puntos-del-acuerdo/>

In this context of violence, it is important to note that cases of sexual violence in the conflict registered an increase of 15 percent in 2022 compared to 2021, according to official information from the Unit for Comprehensive Care and Reparation for Victims. The escalation of sexual violence has heightened the risk of internal displacement for families seeking to safeguard their daughters. As articulated by an informant from a multilateral organization, there are known instances where families have stated, “Someone from a gang or armed group took an interest in my daughter. Before they rape her, I’m moving with her from here.” Such circumstances are also contributing factors to the increase in school dropouts. Attitudinal barriers persist for young pregnant girls and marginalized groups, where stigma from some officials hinders the protection of their rights. As described by a government official, this prejudice often extends to teachers and community members, undermining support systems designed for their welfare.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES. Violence caused by illegal armed groups and armed conflict. In addition to extensive bibliographic evidence, violence caused by armed conflict and illegal armed groups has been identified at all levels – in interviews and SIRs – as one of the main negative factors in rural environments, affecting mostly areas where indigenous, Black, and Afro-Colombian communities live. In the words of one participant: “we are still seeing an intensification of war and criminal violence in some regions in Cauca and Chocó, which affects young people. In terms of access and retention in the educational system, we have an issue of violence, of war” (key informant from a Think Tank). The situation becomes so serious that “in Quibdó the children from a school in this neighborhood cannot go to the other school, because it is in an area where they can be killed if they cross that line. That has happened” (key informant from an international NGO).

There is a direct relationship between conflict and poverty, particularly in rural areas. Territories that have experienced a high level of armed conflict also show a significant lag in terms of development. Looking at the municipalities with Territorial Development and Focus Programs and the Multidimensional Poverty Index, it is notable that these municipalities are the ones especially affected by multidimensional poverty. Violence persists in Colombia, with an emphasis on rural and border areas, where armed groups exercise control. This widens the well-being gap between the countryside and urban centers. According to one informant, “if I don’t have access to a sustainable economic resource that allows me to negotiate for my life, I’m going to end up in the ranks of an armed group... and this is linked to drug trafficking (key informant from an international NGO). “In the transition, that is, Grade 9 to Grade 11, is where we lose the most boys and girls, and more men than women. When you look closely, there are violations in terms of poverty and violence that make boys the ones who leave, as education makes less sense to them,” mentions another informant (governmental official).

In this context, the recruitment and use of children and adolescents to join illegal armed groups continues, and it is transformed, as a result of territorial control by armed individuals, into more subtle and complex forms that, in addition to the traditional methods of organized armed groups, have seen the appearance of practices more typical of other armed institutions and organized crime (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023, p. 16). Between 2020-2022, 206 such related events were recorded, affecting about 532 victims in 27 of the 32 departments in the country (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023, p. 17), to which were added episodes of threats, violence, and homicides, together with the forced displacement of children and their

families. This worsening of the conflict in rural areas that particularly affects ethnic communities and migrants, can lead to an increase in dropouts (MEN, 2022a, p. 49).

The territorial control by illegal armed groups in Colombia has evolved into ongoing forced and volunteer recruitment, significantly impacting children and adolescents. Between 2020 and 2022, over 206 incidents were reported, affecting 532 individuals across the majority of the country's departments. Threats and violence lead to the forced displacement of families, thereby exacerbating the risk of school dropout, particularly in rural areas home to ethnic communities and migrants (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023). Educators face direct challenges in discouraging youth from joining these groups, which often entice students with the promise of wages, as a Montes de María teacher recounted (key informant from a multilateral organization). The fear of landmines and the potential for violent confrontations on school premises or during the commute make families reluctant to send their children to school. This environment of fear and instability, punctuated by the presence of armed groups that pose threats of sexual violence and recruitment, disrupts education access and retention, leading to school closures and class cancellations (UNICEF, ICBF, 2023). Afro-Colombian communities and indigenous groups in Colombia face significant attitudinal discrimination. This compounds their historical marginalization and hinders their access to equal protection and fair treatment within society.

VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS. Host communities and migratory phenomena. The effect of migration illustrates the need to adapt and strengthen existing support systems that guarantee the inclusion and well-being of the migrant population and maintain social cohesion in these regions. In host communities, tensions may arise due to the increase in demand for public services, such as health, education, housing, and employment. For example, stakeholders mentioned that in communities where there was a massive influx of migrant, problems arose regarding the availability of space in schools. Tensions and stereotypes toward migrants, which in turn could escalate to school violence, decreased academic performance, and/or increased school dropout rates. Additionally, Venezuelan migrants often encounter attitudinal barriers due to discrimination and stereotypes from host communities.

3.2.9. MULTILATERAL SUPPORT (RQ6)

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN COLOMBIA: OVERVIEW

Colombia has been a member country of the OECD since 2020, which is why it plays a dual role in the context of international cooperation: it is both a recipient of Official Development Assistance and a provider of South-South and triangular cooperation. In 2022, Colombia managed over \$500 million in non-reimbursable international cooperation projects, supported by various bilateral, multilateral, and private donors, with allocations across multiple regions. Key areas of funding included the migratory phenomenon (44 percent), conservation and environmental sustainability (13 percent), and territorial stabilization (12.5 percent). Major bilateral donors encompass the United States, the EU, and others, supplemented by UN agencies and international organizations. Notably, nine percent of the non-reimbursable educational funds received in 2021 were dedicated to supporting SDG 4, "Quality education".

The national government's demand strategy for international cooperation. Colombia's international cooperation priorities, historically guided by the National Strategy for International Cooperation (ENCI) 2019-2022 with a focus on migration and education, have evolved with the

“National Development Plan 2022-2026: Colombia, world power of life.” Current trends indicate a shift toward a holistic, multi-sectoral approach in education, emphasizing early and comprehensive training, strengthening regional secondary education in rural areas, teacher training, student welfare, school meals, infrastructure development, and bolstering territorial capacities. This refocus suggests the participatory development of work priorities in collaboration with international partners. The new ENCI 2023-2027 aligns with the PND, treating education as a pervasive rather than a standalone goal.

HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Education plans and programs with international cooperation. The research team’s findings suggest international support is centered on migration and peacebuilding (“peace with legality” in the government of President Duque and “total peace” in Petro’s government).

Education initiatives are nested under the triple Nexus: peace – humanitarian aid – development. Consequently, interventions to promote peacebuilding and development target areas with a high presence of illegal armed groups with acts of violence and displacement. Cooperation programs also focus on improving educational quality with activities such as teacher training in pedagogy, learning recovery, school coexistence, and the strengthening of family and community environments.

According to the **Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2023-2024** of the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela (R4V) of the Group for Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM), main priorities in education are: (1) promoting access and permanence in the education system, with emphasis on preschool and secondary education; (2) improving capacities of educational institutions and authorities and social welfare systems, teachers and preschool education providers; (3) recovery of learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, through curricular adaptation, greater flexibility in assessments and capacity building for teachers. Response modalities include technical assistance, capacity building and in-kind distribution. The work approach is multisectoral and contemplates coordination with different sectors including actions for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and protection of children against gender-based violence, among others (R4V, 2023, p. 148). In the case of migrants, particularly in the first phase of the response to mixed migratory flows from Venezuela, there was an important portfolio of humanitarian assistance initiatives. In this regard, in general, it should be noted that the demands of national partners for international cooperation often include the delivery of kits, educational materials, etc. and rapid responses, since the processes and deployment of actions of these partners tend to be more agile and rapid than those of the public sector.

In the context of **peacebuilding**, efforts by international and NGOs focus on rural and remote regions, like the Colombian Pacific and border areas. In contrast, urban centers, such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and the migrant transit area of Cúcuta, receive initiatives addressing the migratory phenomenon. The 2023-2024 Regional Migrant Response Plan targets border areas with Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama, and municipalities with high enrollment of Venezuelan refugee children and adolescents. (R4V, 2023, p. 148).

The following is an inventory of **specific projects, programs, and initiatives** that stakeholders in this study mentioned or that the research team identified in the literature review (for each, the main focus in terms of target groups of this study is specified):

- UNICEF has promoted flexible education models for students who are outside the system, such as the “Learning Circles” program, identified as a good practice to promote inclusion of Venezuelan migrants in the education system (UNESCO, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait, 2021, p. 3). Flexible models of education are particularly important for bringing girls and adolescents who have had early-age pregnancies back into the education system. UNICEF has also implemented the “Schools in Peace” and “Ethno-education” strategies, among others (main target: ethnic groups).
- Within the framework of the “Together We Learn (*Juntos Aprendemos*)” program, financed by USAID, the Carvajal Foundation’s Aula Global project has been mentioned as a good practice in the same study (UNESCO, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait, 2021, p. 3) and has sought to reduce the rates of grade repetition and school dropout of Venezuelan children and adolescents, through group training for teachers, support for families to improve study habits at home and personalized tutoring for students in difficulty. The *Juntos Aprendemos* program also implements flexible educational models (main target: migrants).
- “Let’s All Learn to Read” (*Aprendamos Todos A Leer*), promoted by the IDB, has had experimental evaluations that show evidence of improvements over other traditional teaching methods. As a result, it was adopted as public policy by Colombia and Panama (main target: ethnic groups).
- Save the Children, among different initiatives implemented, seeks to recover and strengthen reading and writing skills in children and adolescents living in poverty, inhabitants of marginalized areas after the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the “Reading Clubs” project. The impact evaluation of the project showed positive results (Save the Children, 2023, p. 7) (main target: ethnic groups).
- UNHCR and the partner Legal Option have sought to provide educational institutions with tools to promote pedagogical adaptation to the challenges associated with the arrival of children and adolescents in refugee and migration situations to schools with a focus on rural areas, aiming at inclusion, interculturalism and respect for difference, and the prevention of xenophobia.
- The Norwegian Refugee Council has implemented rural education initiatives to combat school dropout in high conflict-affected areas (main target: ethnic groups).
- In the area of work on early-age pregnancy, UNFPA, in partnership with the ICBF Institute, has carried out programmatic initiatives to guarantee sexual education outside school, such as the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Outside School Project, financed by Norway. It should be noted that there are a limited number of cooperation initiatives in this area (main target: early-age pregnancies).

CHALLENGES

Rigorous M&E practices emerged as a key challenge that donors and international partners face when implementing education activities. Although evidence-based programs are being

implemented in the country (see inventory above), some stakeholders consulted highlighted the lack of consistent M&E rigor in multilateral education activities. They stated that this was the case on the use of robust indicators and the design of interventions that incorporate an impact evaluation to produce evidence supporting program effectiveness. A key informant from a Think Tank explained, “The lack of an evaluation culture is in itself a barrier.”

Another issue is the use of one-size-fits all approached. In the case of the “Juntos Aprendemos” program, likely the largest international cooperation education program in the country, some informants pointed out that it can be complex to adapt the program model from one city to another. This could be due to the diverse number of implementing partners, depending on the area of intervention. Similarly, it was mentioned that the programmatic scope might be too broad and comprehensive, which could lead to the achievement of significant results in some components and less in others.¹⁷

COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN EDUCATION

In Colombia, the MEN, through its Office of Cooperation and International Affairs, plays a pivotal role in coordinating efforts for inclusive education, especially in crises such as displacements and natural disasters. This coordination includes the national education cluster’s activities to identify educational needs, formulate responses, and foster alliances. The effectiveness of these coordination efforts is widely acknowledged by stakeholders, highlighting the crucial support of international cooperation in enhancing state initiatives and preventing duplications. A notable quote from a stakeholder praises the coordination mechanisms: “The mechanisms work well,” and “All actions are coordinated. International cooperation has been key to supporting state efforts” (governmental official). Furthermore, the significance of international cooperation at the local level is underscored by the challenges posed by complexities and high turnover rates among officials.

In migration-related matters, coordination is further structured through the GIFMM at the regional level and its corresponding national framework. Despite the generally positive feedback on educational cooperation mechanisms and the MEN’s coordinating role, challenges persist, particularly in projects tackling migration issues, where **competition among actors and fragmentation of efforts are notable** concerns. This paradoxically occurs in areas with well-established coordination frameworks, leading to a lack of alignment and teamwork. As one actor stated, “We all think that what we do is the right thing to do, and sure it is, but there is no sense of teamwork [with other donors and multilateral agencies]” (key informant from a Multilateral agency). Additionally, the National Roundtable on Sexual Education represents a collaborative effort involving various governmental bodies, universities, NGOs, and international partners to address early-age pregnancies, highlighting the multi-faceted approach to inclusive education in Colombia.

¹⁷ There is not enough information available to triangulate these statements, but given the importance of this program, the research team recommends that such issues receive greater attention during program evaluations.

3.3. EL SALVADOR OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

3.3.1. EDUCATION SYSTEM SNAPSHOT

El Salvador General Education Law outlines policies to ensure access to education and democratize the education system. These policies involve developing appropriate infrastructure, securing qualified staff, and providing relevant curricular resources. The law mandates free and compulsory preschool, primary education, and free special education services when offered by the state. Primary education typically spans nine years, encompassing Grades 1 through 9 (UNESCO, 2021).

Early childhood covers ages zero to three, with kindergarten students being four to six years of age. Basic education is Grades 1 through 9, divided into three cycles of three grades each. Secondary education consists of a two-year general high school or three-year technical high school degree.

The Salvadoran school system is centralized, with 14 departmental (subnational) offices assisting 5,935 schools (public, private, and subsidized).

- **Enrollment.** For 2023, the MINEDUCYT reported an enrollment of 1,239,052 students, with 555,148 enrolled in rural schools. Even though 75 percent of schools are rural, 45 percent of students are enrolled in rural areas, since rural schools tend to be smaller and have lower enrollment (MINEDUCYT, 2023). The total number of children enrolled in school decreased in 2022 as compared to 2012 (ibid.).
- **Educational attainment.** Regarding the average number of years of schooling, the national average in 2021 was 7.1 grades, with an urban average of 8.1 grades and a rural average of 5.5 grades (Household Survey, EHPM 2021, conducted by the National Office of Statistics and Census, ONEC).

3.3.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EL SALVADOR

According to information from the desk review, key informants, and SIR participants, both El Salvador's Inclusive Education Policy (2010) and USAID's Inclusive Education Policy (2018) share common goals and principles related to inclusive education: (1) Both policies emphasize the importance of providing educational opportunities to all individuals, regardless of their background or abilities. They recognize the need to eliminate barriers to access and participation, promoting equal opportunities for marginalized populations. (2) Both policies prioritize expanding access to quality education. They stress the significance of safe, affordable, and inclusive educational environments that address diverse student needs. (3) Both policies view inclusive education as central to empowering schools, strengthening the education system, and facilitating community participation. However, El Salvador's and USAID's inclusive education policies also exhibit differences in their definitions, approaches, and specific focus areas: (1) El Salvador's policy highlights the importance of consistent laws, financial support, and school safety. However, it does not delve into specific educational outcomes or essential skills development, while USAID's policy places a strong emphasis on essential skills development, including reading, writing, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and socio-emotional skills. USAID also stresses evidence-based best practices in education. (2) El Salvador's policy lacks a detailed implementation framework. By contrast, the USAID policy provides a comprehensive framework, emphasizing the fortification of local

institutions, data-driven decision-making, and targeted efforts to enhance learning outcomes and capacity building for educators and administrators.

3.3.3. MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS

Group 1. Girls, especially from rural areas. The IELEA research team calculated net enrollment rates using Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples (EHPM) 2020 data for children aged 7 to 12 years old. Enrollment rates for girls in urban areas in El Salvador was 95.9 percent, compared to 95.7 percent for girls from rural areas. Thus, the research team did not find significant differences between both.¹⁸ In terms of adolescent girls, in 2017, there was a total enrollment of 395,983 female students from the second education cycle through high school, with 105,229 in the capital, San Salvador (UNFPA, 2019). The country sees a higher dropout rate among girls beginning in the early primary grades. This disparity with boys widens by secondary school. Disinterest is cited by 40.5 percent of girls aged 7 to 15 as the primary cause for leaving school, a figure that reduces to 30 percent among 16- to 18-year-olds. Meanwhile, 16 percent of girls in the older age bracket dropout of education to fulfill domestic duties, unlike their male peers, who typically enter the workforce at a similar age. This withdrawal pattern is often due to poor academic performance in early grades and pervasive social norms prioritizing domestic responsibilities and early childbearing for women (World Bank, 2022).

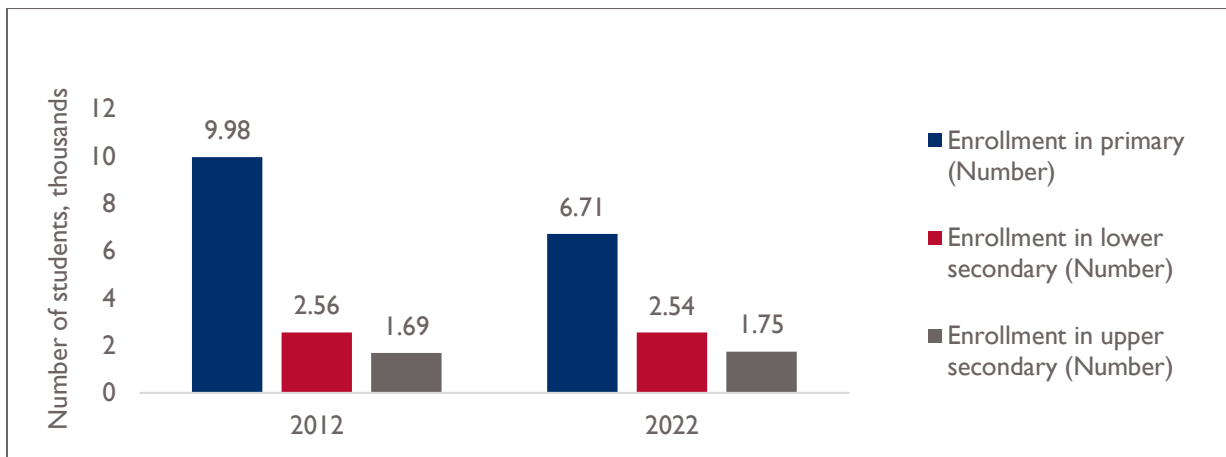
The country also has a notable incidence of adolescent pregnancies, which is higher compared to its neighboring countries. Reports from 2017 indicated that between 14 percent and 16 percent of all educational institutions experienced student pregnancies across primary and secondary levels. Despite protective legislation such as the Crecer Juntos Law (Growing Together) safeguarding the educational rights of pregnant students, approximately 75 percent of these students discontinued their schooling in the same year (OECD, 2024). According to the General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses (DIGESTYC), in 2019, before the pandemic, 2.6 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age were married or in common law relationships, with 61 percent of these adolescents from rural areas (DIGESTYC, 2021). The UNFPA (2019) Adolescent Pregnancy Map indicates that these early marriages generally occur before pregnancy, but then pregnancy becomes an obstacle to studying, manifested as a form of violence against these young mothers.

Group 2. Children with disabilities. As of 2017, the MINEDUCYT reported that there were 10,099 students with disabilities, of which 30 percent were visually impaired. No information is available for children with disabilities out of the school system. The 2021 National Health Survey, utilizing the Washington Group on Disability Statistics' international standards, defines disability as varying levels of functional difficulty. The survey reveals that 7.3 percent of children aged 0 to 14 experience some degree of disability, with an additional 2.2 percent facing severe challenges. For those aged 15 to 29, the disability prevalence stands at 8.4 percent, with a further 2.8 percent encountering critical difficulties (UNPFA, 2023).

¹⁸ Data from OECD estimates primary net enrollment rates for girls at 83.5 percent for year 2020, but the research team was not able to replicate this finding. Furthermore, data officially calculated for relevant age groups by gender is not available by geographic area (urban/rural).

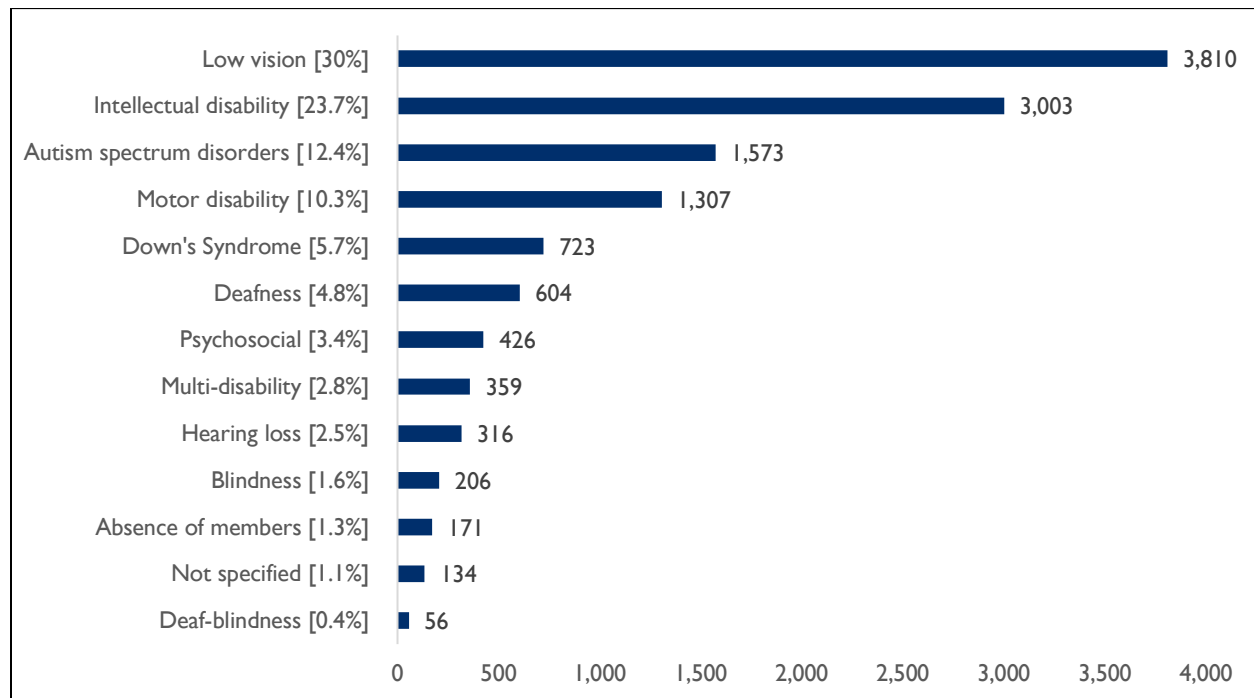
Using the *Censo escolar, Ministerio De Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología* (2012, 2022), the IECLA research team estimated the number of learners with disabilities by education level. FIGURE 13 shows the estimated total number of learners with disabilities by education level for 2012 and 2022. El Salvador’s information system, the Sistema de Información para la Gestión Educativa Salvadoreña (SIGES) 2023 enrollment dashboards indicated that there were 12,688 learners with disabilities enrolled (0.99 percent of total learners enrolled), but data is not available by education level. FIGURE 14 shows the number of learners by disability type for 2023.

FIGURE 13. EL SALVADOR. LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES BY EDUCATION LEVEL, 2012 AND 2022



Source: Authors’ calculation based on Censo Escolar. MINEDUCYT 2012 and 2022.

FIGURE 14. EL SALVADOR. LEARNERS BY DISABILITY TYPE, 2023



Source: Own adaptations using [SIGES 2023 enrollment dashboard](#).

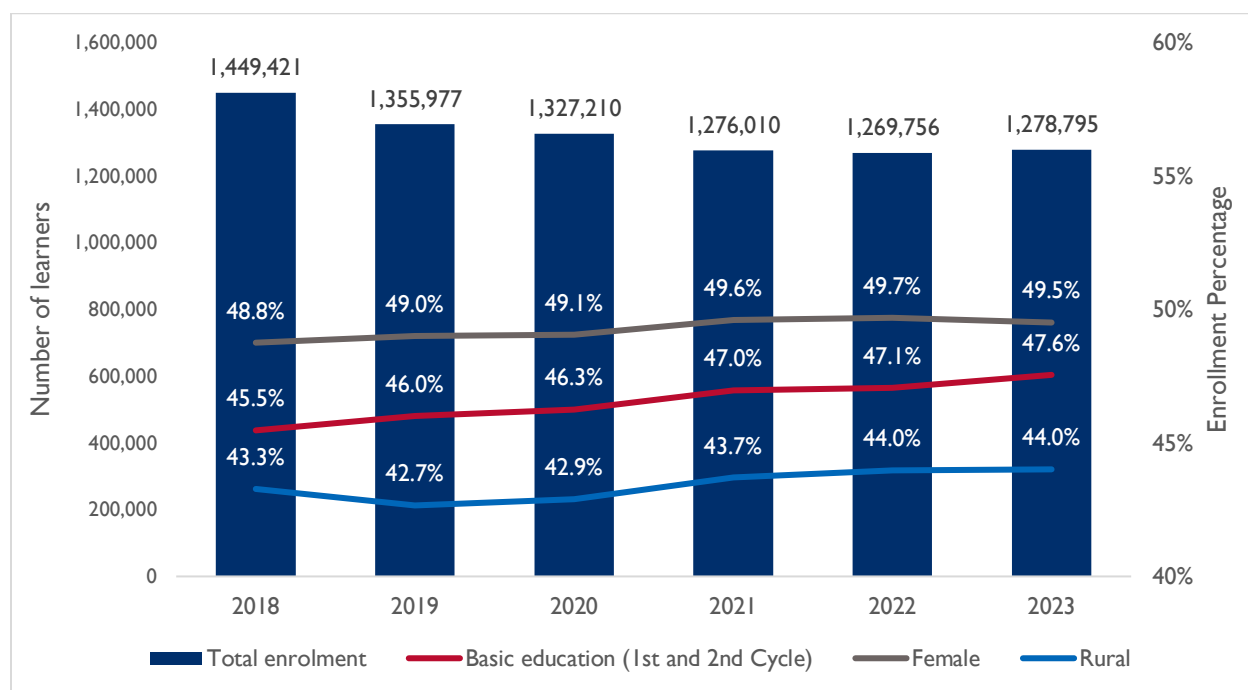
Group 3. Returned migrants and persons internally displaced due to violence. In El Salvador, migration related factors such as human mobility, including migration abroad, internal displacement, forced return, residence by foreign nationals, and transient movement through the country determine educational enrollment, attainment, completion, and learning outcomes. Although each scenario presents unique challenges, they commonly disrupt educational paths due to family circumstances or compulsion. The 2022 State of Exception anti-gang policy has further exacerbated these disruptions, leading to increased migration, displacement, and the emergence of children who, due to parental incarceration, must either fend for themselves or assume caretaking roles for their siblings. A report from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT) Observatory (2018) on factors that contribute to dropout indicated that 66.32 percent of schools affirmed that a change of residence contributes to the likelihood of school dropout. Dropout due to migration (understood as external) is reported by 45.31 percent of schools; however, it is unknown if the students return later. MINEDUCYT Observatory (2018) also reported 4,344 foreign students in public and private schools, of which 49 percent were students from other Central American countries, 44 percent from North American countries, and 7 percent from countries in South America or elsewhere. Data limitations exist as IDPs are not reported due to political sensitivities. While returned migrant children are tracked by Foreign and Immigration Services, their school enrollment status is not recorded. Additionally, MINEDUCYT does not register these data in the SIGES system, further complicating efforts to assess the educational impact on these vulnerable populations accurately.

3.3.4. EDUCATION ACCESS AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT (RQ1)

ACCESS DATA

The following figure summarizes El Salvador enrollment data for the 2018-2023 period. As noted in the figure, overall enrollment decreased for all years except for 2023. The highest decrease during the period was in 2019, with a 6.4 percent reduction over the 2018 figure. Enrollment increased 0.7 percent in 2023 over 2022. The years when the greatest reduction was recorded could be linked to factors such as migration, forced displacement due to violence, and economic conditions. In 2020, a determining factor in education systems worldwide was the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the virtual or semi-face-to-face modality of classes. However, enrollment data trends do not show deep shocks for that particular year, and, according to MINEDUCYT, the dropout rate for 2020 was only 2.4 percent, lower than other years (4.6 percent for 2018, 4.2 percent for 2019 and 5.4 percent for 2021).

FIGURE 15. EL SALVADOR. ENROLLMENT STATISTICS, 2018 – 2023



Source: 2018-2022, adapted from [“Observatorio de Niñez y Adolescencia”](#) (Childhood and Adolescence Observatory), citing MINEDUCT statistics. 2023: Own adaptations using [SIGES 2023 enrollment dashboard](#).

The figure also shows enrollment composition for female learners, learners from rural areas, and primary education (first and second basic education cycles) as a percentage of total enrollment numbers. The participation of each group shows small fluctuations for the period. In the five-year period, both female and rural participation increased 0.7 percentage points.

TABLE 12 shows the reasons for dropouts for the period of 2018 to 2021. MINEDUCT clarifies that the causes for dropping out registered in the school and SIGES refer only to the causes known to the teachers. That is, when the student reports the reason behind why they are leaving the school.

TABLE 12. EL SALVADOR. CAUSE FOR DROPOUTS, 2018 – 2021

CAUSE FOR DROP OUT	2018	2019	2020	2021
International migration	12.1%	18.5%	2.2%	7.2%
Accident	0.0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Poor academic performance	5.4%	12.1%	31.2%	22.4%
Bullying	N/A	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
Change of address of the student	37.7%	24.1%	12.1%	13.3%
Caring for a relative	N/A	0.7%	0.7%	0.4%
Delinquency	3.6%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%
Economic hardship	4.5%	3.8%	9.8%	3.3%
The school is a long way away	1.4%	1.3%	0.4%	0.8%
Pregnancy	0.8%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%
Migrated to the Educame ¹⁹ system	0.9%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%
Illness	1.5%	1.7%	0.9%	1.2%
Parents don't want them to attend school	6.0%	9.2%	7.2%	10.3%
Natural death of the student	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Student accidental death	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Death by murder of student	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other causes	5.3%	7.2%	26.5%	21.5%
Other student work	1.9%	4.6%	5.9%	4.0%
Went to another school	11.0%	13.1%	0.7%	12.7%
Have a physical disability	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Agricultural work	3.8%	0.5%	0.8%	1.0%

¹⁹ Educame is a flexible education program designed to re-engage Salvadoran dropouts in education. The program is part of a broader effort to reduce illiteracy in the country.

CAUSE FOR DROP OUT	2018	2019	2020	2021
Work on the student's housework	2.1%	0.8%	0.3%	0.6%
Victim of forced displacement	0.7%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
Victim of gangs	0.8%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: adapted from "[Observatorio de Niñez y Adolescencia](#)" (Childhood and Adolescence Observatory), citing MINEDUCYT statistics.

Values highlighted in the table highlight the major causes for dropouts. For 2021, accounting for 22.4 percent, poor academic performance was the main reason for dropping out of school, followed by "other causes" at 21.5 percent, and change of address at 13.3 percent. International migration was among the main causes for dropping out in 2018 and 2019, representing up to 18.5 of dropouts for 2019. This trend, however, significantly decreased in 2020 and 2021.

PRIMARY EDUCATION – ERCE LEARNING RESULTS

The research team analyzed learning results from the 2019 ERCE study, which was administered to 11,734 boys and girls (5,814 in third grade and 5,920 in sixth grade), to measure what students know and are capable of doing according to the national curriculum. Overall results are shown in TABLE 13.

TABLE 13. EL SALVADOR. ERCE RESULTS. 2019.

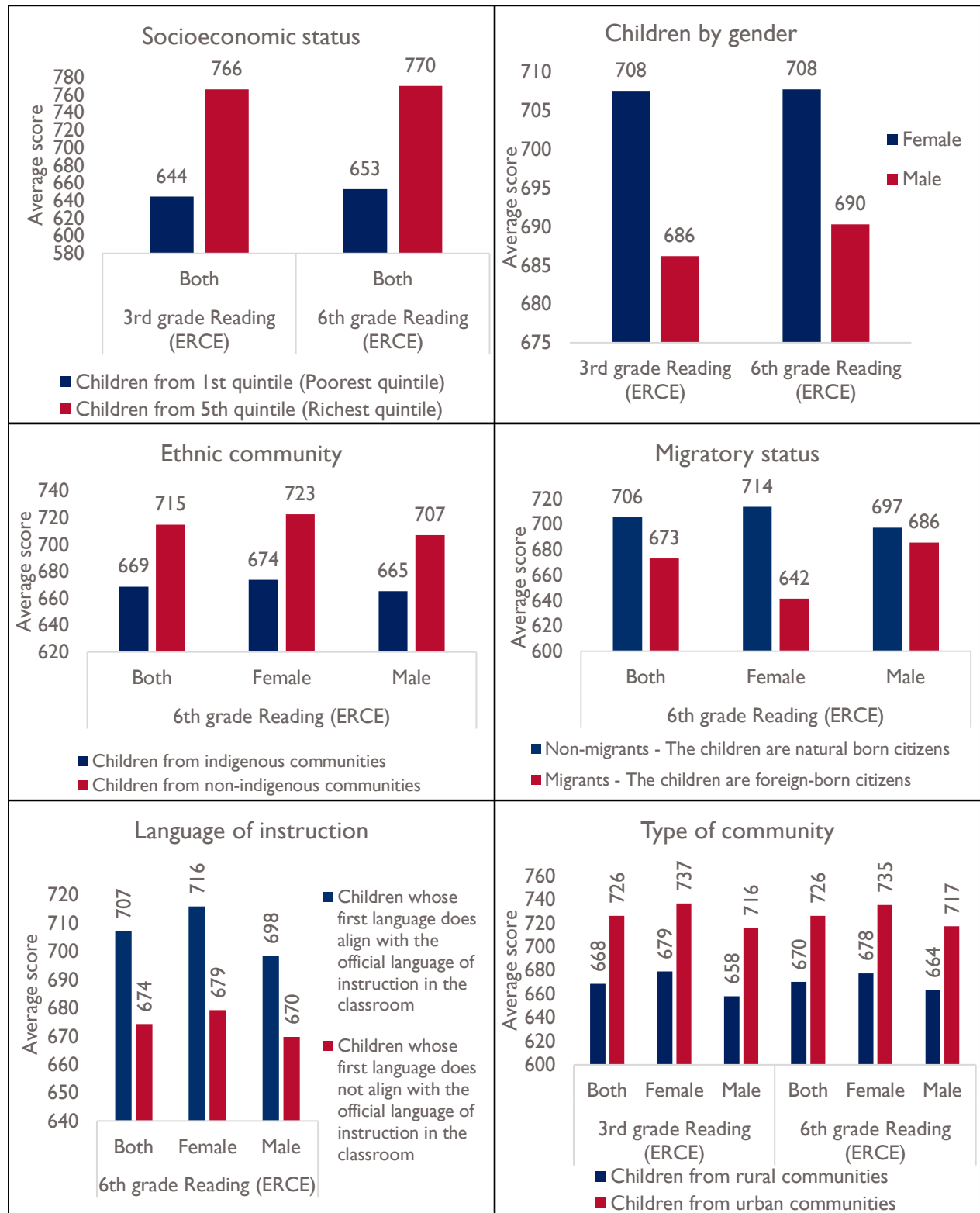
GRADE	CURRICULUM AREA	AVERAGE SCORE	COMPARISON WITH REGIONAL AVERAGE	COMPARISON WITH TERCE	GENDER DIFFERENCES
3 rd Grade	Reading	697	0	N/A	21 points higher among girls*
	Math	691	-7*	N/A	5 points higher among girls
6 th grade	Reading	699	+3	N/A	17 points higher among girls*
	Math	676	-21*	N/A	4 points higher among boys
	Natural Sciences	705	+3	N/A	5 points higher among girls

Source: 2019 UNESCO ERCE Study Report for El Salvador.

Note: The asterisk * indicates statistically significant differences.

As shown in the table above, average reading learning scores in El Salvador are similar to regional averages, with no statistical significance differences between both. However, results in the area of mathematics are below average (by 7 points and 21 points for third and sixth grade, respectively). With regard to gender, results in reading are higher among girls. Next, FIGURE 11 shows the learning results, by grade and gender, type of community, SES, ethnic group, and migratory status.

FIGURE 16. EL SALVADOR. ERCE READING SCORES BY MARGINALIZED GROUP, 2019



Source: Own calculations with microdata from UNESCO ERCE 2019. Differences are statistically significant.

The figure shows that in general, ERCE reading scores for El Salvador are lower for marginalized groups, with all differences being statistically significant. Girls outperform boys in reading, they achieve a higher mean reading score than boys in both grades (Grades 3 and 6). The differences are even more pronounced in rural communities. The average reading score of children in the lowest quintile of the income distribution was 644 and 652 in third and sixth grades respectively, compared to 766 and 770 for learners from the highest quintile, equivalent to 15.9 and 15.19 percent differences, respectively. Children from indigenous communities have a 6.4 percent lower reading score in sixth grade than children from non-indigenous backgrounds. These results hold for the other marginalized groups, and are statistically significant.

Annex C1 includes more information for math scores. The Annex shows gender gaps in mathematics achievement favoring boys in both third and sixth grade. Girls in both urban and rural areas lag behind boys, particularly in sixth grade. Children in lower socioeconomic quintiles show lower performance in mathematics than children in the fifth quintile. On average, math performance is lower for children from marginalized groups compared to their peers. In addition, the three marginalized groups show a gender gap in mathematics performance that favors boys. Results for enrollment estimates by marginalized groups are also available in Annex C2. Internal data calculations show that the number of children enrolled in school decreases as the level of education increases.

3.3.5. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (RQ2)

The MINEDUCYT relies on SIGES as its information system. Among SIGES' mandates is to document education statistics, including data on enrollment, registration, re-registration, changes in grade, change of educational center, and risk factors for dropping out or children missing school for a day. SIGES is also used to monitor teacher attendance. Additionally, SIGES records risk-factor data including: (1) early warnings related to academics, performance, school attendance, and age; (2) marital status related to pregnancy, mother/father, accompanied, married; and (3) social factors related to child labor, manifestation of violence (victim of domestic violence, gangs, or verbal aggression).

BARRIERS TO COLLECT AND USE DATA

General Barriers. According to governmental officers, multilateral agency representatives, and SIR participants in this study, barriers to collecting and using data from SIGES include:

1. **Limited staff trained in data management** and data collection methods since this would require more work for already overwhelmed teachers and principals. These issues result in an unreliable system that forces certain educational institutions to have their own registry.
2. **Ambiguous criteria for reporting cases**, including violence, disability, school dropout, early pregnancy, and rural status, among others, in light of discretion given to teaching staff or omissions that would not reflect formal diagnoses.
3. **Data fragmentation.** Limited cross-referencing within the levels of the education system (national, departmental, and school), with other governmental sectors, and with other data producing institutions from academia and civil society organizations.

- a. Within the education system:
 - i. The SIGES does not collect data on undocumented populations and/or migrants at the borders.
 - ii. The SIGES does not collect data on LGBTQI+ students. This population was unrecognized even before recent events to eliminate any references to sexual diversity or inclusion from the national curriculum. This has been a highly publicized initiative emanating from the executive branch of government. The pushback on “gender ideology” or reference to gender, sexual and reproductive education, or even inclusion and diversity communicates blatant discrimination and no immediate possibility of inclusive education for the gender-diverse student population.
 - b. With other government agencies:
 - i. SIGES lacks coordination with other data systems such as health, Dataset Records for General Directorate of Statistics and Census, local mayors, and NGOs. Additionally, universities in El Salvador do not effectively leverage the education data gathered by SIGES for research that could inform decision-making.
 - c. With civil society organizations:
 - i. According to key informants and SIR participants, given the centralized nature of the data procedures, data from social organizations are not integrated into SIGES. These organizations also work with marginalized populations (children and adolescents with disabilities, children and adolescents of sex-gender diversity, dissidents, among others) and have already made some progress that could feed into already existing information.
4. **Lack of mechanisms to track out of school children.** According to key informants from NGOs that work with schools and communities, SIGES has streamlined the enrollment process with set deadlines, but subsequent steps mandated by MINEDUCYT are more complex. Currently, schools maintain data only on enrolled students, lacking mechanisms to track those who drop out. However, the Crecer Juntos legislation (2022) advocates home visits as a best practice to encourage families to keep their children in school.
5. **Political will.** According to key informants, while the country possesses the necessary technical and technological capabilities to develop a comprehensive educational statistics system, there is an apparent deficit in political will and commitment to address specific issues related to social exclusion.

Barriers to collect and use data on children with disabilities. The CRPD (2019) identified the absence of a comprehensive system to collect disaggregated data on children with disabilities in El Salvador. This deficiency mainly affects children with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, whether they are in segregated or mainstream education settings. The lack of detailed data impedes the design of effective public policies tailored to the needs of these children. Additionally, educational institutions in El

Salvador do not maintain a consistent system for data collection, resulting in non-unified internal records. There are notable gaps in diagnostic services, underscoring the need for strategic coordination with the Ministry of Health.

Barriers to collect and use data on girls, especially from rural areas. The EMIS in EL Salvador collects and shares education data disaggregated by sex. The EMIS also collects and disaggregates data by geographic location. Thus, official education data on rural girl learners is available through the EMIS (gross enrollment numbers). This study identified barriers to obtaining official information on the education status of girls with early pregnancies. The lack of coordination between government systems is a key barrier for collecting comprehensive data on school enrollment and completion for girls with early pregnancies. Specifically, there is a notable absence of integration between the Ministry of Education, which maintains educational enrollment data, and the Ministry of Health, which holds information on health services, diseases, and instances of adolescent pregnancy. This disconnection hampers the ability to effectively track and support the educational progress of young mothers.

Barriers to collect and use data on returned migrants and persons internally displaced due to violence. In the context of tracking returned migrants and internally displaced populations within the SIGES system, challenges are compounded by the transient nature of these groups and their reluctance to register due to fear. News reports cite 14,441 deported Salvadorans in 2022, 9,147 in 2021, and 10,181 in 2020.²⁰ In 2021, IOM reported 2,880 deported minors: 1,701 male and 1,173 female.²¹

Key informants, including a technical expert from an international NGO, acknowledged the complexity of monitoring and managing the data due to the constant movement of these populations. Additionally, an international cooperation agency officer suggested that fear plays a significant role, as individuals are apprehensive about how their information might be utilized.

3.3.6. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES (RQ3)

The 1983 Constitution of El Salvador upholds the right to education. It prohibits educational institutions from denying students admission based on their parents' marital status or differences related to social, religious, racial, or political factors. The 2010 Inclusive Education Policy aims to address the needs of children, adolescents, and young people who fall into various categories: (1) those who are not enrolled in school; (2) individuals who are not making expected academic progress or advancing significantly ahead of their peers; (3) students who experience grade repetition or are of an age not typical for their grade level or have dropped out of school; and (4) those marginalized within the school environment due to their affiliation with marginalized groups (such as students with special educational needs or ethnic minorities) or because of their gender or social status.

²⁰ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/70714-salvadorenos-fueron-retornados-desde-2019-segun-datos-de-Migracion-20230324-0106.html>

²¹ https://nortedecentroamerica.iom.int/es/search?keywords=el+salvador&type%5B%5D=resources&created=&All&sort_bef_combine=search_api_relevance_DESC

This policy enhances the focus on diversity within schools by implementing effective inclusive education initiatives. Recent educational policy in El Salvador (Social Educational Plan 2009-2018, Torogoz Plan 2019-2024) encourages the development of an education system that achieves peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, and relevant education. The Grow Together Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Early Childhood, Childhood, and Adolescence (2023) launched by the First Lady of El Salvador promotes the maximum development of children from zero to eight years old.

TABLE 14 presents a summary of El Salvador’s policies for inclusive education and the level of progress of its legal framework and institutional coordination. As shown in TABLE 14, the IELA research team classified the legal framework to guarantee quality education for girls from rural areas as advanced, and the coordination among institutions to implement the existing policies as emerging. For children and young people with disabilities, the team classified the inclusive education legal framework as emerging, and the institutional coordination as emerging. Finally, for returned migrants and IDPs, the team classified the legal framework as emerging and the institutional coordination as latent.

TABLE 14. EL SALVADOR. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
GIRLS (ESPECIALLY FROM RURAL AREAS)			Advanced	Emerging
Inclusive Education Policy of 2010	Initiative to respond to the diversity of educational needs, recognize differences, and intervene in populations with obstacles to academic progress.	Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1990 that guarantees children and young people (aged 17 and under) free quality education.		
Growing Together Law of 2022 (Decree No. 431)	Set of initiatives and provisions to promote the maximum development of children from zero to eight years old.			
Protocol for School Permanence of Pregnant Girls and Adolescents or those who are already	Establishes guidelines to reduce school dropout rates among pregnant girls, adolescents, and early mothers.	International Conference on Population and Development. Program of Action of 1994. Recognizes the sexual and reproductive health		

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
Mothers of 2020		and rights of adolescents.		
National Women's Policy of 2009	Promotes access to sex and reproductive education.			
CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES			Emerging	Emerging
Special Law on the Inclusion of People with Disabilities of 2020	Establishes that the State will help guarantee the elimination of barriers that hinder the full development of persons with disabilities.	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006: emphasizes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion for people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including education.		
Inclusive Education Policy of 2010	Initiative to respond to the diversity of educational needs, recognize differences, and intervene in populations with obstacles to academic progress.	Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities from Organization of American States.		
RETURNED MIGRANTS / INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDP) DUE TO VIOLENCE			Emerging	Latent
Growing Together Law of 2022 (Decree No. 431)	Set of initiatives and provisions to promote the maximum development of children from zero to eight years old.	UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families of 1960: recognizes the right to education for migrant children, emphasizing that they should have access to education on an equal basis with		

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
		nationals of the host country.		
Special Law for the Salvadoran Migrant and Family of 2011	Legal framework for support for returning migrants, in public services, including education.			
Special Law for Integral Assistance and Protection of Persons in the Situation of Forced Internal Displacement of 2020	Access to education of internally displaced children and youth in place of residence.			

POLICIES BY TARGET GROUP

Girls (especially from rural areas). The 2010 Inclusive Education Policy of El Salvador actively addresses the diverse educational needs of marginalized groups, including those with special educational needs, belonging to ethnic minorities, or differentiated by gender and social standing. Specifically, the policy encompasses girls in rural areas who often face unique educational challenges. Moreover, the 2020 Protocol for School Permanence of Pregnant Girls and Adolescents or Early Mothers lays out vital guidelines designed to lower the dropout rates of this demographic by ensuring their ability to remain in school and complete their education. Complementing this, the National Women’s Policy of 2009 advocates for increased access to sexual and reproductive education, aiming to inform and empower young women. Despite the establishment of these policies, significant implementation gaps persist, particularly in rural regions where early pregnancy rates are notably higher. Among these are the omission of comprehensive sexual education within schools, persistent social and gender norms that unfairly stigmatize pregnant students, and a shortfall in the enforcement of laws designed to protect and support young mothers on their educational journey.

Children and youth with disabilities. El Salvador has adopted legislation and policies that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, such as the Special Law of Inclusion for People with Disabilities of 2020 that seeks to guarantee the exercise and full enjoyment of rights by all girls, boys, and adolescents, regardless of their disability; promotes the implementation of universal design in private, municipal, and public sector entities; and establishes the sign language as an official language. However, there is limited progress in the implementation of the law due to (1) insufficient data and information regarding the number of children with disabilities in both segregated and mainstream schools, making it difficult to plan and allocate resources effectively; (2) the absence of a comprehensive national strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education, resulting in fragmented efforts and inconsistent policies; (3) the need to reallocate budgetary resources from segregated classrooms and schools to support mainstream educational settings; (4) inadequate accessibility measures in educational facilities, including the presence of architectural and communication barriers that hinder the participation of children with disabilities (CRPD, 2019); (5) removed decision-making authority from families in cases involving individuals with disabilities requiring assistance; (6) the elimination of scholarships, which are necessary for children and youth with a disability from rural sectors, and who are the most affected by poverty (key informant from a NGO that works with people with disabilities); and (7) lack of inter-institutional coordination among health institutions, schools, and NGOs.

Returned migrants/ IDPs due to violence. The Growing Together Law (2021) ensures that all girls, boys, and adolescents can exercise their rights fully regardless of nationality. Similarly, the Special Law for Salvadoran Migrants and their Families of 2011 supports returning migrants, including access to public services such as education. Additionally, the Special Law for Integral Assistance and Protection of Persons in Situations of Forced Internal Displacement of 2020 facilitates access to education for internally displaced children and youth in their current places of residence.

Regarding the policy implementation, there is a concern about the absence of adequate measures to guarantee the successful, long-term resettlement and reintegration of repatriated unaccompanied migrant children into their respective home communities. The Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (UN, 2014) raises concerns about the well-being of children and adolescents in El Salvador whose parents have emigrated, particularly concerning their family life and access to education.

Inclusive education practices. Since 2005, El Salvador offers flexible education modalities to help address vulnerabilities faced by the three targeted populations of this study. The flexible modalities refer to adaptable and responsive approaches to learning and educational delivery that accommodate students' diverse needs, circumstances, and preferences. These modalities provide flexibility regarding time, location, and instructional methods and include adult literacy classes and night school, blended learning, accelerated learning programs, virtual education modalities, tutorials for various academic levels, proficiency tests, workforce readiness and wrap-around services training (UNICEF, 2022b)

The flexible modalities support youth with early-age pregnancies and early-age mothers who, due to their new responsibilities, need to study over the weekend or at night. These models are also helpful for low-income populations who do not have the resources to go to school, populations affected by gangs, and returning citizens. In 2022, 597 (298 men, 299 women) Salvadoran returnees from 19 different countries benefited from these services (2 percent classes, 98 percent sufficiency tests). The main

countries from which beneficiary migrants returned in 2022 were Honduras, the United States, and Mexico.

Despite the progress in El Salvador's policy framework, notable gaps in policy implementation remain: (1) limited legal support for the LGBTQI+ community concerning educational inclusion; (2) inadequate and fragmented investments from various sectors, including government agencies, NGOs, CSOs, and multilateral organizations, aimed at strengthening education and serving marginalized populations; (3) insufficient coordination between institutions, allocation of resources, and training of personnel. The success of these actions heavily relies on the political will and commitment of those responsible; and (4) the need for contextualization, with specific attention to both rural and urban areas, particularly those historically marginalized due to gang presence.

3.3.7. ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF EDUCATION QUALITY (RQ4)

The upcoming sections will analyze the impact of school environments on marginalized learners' access to education (RQ4), emphasizing school, teacher, and classroom-level factors. They will also examine how community and family influences affect these learners' educational access (RQ5), with a focus on each marginalized group.

SCHOOL- AND CLASSROOM-LEVEL FACTORS

Schools, teachers, and classroom environments all play a critical role in shaping a student's access to education. A welcoming school environment that prioritizes student safety and well-being can influence attendance and engagement. Supportive teachers who cater to diverse learning needs and styles and create a positive classroom climate can motivate students and make learning more accessible.

Conversely, schools with inadequate infrastructure or classrooms with limited resources located outside the communities where students live can create barriers to learning and discourage participation. The interplay between these factors significantly impacts a student's ability to attend school, feel comfortable, and ultimately achieve their academic potential.

Lack of sequence between the different educational levels. SIR participants explained that one barrier to marginalized populations accessing quality education is the lack of sequence between primary and secondary level. This is confirmed by data that show that of the 5,161 public schools in El Salvador, only 1,012 offer secondary education, which is related to the fact that all grades are not available in all areas (MINEDUCYT, 2023).

Lack of school infrastructure Another barrier is deficient infrastructure and resources, such as adequate lighting and ventilation in classrooms, adequate bathrooms with running water, libraries, science equipment/laboratories, computers, specialized textbooks, etc.

Lack of educational relevance. In 2019, 40 percent of children who were not in school cited a lack of interest as the primary reason for their absence (World Bank, 2022), which means that school content lacks relevance for students. They do not feel engaged or motivated. According to key informants, many students and parents consider that the school does not meet students' needs.

GIRLS, ESPECIALLY FROM RURAL AREAS. School distance. Another barrier mentioned by SIR participants is the long distance between home and school and the cost and effort involved in attending classes.

Disconnect with families. In addressing rural girls' educational challenges in accessing quality education, key informants highlighted the disconnect between schools, families, and communities. A critical barrier is the perception that some families prioritize domestic responsibilities over formal education for girls, undervaluing the importance of their attendance at school. This is further exacerbated when schools do not actively engage with parents to alter this viewpoint.

Insights from a key informant from a community NGO underscore the importance of a synergistic approach: "The educational triangle—comprising the family, school, and community—is essential and should remain intact, as its unity is pivotal for effective educational outcomes."

Lack of accommodations and hostile school environment. The analysis reveals that schools often fail to foster an environment conducive to altering perceptions or dismantling prejudices, significantly impacting girls' educational engagement. Specifically, girls who experience pregnancy face considerable stigma and shame, leading to their withdrawal from educational pursuits. "It remains unclear whether these absences are a direct result of formal exclusionary practices by schools or the result of the girls' own reluctance to continue their education amid societal judgment" (key informant from a local development organization). The lack of sexual education and awareness around early pregnancy within schools contributes to this exclusionary environment. The absence of on-site childcare facilities and the limited availability of flexible educational schedules/models further compound these issues.

Flexible education models as a positive support. Flexible education models emerged as facilitators in ensuring that pregnant girls and adolescent parents continue their education. While the formal education system does not officially exclude pregnant students or teenage fathers, they often face social exclusion. Flexible education models are tailored to the needs of this population, offering options outside of conventional school hours. "Flexible modalities serve single teenage mothers with our programs that operate on weekends or at night, accommodating their new life responsibilities while allowing them to maintain their academic pursuits during the week," explains a governmental representative from MINEDUCYT. This adaptation allows young parents to balance the demands of parenthood with their educational goals, mitigating one of the key barriers to continuing their education.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. Lack of school infrastructure. Learners with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles in their pursuit of education in El Salvador. Schools are ill-equipped to handle their needs starting with proper transportation from home to school, and inadequate educational facilities that do not meet the necessary standards to be considered fully accessible for children with disabilities. Essential modifications such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and other infrastructural adjustments are often missing, impeding the ease of movement and participation of students with disabilities.

Lack of materials. Several key informants identified significant gaps in implementing UDL within educational settings. SIR participants also highlighted the critical need for learning materials and methods

to be accessible, catering to the diverse needs of students with disabilities through various formats and technologies tailored to different learning styles and abilities. This need was also mentioned by the CRPD (2017), who cited concerns for schools' notable deficiency in providing learning materials in accessible formats, including Easy Read and Braille, and a scarcity of sign language interpreters.

Discrimination. Discrimination within schools contributes to the barriers faced by children with disabilities, manifesting in a lack of acceptance. Such an environment compels students with disabilities to not enroll or prematurely exit the educational system. As noted by a key informant from an organization for people with disabilities, "Most schools display a significant shortfall in accommodating students with physical disabilities, whether visual or auditory. This challenge escalates when addressing intellectual disabilities, perceived as more complex to integrate."

RETURNED MIGRANTS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED POPULATION. A recurring barrier for returned migrants and internally displaced individuals at the school level is the **absence of adequately sensitized and trained staff to support these families.** As described by a key informant from an international NGO, "When families affected by internal displacement seek educational support, they often face a second ordeal of re-victimization. They are met with requests for documentation – 'bring this, bring that.' If the receiving staff does not welcome them with understanding and warmth, the families, already vulnerable, feel discouraged and lost in unfamiliar surroundings, and too often retreat from the process altogether." This underscores that despite policies that promote the inclusion of these populations, not all schools foster an inclusive atmosphere that actively guides and supports them.

TEACHER-LEVEL FACTORS

GIRLS, ESPECIALLY FROM RURAL AREAS. Lack of teacher preparation in new technologies.

The digital divide among teachers and a lack of technological proficiency creates a barrier to quality education for rural girls. In rural areas with limited educational resources, teachers often lack access to and training in educational technologies. This shortfall restricts integrating digital tools in teaching, limiting students' learning breadth and their acquisition of essential digital literacy skills.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. Lack of teacher preparation. In addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities in El Salvador, it has been identified that Salvadorian teachers exhibit a notable deficiency in training across several key areas: (1) lack of training in inclusive education principles and practices; (2) insufficient awareness and understanding of the varied types of disabilities and their impact on learning; (3) inadequacy in strategies to develop accessible and inclusive learning environments; (4) limited techniques for adapting teaching methods and materials for the diverse needs of children with disabilities; (5) deficiency in training for effective communication and interaction with children with disabilities; (6) limited understanding in the creation and implementation of individualized support plans for children with disabilities; (7) insufficient knowledge of assistive technologies and their integration into the learning process; and (8) lack of training in positive behavior support and the management of diverse classroom dynamics.

Lack of teacher's support. Schools lack specialized staff, such as psychologists, social workers, and nurses, to support students with disabilities. An educational professional encapsulated this issue: "There is no school support staff to contribute to inclusion. This absence of support staff burdens teachers,

who are expected to address all aspects of student needs and inclusion, often without adequate training or resources. Consequently, the responsibility for managing all facets of inclusion falls disproportionately upon teachers and sometimes the school director, who may also be tasked with classroom teaching duties.”

RETURNED MIGRANTS AND PERSONS INTERNALLY DISPLACED DUE TO VIOLENCE. One-size fits all instruction and stigma. Returned migrants and internally displaced individuals face unique educational barriers, primarily due to the interruptions in their education caused by their displacement. Their often-prolonged absence from formal education leads to gaps in fundamental competencies, such as literacy and numeracy, which are critical for further learning. Teachers typically offer a uniform and standardized curriculum that does not cater to those who have fallen behind or have specific educational needs stemming from their displacement. This one-size-fits-all approach fails to accommodate the varied learning requirements of these individuals, hindering their ability to reintegrate into the educational system and advance their learning. There are also barriers linked to attitudes and stigmas, and lack of preparation to teach in differentiated language instruction.

3.3.8. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS (RQ5)

FAMILY FACTORS

GIRLS, ESPECIALLY FROM RURAL AREAS. Economic factors of families. Household poverty significantly contributes to school drop-out risk. Informants indicate that early marriage is sometimes employed as a strategy to alleviate familial financial burdens, particularly in families with daughters. These early marriages are associated with pregnancies and then with dropping out. A representative from a local development organization elucidated, “When daughters are married early, they generally move out and are supported by their new partner, thus becoming one less burden on their household of origin.” Additionally, in environments where family dynamics are oppressive and violent, young women may seek early marriage as a means of escape.

Attitudinal barriers and domestic violence. Patriarchal attitudes deeply ingrained within family structures in El Salvador present significant obstacles to girls’ education, especially in rural areas. The prevailing *machismo* mindset dictates that girls prioritize household responsibilities over academic pursuits. This cultural expectation is firmly rooted in the belief that domestic roles and caregiving within the home take precedence over a girl’s schooling. Such barriers are further amplified in the context of rural, indigenous, and impoverished communities where traditional gender roles are more rigidly enforced, and education is not perceived as critical for development. A key informant from a social organization explained that she has heard parents say: “If I reached second grade and have been able to move forward, my daughter doesn’t need to continue the formal educational process.”

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. Fear of discrimination. According to key informants, family concerns about discrimination pose a significant barrier to accessing quality education for children with disabilities. Mothers, often the primary caregivers, may cease efforts to send their children to school upon encountering discriminatory attitudes despite the children’s desire to attend. A key informant from an NGO working with disability recounted cases where “mothers of children with disabilities refuse to take their children to school after witnessing all the discriminatory attitudes to which their children are exposed to in school.” This is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where a

prevalent misconception exists in some communities that disabilities are contagious. This fosters an atmosphere of discomfort and prejudice towards those with physical disabilities.

RETURNED MIGRANTS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS DUE TO VIOLENCE. Economic needs of the family. Family expectations regarding migration emerge as a barrier to education, particularly affecting motivation among students. Informants have noted a trend where families prioritize economic contributions through migration instead of education. Boys are seen dropping out of school to fulfill familial expectations of labor migration, either for family reunification purposes or to support their family's livelihood. A key informant from a community organization illustrated this pattern by sharing, "The family project has become to migrate, which becomes the central life plan, undermining the value of education and creating a rationale for school dropouts. There's no drive to pursue education when migration looms as the imminent goal," explained a director from a civil society organization. This sentiment is particularly stark in rural areas where youth frequently lack local ambitions. "It's concerning that many young individuals don't envision a future in their communities; their goal is to migrate. They plan to leave before turning 17 to navigate borders more easily and to fulfill their dream of building their own home," this statement from a SIR session reflects a profound shift in the priorities of young people, sidelining education for the pursuit of migration. These statements underscore the prevalent view within specific communities that migration is seen as predetermined and as a necessary path, leading students to undervalue education's long-term benefits.

COMMUNITY FACTORS

Gang violence and the effects of the State of Exception. In El Salvador, community factors such as gang violence and national policies to respond to it influence marginalized population's access to education. Historically, the violence linked to Maras (gangs) significantly impeded mobility and prompted internal displacement, disrupting schooling. "Before, if the girls got involved with the gangs, the family also left the area... and this girl followed the cycle of poverty and caregiving," a representative from a local development organization remarked, highlighting the gender-specific impacts within gang dynamics. Currently, the State of Exception in El Salvador, a governmental measure that temporarily suspends certain constitutional rights to address security challenges, predominantly the gang crisis, is shaping educational access. Under this regime, communities live in fear, leading to migration—especially among those with criminal records at risk of detention. "Today, it is because of fear of the emergency regime... young women take on familial responsibilities as their siblings or parents are jailed or have migrated," a community organization leader pointed out. The regime has forced schools to adapt to new familial structures, often with elder siblings stepping in as guardians. "The schools have had to recognize an older sister as the family reference point," a principal noted, pointing out the absence of other caregivers due to incarceration.

A community promoter added, "With many parents imprisoned, children remain alone and unmotivated, impacting their drive to attend school." These shifts have led to disconnection and a loss of motivation at school among children.

Multiple community-based programs to promote engagement, yet with no alignment. On the positive side, community-based organizations, including municipal entities, private businesses, churches, and local NGOs, have shown good practices in community involvement, such as recreation

and artistic activities, as well as attention to out-of-school children with disabilities. These organizations mobilize efforts to support the child’s return to school, utilizing various community resources to support educational trajectories.

Conversely, a notable challenge is these community institutions’ lack of coordinated effort. There is a recognized need for enhanced inter-institutional collaboration among state organizations, social organizations, and NGOs to address education barriers more effectively. A key informant from a multilateral agency explained, “There is no coordination between institutions that work in the territory. Each one resumes their work and puts aside alliances that could optimize resources and investments. Each institution has data on their work, but not necessarily on the needy population.” Greater coordination is especially critical for marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities, who face compounded barriers including poor access to health services in areas previously stigmatized by gang control. The informants also cite a lack of support from municipal leadership in improving community infrastructure, such as ensuring wheelchair access. To meet the specific needs and understand the complex dynamics of these communities, a strategic partnership between departmental directorates, territorial entities, and schools is essential.

3.3.9. MULTILATERAL SUPPORT (RQ6)

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN EL SALVADOR: OVERVIEW

In El Salvador one percent of investments in education come from bilateral donors.²² TABLE 15 shows an inventory of education related projects with international cooperation across the country.

TABLE 15. EL SALVADOR. INVENTORY OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION EDUCATION PROJECTS. 2023.

ORGANIZATION	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	MARGINALIZED GROUPS
Global Partnership for Education/ World Bank (Multilateral)	Growing up and Learning Together	Comprehensive early childhood development	All marginalized children from 0-8 years old
AECID- Spain (Donor)	Territorial Management Strategy with Inclusive Approach	This project seeks to develop strategies for territorial management that favors inclusion and prevents school drop-out.	Students at risk for exclusion due to violence, disability, pregnancy, work, migration, and other conditions of exclusion.

²² See: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2020. Country Compact El Salvador. Local Education Group, p. 28.

ORGANIZATION	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	MARGINALIZED GROUPS
GIZ – Germany (Donor)	Integración y reintegración de niños y jóvenes en riesgo de migración irregular en Centroamérica – ALTERNATIVAS”,	Mental health resources, education, local resources, and job training to prevent irregular migration.	Migrants
Norwegian Refugee Council (NGO)	Humanitarian Assistance in Mexico and the Northern Triangle	Access to education and safe schools, despite violence and displacement in coordination with local communities and local and national authorities. Aims: identify out-of-school children and youth and prepare them to resume education activities and gain basic skills to remain safe; promote and provide safe education opportunities, including flexible learning modalities, according to their need; strengthen the capacities of local communities and institutions.	IDP, migrating youth and children
OEI/ Organization of Iberoamerican States (Multilateral agency)	Resource Center for Inclusive Education for Students with Visual Disability.	Methodological design, strategies, and materials for visual disability. School supplies packets with material for visual disability. https://oei.int/proyectos/164 ; https://oei.int/proyectos/1825	Students with visual disability.
Save the Children (NGO)	“Protected Steps. Protection for Girls, Adolescents, and Women Affected by Social Violence and Forced Migration in Central America.” Pasos protegidos. Protección a la niñez adolescentes y mujeres afectados por la	Coordination with Civil Protection agency, Plan International various government offices, including the Ministry of Education, Center for Migrant Protection, and Center for Child Protection to meet basic needs of migrant children.	Migrants, IDP

ORGANIZATION	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	MARGINALIZED GROUPS
	violencia social y la migración forzada en Centroamérica.”		
UNICEF (Multilateral agency)	Inclusive Education as a priority in 2016-2020 cooperation agreement.	Focused on children 0-7 and their access to early childhood education and adolescents in settings of social violence and poverty.	Children 0-7, at-risk adolescents.
UNICEF/ Save the Children (Multilateral agency/NGO)	Save the Children “Equitable, Inclusive and Quality Education for Children and Adolescent Migrants and Displaced”. Educación equitativa, inclusiva y de calidad para niñas, niños y adolescentes migrantes o en desplazamiento interno”	Humanitarian response to the migration crisis in the region. Scope: San Salvador, San Vicente, Usulután y San Miguel. Sept. 2021- Abril 2022	Returnees, migrants, IDP.
USAID/FHI (Donor)	Innovative Education Project	The development of strategies to strengthen early grade reading and math, using UDL, socio emotional learning and in Grades 4-6, Teaching on the Right Level strategies.	Low-achieving and retained students
USAID/Save the Children/FEPADE (Donor/NGO)	Proyecto Aprendo para Brillar/ Learn to Shine	Retaining students and socioemotional learning.	Preventing dropout of students at risk due to migration, socioeconomic problems, poverty)

HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Progress toward learning for all. Key informants explained that cooperation initiatives in Honduras have made strides in eliminating barriers to education for marginalized populations. Projects have focused on strengthening the capacity of educational institutions and local organizations to serve children’s educational needs inclusively. This capacity building has reinforced strategies that ensure the inclusion of all children within the education system. However, the alignment of investments with the diverse needs of MINEDUCYT and local communities is critical, as externally driven financial priorities can sometimes diverge from local needs.

Highlighted programs

- The “Growing Up and Learning Together: Comprehensive Early Childhood Development in El Salvador Project,” funded by the Global Partnership for Education and managed by the World Bank, has fostered early childhood development.
- Save the Children’s project, “Equitable, Inclusive and Quality Education for Migrant and Internally Displaced Children and Adolescents,” which addresses the migratory crisis affecting El Salvador and the region. Targeting returnees, migrants, and internally displaced persons in areas such as San Salvador and San Miguel, this initiative, in partnership with UNICEF, ran from September 2021 to April 2022.
- Save the Children’s “*Pasos Protegidos*”; an initiative for the protection of children, adolescents and women affected by social violence and forced migration in Central America. The project sought to help groups in situations of greater vulnerability due to violence and migration, including children, adolescents and women, by facilitating their access to protection and education services. Partners: Plan International and with the financial support of EU ECHO, Ministry of Education, the Center for Childhood, Adolescence and Family Care of San Miguel and the Management of Migrant Care. The target groups were migrants and IDPs.

Challenges

- **Civil society coordination.** The research conducted reveals the importance of coordinating with CSOs, while also promoting dialogue and capacities’ strengthening. Civil society can play a key role in facilitating the enrollment of children with disabilities in schools and fostering community engagement.
- **Program sustainability.** Cooperation efforts must pivot towards sustainable outcomes and improved project management. The absence of sustained follow-up leads to new exclusions, undermining the longevity of project benefits.
- **Inter-institutional collaboration.** Organizations implementing programs work mostly in silos. There is a lack of established inter-institutional strengthening frameworks within and across sectors in El Salvador. Inclusion efforts are often implemented by various stakeholders, including those from health, education, communities, and municipalities, without alignment and cohesive participation. The challenges encountered in the Consejo Nacional de la Primera

Infancia, Niñez y Adolescencia (CONAPINA) network have highlighted the need for better networking and coordination opportunities.

- **Coordination between public and private sector efforts.** Both at the national and local level insufficient dialogue and complementarities between stakeholders leads to duplicative efforts and inefficient use of resources. State efforts and those implemented by non-state actors are taking place in the same territories, yet without shared knowledge on what other actors are doing.
- **Consensus on the meaning of inclusive education.** International donors and NGOs are valued for the resources and technical support they can provide, but the recent case of rejection of LGBTQI+ initiatives and gender issues in education demonstrates the resistance to accepting some agendas that are promoted by international organizations. This shows that concepts of inclusion and human rights need to be negotiated for a common definition on a national and local level, as consensus on what inclusive education entails does not yet exist.
- **Community participation.** Stakeholders stress the need for more participatory processes that involve local communities from the outset of project development, ensuring that initiatives are rooted in the specific context and needs of those they aim to serve.

3.4. HAITI OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

3.4.1. EDUCATION SYSTEM SNAPSHOT

Haiti is one of the most fragile states in the world. Almost 60 percent of the population is below the national poverty line, and 28.9 percent live in extreme poverty (less than \$2 USD a day), compared to less than 10 percent in the rest of LAC (IDB, 2023a). Recent years have seen escalating insecurity and social unrest in Haiti, with armed gangs asserting control over various regions, notably in the West Department within the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince and the Artibonite. These gangs engage in territorial power struggles, expanding their influence by occupying new neighborhoods, forcing residents to flee, and leaving their homes and possessions behind. These issues are compounded by natural disasters that have greatly affected the educational infrastructure.

Haiti has established a decentralized education system featuring Technical Directorates at the Ministry of Education and Professional Development (MENFP) in Port-au-Prince and Departmental Directions in each country's departments. The Bernard Reform has led to the elimination of the primary and secondary division, favoring a consolidated fundamental national framework spanning nine years, distributed across three cycles: preschool, fundamental school (comprising nine years of mandatory schooling), and secondary school (with a duration of three years) (MENFP, 2018). In Haiti, the education sector comprises 17,603 schools with 1,784,738 students—51.5 percent of whom are female and 48.5 percent male—supported by 59,813 teachers, of which 69.3 percent are male and 30.7 percent female. The public education sector falls short of meeting the demand, prompting private providers to fill this gap, with over 90 percent of preschools and 81 percent of primary schools privately operated (SIGEE, 2024).

3.4.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN HAITI

The participants in this study defined inclusive education as a holistic approach to education that integrates all individuals into the educational system, ensuring that everyone can contribute to the country's prosperity. They associated quality education with the following: (1) enhancing teacher training and supporting them with itinerant teachers who can make advisory visits to schools; (2) appropriate infrastructure with accessibility measures, having sufficient recreation areas and space in the classroom conducive to learning; (3) appropriate educational materials that are culturally sensitive, student-friendly, and adapted to all special education needs; (4) an educational system adapted to the students and their learning styles; (5) prioritizing data collection and expanding access to information sources (as cited by governmental officials, local foundations and associations representatives, and multilateral agencies representatives). Haiti and USAID both emphasize access to educational facilities and safety and tailoring the educational system to the students' needs. However, USAID's concept of quality education emphasizes equipping students with essential skills fostering critical thinking and socio-emotional development.

3.4.3. MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS

Group I. Children from lower socioeconomic status, including rural and urban communities. According to data from UNESCO from March to June 2023, in Haiti, 4.9 million individuals, equivalent to half of the population, are experiencing acute food insecurity, with 1.8 million

of them in an emergency phase. This reflects a nine percent increase from the same period in 2022. The escalating vulnerability nationwide is compelling those most at risk to allocate their limited resources to food, which is, in turn, diminishing their access to education. Educational opportunities have also been compromised as fewer schools are operational in fragile areas, which already suffer from a lack of publicly funded educational institutions. Since the onset of COVID-19, over 2.4 million children have been unable to return to school, out of an estimated four million school-aged children. The country has a national average illiteracy rate of 23 percent (IDB, 2023).

Group 2. Children and youth with disabilities. In Haiti, accurate information on children with disabilities is scarce due to a lack of systematic data collection, which hampers the development of effective policies. A study post-COVID-19 by the National Associative Network for the Integration of persons with Disabilities, a network of 60 local organizations working with people with disabilities and marginalized populations, cites only 2,243 registered individuals with disabilities from an estimated population of 11 to 12 million, with a nearly even gender split and distribution primarily in the fundamental school cycle. Estimates from the DHS from 2016-2017 indicate that approximately four percent of the Haitian population aged five and over has some form of disability (World Bank, 2021).

The absence of legal protocols for reasonable accommodation in schools, notably in rural areas, further complicates their inclusion. Students with disabilities face multiple barriers, including inaccessible facilities, societal discrimination, and a deficiency of trained inclusive education personnel. Data indicates that these children are predominantly located in the Central, Western, and Northern regions of Haiti, with physical, auditory, mental, and visual disabilities being the most common types identified (CRPD, 2018). According to key informants, data on children and youth with disabilities is unreliable, as families tend to hide their children with disabilities due to social stigma. A report by Regulus, S. (2023), funded by the Partnership for Enhanced Engagement in Research, describes the social stigma around people with disabilities as follows:

“Women or men, children, adolescents, or adults with apparent physical or mental disabilities are considered cursed by God or an evil spirit and thus often become sources of shame for the family. As a result, these people are ostracized, denied access to school or church, and sometimes even to health centers. We hide them away. They are ignored and looked down upon. We don’t mention their names. We don’t count them. Sometimes they are completely abandoned by their families”.

Many children with disabilities are neither counted nor declared to the State. A high-level official from the Secretary of State for the Integration of People with Disabilities explained that public policies for learners with disabilities who do attend school must allow for the collection of more granular data, because without figures and/or records policy makers are unable to support progress.

Group 3. Returned migrants/ IDPs. Controlled largely by armed groups, 80 percent of western Haiti faces a rising IDP phenomenon, complicating data collection due to its complex nature. Approximately 370,000 individuals are internally displaced, over a half of them being children (around 55 percent); these displacements, driven primarily by violence, have increased particularly since the assassination of the democratically-elected president Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. Education for displaced children is precarious, with schools like Lycée René Prével being overrun by gangs and classroom attendance plummeting. Moreover, a report from IOM (2023) indicates that 69 percent of IDPs in camps

receive education, compared to 59 percent in families, highlighting a need for further research on this disparity. Critically, the IDP crisis affects not only children but also teachers, many of whom are displaced, thus exacerbating the shortage of qualified personnel. Additionally, children often separated from their parents face heightened risks of exploitation and violence, and the camps’ unsafe environment. For this study, the discussions focus primarily on the internally displaced due to insecurity, natural disasters, and deportation from neighboring countries such as the United States or the Dominican Republic.

3.4.4. EDUCATION ACCESS AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS (RQ1)

ACCESS DATA

In comparison with other countries, official historical data for Haiti is rather limited. However, following ongoing collaborations with the MENFP, IDB, and support from the World Bank, Haiti has recently deployed their first integrated EMIS platform (see sub-section “Education Management Information Systems” for more information about barriers to collect and report data). The following table summarizes school enrollment data for year 2023.

TABLE 16. HAITI. ENROLLMENT DATA, 2023

DEPARTMENT	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	WITH DISABILITIES %	PUBLIC SCHOOLS %	FEMALE %
WEST	502,243	238,879	263,364	0.33%	7.77%	52.44%
SOUTH-EAST	55,552	27,617	27,935	0.46%	30.37%	50.29%
NORTH	199,811	93,422	106,389	0.38%	27.65%	53.24%
NORTH-EAST	107,268	52,628	54,640	0.25%	34.30%	50.94%
ARTIBONITE	219,659	105,334	114,325	0.28%	20.46%	52.05%
CENTRE	208,716	101,346	107,370	0.29%	18.64%	51.44%
SOUTH	166,015	83,927	82,088	0.62%	24.55%	49.45%
GRANDE-ANSE	65,377	33,365	32,012	0.33%	39.74%	48.97%
NORTH-WEST	113,751	56,119	57,632	0.26%	24.75%	50.67%
NIPPES	93,148	47,992	45,156	0.46%	28.82%	48.48%
TOTAL	1,731,540	840,629	890,911	0.35%	18.92%	51.45%

Source: Research team using data from [MENFP \(2023\)](#)

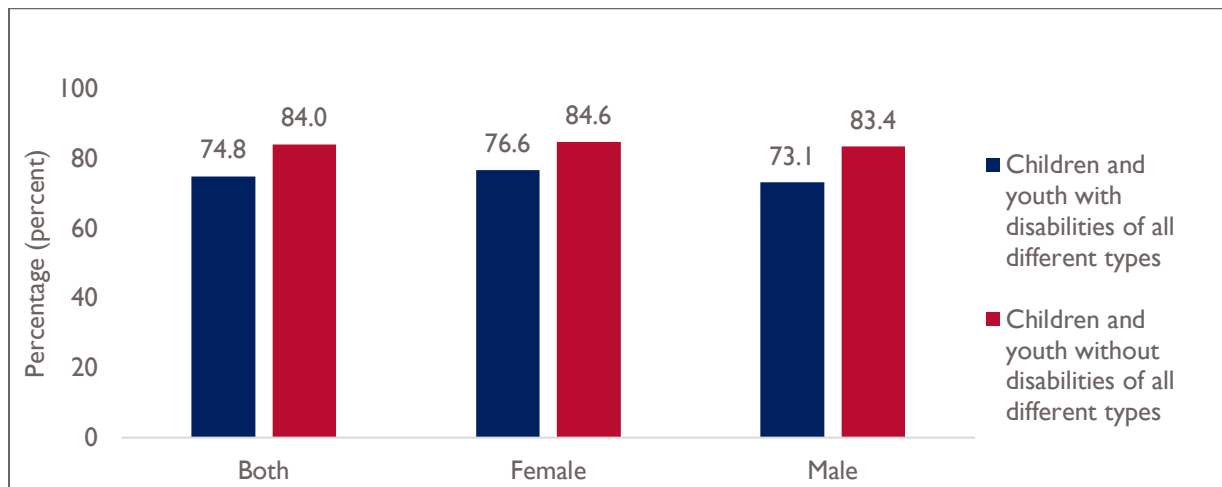
- According to a post from the World Bank (2015), in the early 2000s, about 90 percent of schools were private (10 percent were public). These are very diverse and are run by religious

organizations, NGOs, or for-profit institutions. As noted by the most recent data from the information system, *Système d'Information sur la Gestion de l'Éducation (SIGE)*, in the table above, this situation has improved, with almost 19 percent of schools being public in 2023. However, the education system is still predominantly private-owned.

- Most learners (29 percent of total) reside in the West department, where the capital city Port-Au-Prince is located.
- In 2023, official enrolment for learners with disabilities was 6,118 (48.9 percent female), and they represented only 0.35 percent of the total number of learners enrolled, well below findings from other countries, which might suggest that children with disabilities are less likely to attend school in Haiti.

The USAID Standards study on the DHS program (DHS, 2016-2017) provided data on enrollment by disability status, as reflected in FIGURE 17. The school enrollment rate of children and youth without disabilities is higher than that of those with disabilities. This difference is greater for boys with disabilities than for girls with disabilities.

FIGURE 17. HAITI. CHILDREN AND YOUTH ENROLLED IN SCHOOL BY DISABILITY STATUS AND GENDER, 2016-2017



Source: Haiti Standard DHS (2016-2017).

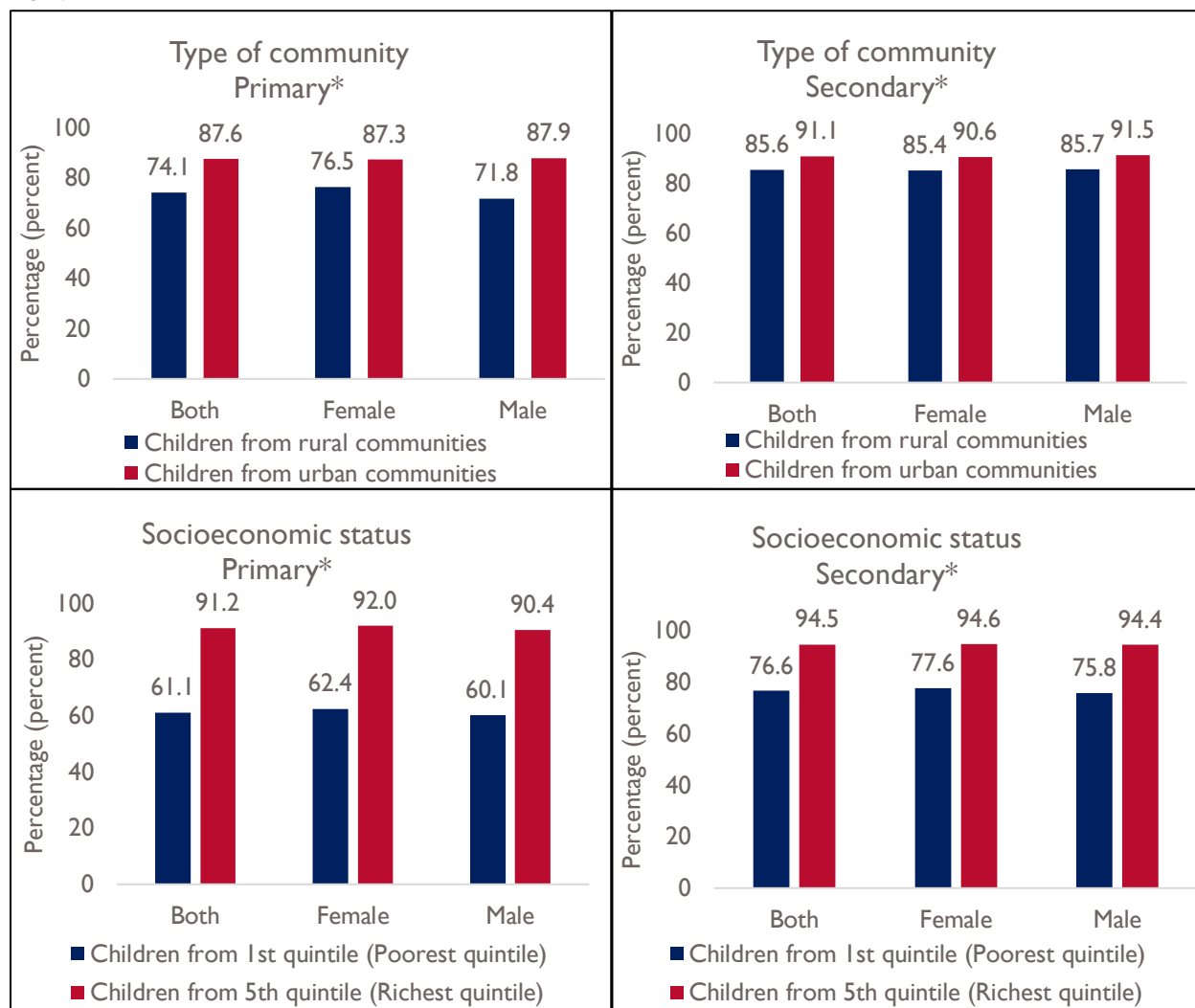
Notes: Population between the ages of 6 to 18. The IELEA research team constructed the enrollment indicator using the population of school age that report having an impairment (difficulty or inability to perform certain activities) and a school attendance status of having entered school, being advanced or repeating the school year.

Lower socioeconomic status (rural and urban communities). The research team did not find recent data from children and young people of lower socioeconomic levels. Thus, the team used the DHS program (2016-2017) database to prepare indicators on school enrollment. The research team defined school age as between 6 and 18 years old, primary-education age as between 6 and 11 years old, and secondary-education age education as between 12 and 18 years old. FIGURE 18 shows the following results:

- At all levels of education, the school enrollment rate of children and youth in urban communities is higher than in rural areas. In urban areas, male enrollment (87.9 percent in primary and 91.5 percent in secondary education) is slightly higher than female enrollment (87.3 percent in primary and 90.6 percent in secondary), while in rural areas girls' enrollment in primary education (76.5 percent) outpaces boys (71.8 percent).
- At all levels of education, the school enrollment rate of children and youth from the richest socioeconomic quintile is higher than that of those from the poorest quintile. This difference is less pronounced in secondary education compared to primary education (see the figure for precise results).

Returned migrants and IDPs. Precise information about this group is rather limited due to the internal, constantly evolving conflict ongoing in Haiti. NBC News (2024), citing UNICEF and MENFP, reports that more than 500,000 children had lost access to education as of 2022 and that nearly 1,700 schools have been closed in Port-au-Prince as of early March 2024. Data from the MENFP EMIS platform, *Système d'Information sur la Gestion de l'Éducation (SIGEE)*, shows that there were 6,643 open schools in the West Province, which would mean that around 25.6 percent of schools are officially closed.

FIGURE 18. HAITI. SCHOOL ENROLLMENT DATA BY MARGINALIZED GROUP, 2016-2017



Source: Haiti Standard DHS (2016-2017). The asterisk * indicates whether the differences are statistically significant.

Notes: The school-aged population was defined as that between the ages of 6 to 18. The primary education aged population is defined as that of ages 6 to 11 and the secondary aged population is defined as that between the ages of 12 to 18. The enrollment indicator was constructed using the population of scholarly age from rural communities that report a school attendance status of having entered school, being advanced or repeating the school year.

LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS

Context around learning outcomes in Haiti. Following the publication of the presidential decree in September 2014 relating to the reform of the schools functioning in Haiti, national achievement tests (or national exams) in the sixth and twelfth grades (“6e AF and Rhéto”) were officially eliminated. MENFP started to organize targeted national evaluation sessions in the fourth grade on basic disciplines. This

decree is often called the “12 measures decree,” which aimed to redress, improve, and reform the Haitian education system. Hence, in 2015, the MENFP with the technical and financial support of the IDB, the Haitian Institute of Training in Educational Sciences (IHFOSED), and support from the International Evaluation Association of School Achievement (IEA) embarked on a joint effort to improve the quality of the education system, with the Introduction of national evaluations in French, Creole, and mathematics in the fourth grade of primary education as stipulated under clause 3 of the 12 measures. MENFP and IHFOSED piloted the tests in 2015 and 2016 in non-representative samples of schools. Later in 2016, MENFP and IHFOSED administered the first National Evaluation to a representative sample of 526 schools in 10 departments across the country. In 2017, the MENFP decided to expand the scope of tested schools to conduct a census for the public-school sector – i.e., to include all public schools that offered education to fourth-grade students in the country. Then, in the most recent national evaluation in 2022, the IDB, in collaboration with the MENFP, IEA, and IHFOSED, agreed to conduct the evaluation in the sixth rather than the fourth grade (IDB, 2023). The research team requested access to the databases and/or reports findings, but MENFP did not provide it (see more on section “Barriers to Collect and Use Data”). IDB (2022), reports the following findings:

- Students across the board perform better in their mother tongue language (Creole);
- Girls tend to outperform boys in language subjects slightly;
- Students in bilingual households score better across all subjects;
- Performance varies significantly by department, with rural areas lagging;
- Lack of basic resources and supplies was cited as an issue by schools;
- Limited access to electricity, water, internet, and computers prevails at home and in schools;
- High rates of teacher absences likely impact instructional time and learning.

3.4.5. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (RQ2)

Information systems. According to ministry officials, in Haiti, the availability of reliable and relevant educational data remains a significant barrier to improving educational quality for students. The EMIS, or SIGE, is designed to collect, process, and manage national educational data for achieving the governance objectives of the MENFP. The IDB has been unwavering in its commitment toward building a stronger EMIS capable of collecting data on the education sector and monitoring progress. The IDB started supporting MENFP in building its very own EMIS in 2017. After years of strategy development and ministry unit strengthening, IDB successfully deployed the first year of full implementation of the EMIS in 2020 with support from the World Bank, setting up the first pieces of a robust foundation for the collection and management of education sector data in Haiti. However, the SIGE is facing critical challenges in its third year of implementation. Although SIGE has initiated the release of educational sector data to the public, inefficiencies in management and coordination within MENFP and between ministries have impeded its full utilization as a tool for policy development and ministry-level planning. Furthermore, the system has not yet fully registered teaching personnel and its school-level governance deployment remains insufficient (IDB, 2023).

BARRIERS TO DATA COLLECTION AND USE

General barriers

- **Unreliable, outdated, and incomplete data.** According to interviewed governmental officials, the data for education decision-making is not reliable with significant data gaps across Haiti. Official national data are outdated, with the most recent census data dating back to 2014-2016. Additionally, information on inclusive education is incomplete and derived from a patchwork of studies and data collection conducted by various donor partners and NGOs. These are often limited in scope, focused on specific localities rather than providing a comprehensive national perspective, and their reliability is frequently questioned. Key informants from the government mentioned that central national offices tasked with educational studies and integration of marginalized populations, such as the departments responsible for statistics, the integration of individuals with disabilities, and social welfare research, are grappling with these issues.
- **Unavailable or non-existing data.** For this study, data requests were conducted at the national level toward three key departments of the governmental administration related to the IELA study: the Haitian Institute of Statistics, the Bureau of the Secretary of State for the Integration of People with Disabilities, the Institute of Social Well-Being and Research. More specifically at the MENFP, five key departments related to the IELA study received requests for data: the Unit of Statistics and Information (USI), the Bureau of National Exams, the Commission for Adapted Schooling and Social Support (CASAS), the Directorate for Planning and External Cooperation, and the Bureau of Archives. None of these official structures have been able to provide any Internally generated data/datasets. The data shared comes from various international donors' reports/studies, etc.
- **Fragmented centralized system.** Haiti's EMIS is not yet integrated with departmental education directorates, lacking modules for gender, disability inclusion, and tracking of out-of-school children. The IDB, in response, is developing a MENFP action plan to upgrade the EMIS for improved planning, accreditation, and quality control, aiming to bridge this gap and bolster EMIS implementation at the departmental level (IDB, 2023)

Children from lower SES. Lack of infrastructure, high staff turnover, lack of training and centralization and barriers for collecting data from the poorest learners start at the school level. Results from the FGDs show a lack of infrastructure (including electricity, internet, and tablets) as an impediment to adequately collect and share data. High staff and teacher turnover and lack of training to properly collect data also cause inconsistencies in data collection, analysis, and dissemination for the EMIS in Haiti (World Bank, 2017). The need for principals to travel to the School District Office to complete the school census forms complicates the data collection process (World Bank, 2017).

Children and youth with disabilities. In Haiti, the EMIS is challenged in accurately capturing data on students with disabilities, who represent an estimated three to five percent of the student population according to the MENFP. Neither the MENFP, nor the USI, CASAS, or the Bureau of Archives have available data related to the topic of inclusive education for students with disabilities. Even the Bureau

for National Exams (BUNEXE) has not been able to provide data about the number of students with disabilities enrolled in national exams (Baccalaureate) although these students with disabilities are participating in the national exams. These students are registered/identified on a standard form like all other students with no specific mention of their disabilities or special needs.

Data omission is primarily due to **data collection forms lacking specific fields for disabilities** and societal stigmas leading families to keep children with disabilities out of schools, hence they are frequently uncounted and unreported. Students with disabilities, including those with visual and hearing impairments, are registered for national exams without any indicators of their disabilities, resulting in a lack of specific data on their educational outcomes. The BUNEXE **processes these students without distinguishing their unique needs**. CASAS, responsible for exam management and assessment, fails to report differentiated outcomes for these students. A newly implemented strategy in the EMIS now includes **personal information forms with designated areas to denote disabilities** or special needs, marking a pivotal move toward enhanced data collection that can inform more targeted and effective educational policies and interventions for students with disabilities.

Returned migrants/ IDPs. In Haiti, the EMIS struggles to collect data on the internally displaced population given their mobile status. Key informants reported a lack of institutional focus on this marginalized group. Compounding the issue is the absence of public services that displaced individuals can rely on for the continuity of their education, guidance, or support, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

3.4.6. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES (RQ3)

Haiti's constitution guarantees the right to education for all citizens. The MENFP spearheads the national education system to implement the constitutional mandate. While Haiti's legal code doesn't have a single law dedicated to inclusive education, there are provisions scattered throughout several policies that promote it. Haiti is signatory to international human rights treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which mandates the government to provide education on an equal basis for all and without discrimination. There are also ongoing efforts by NGOs to strengthen inclusive education practices.

Haiti's teacher training policies along with its educational curriculum has remained the same since its development in 1980, lacking updates to meet the demands of the 21st century. Notably, it neglects incorporating teaching in the native language and fails to align with modern educational standards. Recognizing the need to equip students with skills relevant to contemporary challenges and technological advancements, the MENFP took a significant step in January 2021 by approving the Haiti Curricular Guidance Framework. This framework is the basis for forthcoming curricular reforms to modernize the education sector. Additionally, in 2023, the MENFP underscored its commitment to prioritizing curricular reform through 2030 (IDB, 2023).

TABLE 17 presents a summary of Haiti's policies for inclusive education and the level of progress of its legal framework and institutional coordination. As shown in TABLE 17, the IELA research team classified the legal framework to guarantee quality education for children from lower socio-economic quintiles as emerging, and the coordination among institutions to implement the existing policies as emerging. For

children and young people with disabilities, the team classified the legal framework as emerging, and the institutional coordination as emerging. Finally, for returned migrants and IDPs, the team classified the legal framework and the institutional coordination as latent.

TABLE 17. HAITI. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LEGAL FRAMEWORK

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
CHILDREN FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (INCLUDES RURAL & URBAN COMMUNITIES)			Emerging	Emerging
National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion of 2020	Social protection and promotion programs that aim to mitigate inequality and discrimination, safeguard individuals from unemployment and illness, or prevent income loss, while enhancing their economic independence.	CRC convention on the rights of the child of 1990 that guarantees children and young people (aged 17 and under) free quality education.		
National School Feeding Policy of 2017	Guides quality school feeding initiatives in the country.			
CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES			Emerging	Emerging
May 11, 2012 Law on the Integration of People with Disabilities	This law installs the principle of non-discrimination and contains a chapter on access to education.	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2008: emphasizes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion for people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including education.		
RETURNED MIGRANTS / IDPs			Latent	Latent
Nonexistent laws				

POLICIES BY TARGET GROUP

Children from lower SES. The 2017 National School Feeding Policy advocates for a collaborative approach to school nutrition, emphasizing locally sourced meals, energy-efficient equipment, balanced diets, and health and sanitation measures. In 2020, qualitative data suggested that schools offering these feeding services experienced lower dropout rates than those without such services. Despite the MENFP having a comprehensive school feeding policy and providing meals to around 800,000 students annually, not all students are reached, and the program heavily relies on external funding. Without this funding, even currently served students might lose access to these meals (IDB, 2023a).

Children and youth with disabilities. The May 11, 2012 Law on the Integration of People with Disabilities. This law installs the principle of non-discrimination and contains a chapter on access to education of people with disabilities and a chapter on employment and adapted work. However, according to the key informants from the government and focus group participants (local foundations and associations representatives, and NGOs), implementing this law faces critical gaps as (1) there is a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms, resulting in non-compliance with the law's mandates. To illustrate, despite the existence of the Buildings Accessibility Standards Act of 2018, it remains unapplied; (2) there is a significant challenge regarding the dissemination of existing laws. While these laws are available in French, they are often unpublished and not disseminated in Creole; (3) there are extensive programs implemented by foreign implementing partners; (4) technical assistance is time-limited with no capacity building. (5) Sending high-paid consultants to government bodies, thinking they will be able to impact the education sector exponentially.

Returned migrants/IDPs. This study did not find reports of laws or policies that serve returning migrants or internally displaced children to access quality education.

Inclusive education practices. The national assessment for sixth graders is designed to provide insightful data on students' proficiency levels upon completing primary education. This information allows the MENFP to identify necessary adjustments as students transition to secondary education (Tamagnan, Routhier-Drab, Saint-Pierre, & Ramirez, 2023). In the last 15 years, specific adaptation processes for people with visual and hearing disabilities have been implemented for their care. These processes involved the preparation of national exams, which incorporated specialized technicians and devices such as braille machines. While the technology used may not be the most current, these processes are aligned with inclusion efforts. However, these adapted exams are limited to children in Port au Prince and exclude children from rural areas. Books on braille are often bulky and not user-friendly (CASAS – MENFP).

According to the IDB (2023), providing free meals at school has played a crucial role in overcoming barriers for accessing education, enhancing student nutrition, and supporting school access and academic performance. School feeding programs have played a vital role in facilitating access to education and significantly impact various educational performance indicators, including enhanced learning outcomes, increased school retention rates, higher graduation rates, improved regular attendance, and reduced school dropout.

3.4.7. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF EDUCATION QUALITY (RQ4)

The following sections will analyze the impact of school environments on marginalized learners' access to education (RQ4), emphasizing school, teacher, and classroom-level factors. They will also examine how community and family influences affect these learners' educational access (RQ5), with a focus on each marginalized group.

SCHOOL- AND CLASSROOM-LEVEL FACTORS

The school environment plays a critical role in shaping students' participation and learning. In Haiti, the marginalized groups targeted for this study face important school environment barriers to access quality education. These include (1) outdated materials and curricula; (2) inadequate school infrastructure – only 56 percent of schools have a source of drinking water; in 7 of the 10 departments of the country, the rate of school electrification is under 25 percent; and very few schools have internet (IDB, 2023a); (3) lack of instruction in the appropriate language; (4) lack of reasonable accommodations; (5) stigmatization, discrimination, and violence against students with disabilities; and (6) school fees and other costs that make education in Haiti for some, specially returned migrants and IDPs, unaffordable.

CHILDREN FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS CATEGORIES. Outdated curricula. Haiti's curricula fail to reflect the country's current and future needs. It is designed as one-size-fits all without adaptations to address the needs of marginalized groups. Curricular updates are needed to consider mother tongue education policy and the coordination of curricular oversight between schools and the MENPF (IDB, 2023a). Barriers are also linked to a lack of a comprehensive approach to inclusion, as one key informant noted, “consider the full scope of inclusive education beyond just physical infrastructure like outdoor ramps. How are we addressing indoor accessibility and fostering an inclusive classroom environment that supports children? What about restrooms and instructional materials.”

Language of instruction in practice. The Haitian Constitution recognizes the importance of Creole in educational settings, backed by the 1979 legislation, which permits Creole's use in both written and oral forms in educational institutions. Despite this legal framework, there has been no subsequent legislation to enforce the use of Haiti's two official languages in schools and universities since 1979. The Ten-Year Education and Training Plan 2017–2027 lacks explicit provisions addressing the implementation of language policy in the education sector (UNESCO, 2021d).

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. Lack of enforcement of inclusive laws. There is a significant lack of penalties for non-compliance with the May 11, 2012, Law on the Integration of People with Disabilities at the school level. Governmental officials highlighted the necessity for circulars to reinforce the commitment of administrative and teaching staff to inclusivity. Despite laws mandating the general admission of all students, principals frequently reject these students and must be compelled through circulars to adhere to the law. This barrier was illustrated by another key informant from the government who explained, “CASAS often must advocate for the admission of children with disabilities upon parental request, which benefits proactive and informed parents. However, the challenge remains for the uninformed parents whose children face registration rejection.” When mainstream schools cannot accommodate these children, families have no choice but to seek out specialized, often private, and more costly institutions with limited capacity.

Lack of reasonable accommodation. In public and private schools, particularly in rural areas, there is no legally established procedure for reasonable accommodation, despite the Buildings Accessibility Standards Act of 2018. The act still needs to be enforced at the school level, leading to a scarcity of necessary infrastructure accommodations. Also, in some schools, materials are not adequate such as unfriendly books on braille (CRPD, 2018).

Unsafe educational environments. Discrimination and violence against students with disabilities are pervasive, leading to unsafe educational environments. A focus group participant recounted the case of a student with a physical disability who was expelled from Lycée Pétion in her second year due to aggressive behavior stemming from persistent bullying. With the involvement of CASAS, an investigation revealed that her aggression was a response to the continuous verbal and physical abuse she endured, provoked by her peers due to her visible disability. Following CASAS' intervention, the school developed an integration plan. It supported her to improve her interactions with peers and excel academically by May 2022.

RETURNED MIGRANTS / IDPs. Legal frameworks in Haiti advocating for free quality education are often not enforced and lack universal implementation. The dependency on private education notably hinders the educational access of migrant and internally displaced children, placing a disproportionate financial strain on underprivileged families. Even in public schools, hidden costs, such as those for uniforms, meals, textbooks, and transportation, persist, imposing financial barriers that can exclude children from attending school altogether (UNESCO, 2021d).

TEACHER-LEVEL FACTORS

CHILDREN FROM LOWER SES CATEGORIES. In Haiti, teachers of children from lower SES categories lack proper training programs focused on effective classroom management and teaching strategies tailored to diverse student needs. Specifically, they lack preparation to utilize various technological solutions, from basic mobile phone texting to advanced digital tools. They also face barriers related to expanding educational resources, particularly in under-resourced areas where children from lower SES categories may struggle to access traditional forms of education. An official from the MENFP highlighted the significance of utilizing educational radio as a medium for student instruction and teacher training.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. In Haiti, access to education for children with disabilities is constrained by a shortage of educators and staff trained in inclusive education practices. There is no module on inclusive education in the training curriculum of universities and/or teacher training colleges (UNESCO, 2021d). The CRPD (2018) underscores the necessity for training initiatives and the requirement for mandatory inclusive education programs for teachers, supporting staff, and administrative personnel. A fundamental area of need is initiating Haitian Sign Language training and integrating assistive technologies, such as speech synthesis software, Braille printers, and screen readers. Within the MENFP, an early-stage Bureau of Inclusive Pedagogy aims to create adapted educational content and materials and conduct training for volunteer teachers and sign language technicians to make these resources widely accessible and free. Collaborations initiated with the World Bank focus on enhancing the CASAS-adapted pedagogy unit as a training and resource display hub. As an official of CASAS articulated, "There is optimism about potential World Bank financing, which currently targets the procurement of specialized equipment, though additional resources, like a Braille transcription

center, are also essential.” This official also notes the positive reception and eagerness among teachers for sign language training despite the limited duration of the courses currently offered.

RETURNED MIGRANTS/IDPS. In Haiti, the quality of education for returned migrants and internally displaced children is hindered by a lack of socioemotional support within the classroom. Teachers play a crucial role in this aspect. Still, many lack the necessary training in socioemotional learning that would enable them to address both their students’ psychological well-being and their own emotional health. Schools are affected in many areas because teachers have left or cannot reach the area. Many teachers are also IDPs themselves. “Quality inclusive education extends beyond foundational skills like reading and mathematics; it must also foster the socio-emotional well-being of students and educators alike” was a key informant’s argument. The mental health component of the National Health Policy (2014) was set to reform teacher training curricula, emphasizing early detection of mental, cognitive, and behavioral disorders (UNESCO, 2021d).

3.4.8. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS (RQ5)

FAMILY FACTORS

Children from lower SES categories. Poverty is often the first barrier parents from lower SES backgrounds in Haiti face to send their children to school. According to key informants, poor families often cannot pay school fees, transportation to and from school, and other costs related to dress requirements or school materials and supplies.

Children and youth with disabilities. According to FGD participants from local foundations, associations, and NGOs that work with people with disabilities, the cost of adequate services is the main barrier Haitian families face given that schools are not equipped to address this population’s needs. Families are left to pay for transportation and need to seek specialized education institutions which are often private, less accessible, and have limited capacity.

Moreover, according to a key informant from an organization specializing in children with disabilities, the threat of bullying within educational settings poses a severe concern for parents, deterring many from sending their children to school. This fear is particularly pronounced for girls and contributes to their heightened vulnerability. Despite these challenges, key informants have noted a growing trend among families to gradually increase school attendance for children with disabilities, signaling a shift toward greater inclusion.

Returned migrants and IDPs. Limited financial resources impede parents of returned migrants and internally displaced children from being able to cover additional schooling costs such as fees, transportation, and school supplies. Moreover, shame for their condition further disrupts their education. In this regard, a key informant explained, “the parents of marginalized children often have as their first barrier the gaze of society/the gaze of others. In Haiti, the social stigma is very strong for all marginalized populations (people with disabilities, internally displaced communities, out-of-school children and youth, etc.). Therefore, this results in some sort of shame in taking these children to school and facing society’s eye.” Compounding these challenges is the issue of family separation. As parents migrate or relocate to camps for displaced persons, children are frequently left in the care of other family members, disrupting their support systems and continuity of schooling.

COMMUNITY FACTORS

Violence caused by illegal armed groups. In Haiti, the pervasive security challenges directly impede access to quality education for marginalized groups, including children with lower SESs, those with disabilities, and those displaced by violence. Documented human rights violations, such as widespread gang violence, recruitment of children by gangs, weaponization of hunger, indiscriminate attacks against the population, obstruction of humanitarian access and assistance, attacks against UN agencies, lynchings, violations by police officers, and a surge in intentional homicides obstructing humanitarian efforts, create an environment of fear and instability. The assassination of President Moïse in July 2021 exacerbated an already volatile situation, leading to a breakdown in governance and stalled political transitions. Without elected representatives since January 2023, the government's ability to function and govern effectively has been critically weakened. Elections have not been conducted since 2016, contributing to the governance vacuum and hampering efforts to manage the intertwined security, social, and economic crises. In such a context, educational initiatives for these marginalized populations are severely disrupted, as the conditions necessary for safe and consistent schooling are compromised (UN, Security Council 2023, p. 135).

3.4.9. MULTILATERAL SUPPORT

The MENFP receives little international support for informal and inclusive education services. In general, there is not a big institutional interest/focus on marginalized children including out-of-school, street children, students with disabilities, and internally displaced children, etc. Neither is inclusive education a main theme in donors' agendas. Donors tend to intervene mostly in formal education. Currently the World Bank seems to be addressing inclusive education and informal education with CASAS and is planning studies on policy design for students with disabilities. On the other hand, SHAA (the Haitian Association for the Blind) has informed the research team that USAID, through the RAPID project, has supported the Integrated Library with the translation of books to braille. This project was a small grant that worked well, according to respondents. Meanwhile, the Digicel Foundation supported the building of schools with ramps after the earthquake. USAID also included ramp construction in its PHARE project. Multilateral programs that support inclusive education focus mainly on school infrastructure and physical access. Curricular and pedagogical content adaptation is still to be adapted to cater to the needs of different students, particularly those with disabilities. The Bureau of the Secretary of State for the Integration of People with Disabilities has been receiving ad hoc financial support from international NGOs. In general, there is little to no emphasis on multisectoral interventions and on inclusive education according to different stakeholders.

Education plans and programs with international cooperation. Few plans, programs, or projects are currently being developed at the national level to expand the coverage of educational services for the three target populations identified for Haiti. Attempts are partial and led by NGOs, international donors, and private sector actors. Some of these interventions include:

- Plan to establish an inclusive education policy at the MENFP in consultation with various government partners (via CASAS/MENFP and Providing a more Equitable, Sustainable and Safer Education in Haiti [PROMESSE]). The World Bank is funding this plan.

- The World Bank and UNICEF have projects targeting children from lower SES categories (this includes rural communities and urban communities).

HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Highlighted programs

- Since 2010, the IDB has approved various non-reimbursable financing operations totaling \$224 million USD for educational investment in Haiti, alongside multi-sectoral initiatives that incorporate school feeding programs amounting to \$31 million USD. These school feeding interventions have played a crucial role in supporting over 220,000 primary school children annually since 2017, reducing one of the key barriers to education for the most vulnerable children in the country (IDB, 2023a).
- IDB Education Sector Support Plan: the IDB approved this project in November 2023 to promote access to quality education for students with disabilities. Public primary schools will benefit from (1) teacher and school director training in disability screening tools; (2) reading glasses, hearing aids, and prosthetics, (3) data collection to tackle the lack of data on gender and students with disabilities; (4) attracting out of school children to school through back-to-school campaigns and addressing access barriers of the particularly vulnerable populations of girls and students with disabilities. The project will finance the hiring/contracting of UNICEF to provide technical support to the MENFP in the identification of the target populations and execution of gender inclusivity, inclusive education, and reaching out of school children (IDB, 2023a).
- Small grants to existing institutions, associations, already implementing activities in the field: these are often local actors with critical field knowledge (e.g. USAID’s RAPID project, a small grant activity that works to develop adapted contents for an integrated library, and the *Bibliothèque Roger Dorsainville*).
- Awareness and sensitization to communities about disability to break down stigma and provide useful information on existing laws are not sufficiently applied.
- Organization of “Christmas for persons who are disabled”, “Mother’s day for persons who are disabled” (NGOs initiatives).

Challenges

Multilateral support to improve inclusive education interventions in Haiti that **lack local input and a holistic vision** receive pushback from the community and are likely unsustainable. These efforts fail to address true needs or cultural context and might tackle a single issue (like building ramps at schools) but neglect broader challenges (like needed adaptations to the curriculum, instruction, and classroom; the prevention of stigma against learners with disabilities; and support to families). This can create unintended consequences or short-term fixes that don’t achieve lasting development. Some examples of projects that could use a comprehensive approach and local involvement include the USAID’s PHARE project with the construction of ramps (only considering aspects related to infrastructure not

envisioning inclusive education in a holistic manner); USAID's Room-to-Learn project for Out-of-School Children and Youth implemented with little communication with MENFP – project efforts were stopped without informing ministry partners; and school constructions (UNICEF, IDB) that only included access ramps, but nothing for the visually impaired (e.g., white bands for people with canes and adapted bathrooms). The project funded building ramps to access schools, yet these were not up to international standards and did not reach all the classrooms and the restrooms in the schools.

3.5. HONDURAS OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

3.5.1. EDUCATION SYSTEM SNAPSHOT

Honduras, with a population exceeding 10 million, has a four-tiered education system encompassing preschool (pre-básica), primary and lower secondary (básica), upper secondary (media), and tertiary (media superior). Currently, there are 1,779,000 students enrolled in both primary and secondary education levels. Out of these, approximately 1,124,000 students, which constitutes 63 percent, are enrolled in primary schools (Education Policy and Data Center, 2018). The net enrollment rate in primary education reached 80 percent for the period 2017 to 2021; however, overall net enrollment dipped across higher levels. Compulsory education in Honduras spans from the last year of preschool to all nine years of primary and lower secondary education, totaling 13 years. This highlights a commitment to a strong educational foundation, but challenges remain in ensuring continued access throughout secondary and tertiary levels.

3.5.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN HONDURAS

In Honduras, inclusive education emphasizes the need for specific conditions to comprehensively meet students' needs, focusing on psycho-pedagogical care, curricular adaptations, and reintegration protocols. Like the USAID inclusive education policy (2018), Hondurans highlighted the importance of teacher training in basic competencies and skills to address marginalized children's psychosocial and learning needs and collaboration between education departments and psycho-pedagogical teams, as well as having the necessary materials to address the specific education needs of marginalized children and youth to equip them with reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning skills. In contrast to the USAID inclusive education policy, Hondurans did not emphasize inclusive education based on evidence and best practices.

3.5.3. MARGINALIZED TARGET GROUPS

Group 1. Children from lower socioeconomic status (including those living in rural and urban communities, and indigenous communities). Honduras lacks a comprehensive registry detailing the SES of children and youth, which poses a challenge to delivering targeted educational services. The Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL) lacks an individualized tracking system for children in and out of school. Although certain indicators, such as the geographical location of educational centers and whether they offer Bilingual Multicultural Education offer insights into the SES of students, these are insufficient for a detailed understanding of their status. The Ministry of Education initiated the population census outside the educational system survey to address this data gap. However, it is currently in its preliminary stages, focusing on training educators to utilize the data collection tools.

Group 2. Children and youth with disabilities. The Pan American Health Organization estimates that approximately one in every 100 households in Honduras includes a person with a disability. Based on this estimation, there may be around 400,000 children with disabilities in Honduras. Yet, according to the Ministry of Education's 2022 report, only 30,438 of these children— 7.6 percent—currently benefit from educational services. This highlights a significant service provision gap within the Honduran education system for children with disabilities.

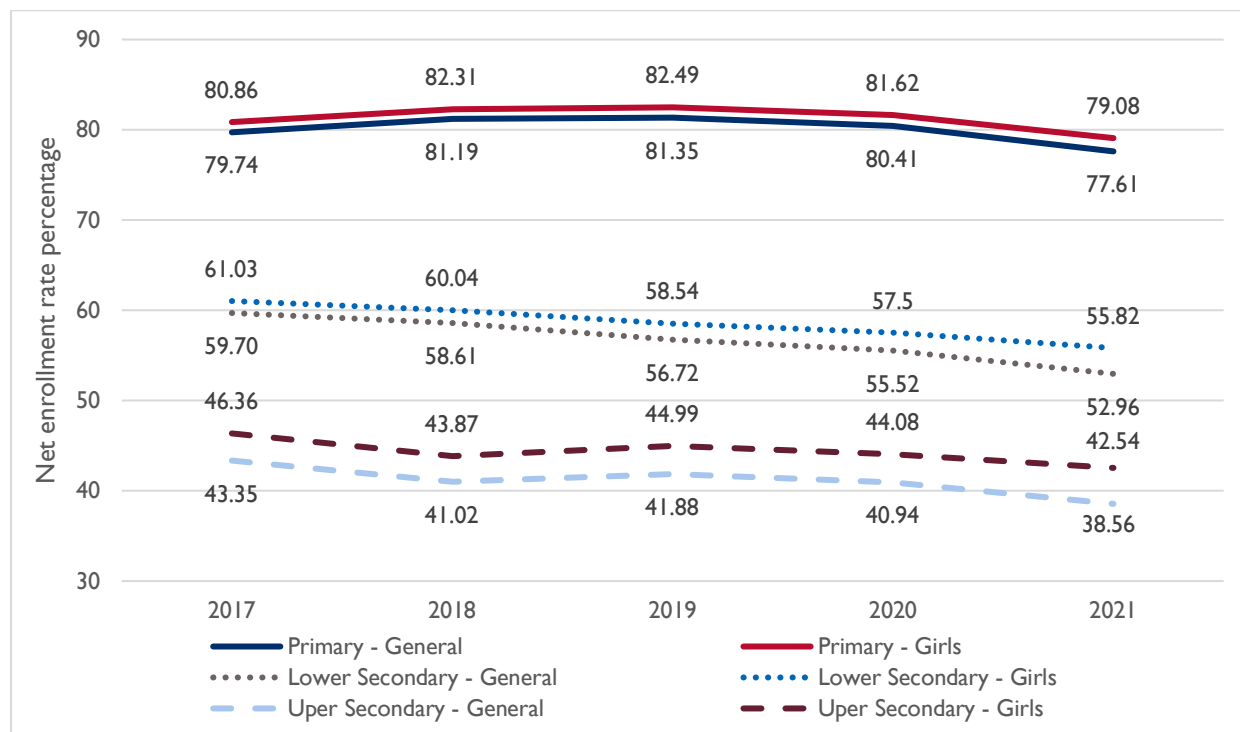
Group 3. Migrants and internally displaced people. This study's analysis of migrants and internally displaced people included irregular Honduran migrants traveling to the United States, returning migrants who have returned to Honduras, migrants from various nationalities who are transiting through Honduras, and IDPs who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence and natural disasters. The ODK application revealed that in 2021, approximately 80,000 students, constituting 4.5 percent of the total student body, stopped attending school. Half of these students discontinued their education due to migration-related reasons (Ministry of Education, 2021). Moreover, the Observatory of International Migration of Honduras (OMIH) indicates that in 2019 alone, a total of 24,038 children under 18 returned to the country and in 2022 the number of returned minors fell to 14,334. The greatest responsibility for school re-entry and curricular adaptation falls on educational centers in the municipalities of the country where the largest number of returned children and adolescents are concentrated, which according to this IOM study are San Pedro Sula, Central District, Villanueva, Choloma, and Yoro (IOM, 2023).

3.5.4. EDUCATION ACCESS AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT (RQ1)

ACCESS DATA

FIGURE 19, below, shows net enrollment rates by education level using estimates from UNESCO.

FIGURE 19. HONDURAS. NET ENROLLMENT RATE BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND SEX, 2017-2021

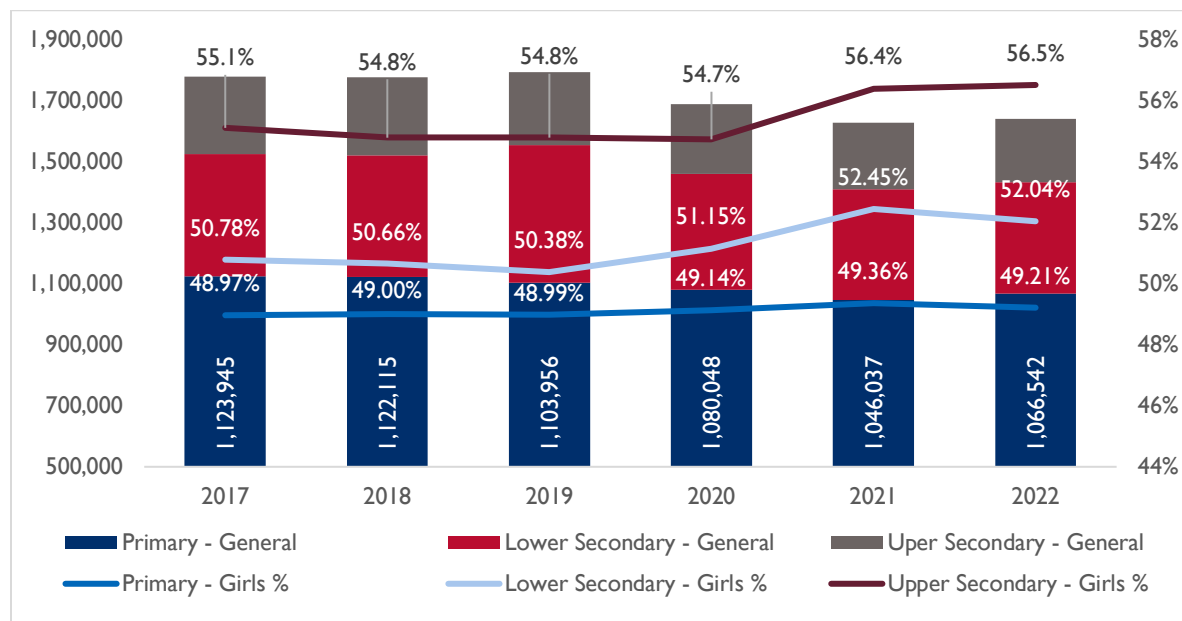


Source: Research team using data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>) data for Honduras (2017-2021).

- Primary net enrollment rate in Honduras is below LAC average (94 percent for 2018 for LAC vs. 81.19 in Honduras). The rate increased by around 2 percentage points between 2017 and 2019, but decreased by almost 4 points between 2019 and 2021 to values below 2017. Even though the research team did not find official enrolment rates for 2022/2023, trends in gross school enrollment (see FIGURE 20) might indicate that there are no significant changes in access to schools in the last 2 years.
- As youth progress through the education system, net enrollment rates decrease. For example, average net enrollment rate for lower secondary education is 52.9 percent, and for upper secondary the value is 38.5 percent.
- Girls have higher enrollment rates than boys across all education levels. However, the gap in favor of girls increases as learners advance into higher education levels. The difference in favor of girls for 2021 was 2.87 percentage points in primary education, 5.59 percentage points in lower secondary and 7.77 percentage points in upper secondary.

The following figure provides gross enrollment data by education level for the period 2017-2022 in Honduras:

FIGURE 20. HONDURAS. GROSS ENROLLMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND SEX, 2017 – 2022



Source: Research team using data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>) data for Honduras (2017-2021). 2018 lower and upper secondary education data extracted from the Honduras National Statistics Institute (<https://ine.gob.hn/v4/categor%C3%Ada-de-documentos/educacion/>). Note: gross enrollment data in the blue bars corresponds to primary education only.

- Overall, similar to Colombia and El Salvador trends, gross school enrollment decreased 7.8 percent between 2017 and 2022, from a total of 1,779,035 across primary, lower and upper secondary education in 2017 to 1,640,434 in 2022. When looking at the changes by education level, enrollment reduced 5.1 percent in primary, 8.7 percent in lower secondary and 18.3 percent in upper secondary education levels.
- Girls' participation increased slightly during the last six years according to available data. In primary education, girls represent 49.2 percent of the total enrollment. This percentage increases in higher school levels, up to 52 percent for lower secondary and 56.5 percent for upper secondary.

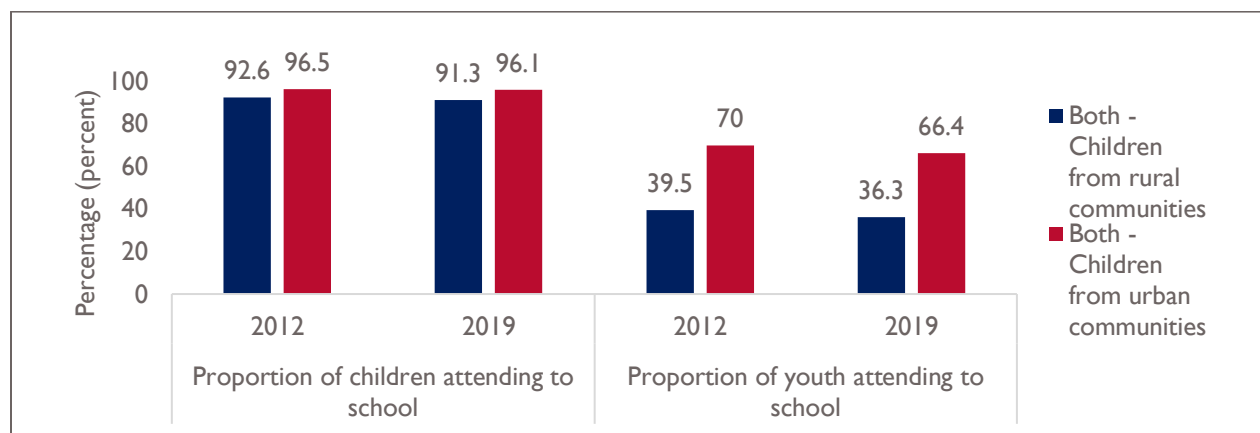
According to the World Bank (2023), Honduras is among the poorest countries with one of the highest inequality levels in the region. In 2020, as a result of the pandemic and Hurricanes Eta and Iota, the share of the population living in poverty (\$6.85 USD per person per day at 2017 purchasing parity power) reached 57.7 percent, an increase from 49.5 percent in 2019. Since then, the recovery of the economy and the labor market, as well as the inflow of remittances, have contributed to reducing poverty. In 2022, the poverty level was estimated to have decreased to 52.4 percent, although this was still above pre-COVID levels. The economic context of Honduras might impact the share of male youth seeking economic opportunities instead of continuing their education.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ACCESS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The Ministry of Education does not track out-of-school students. Informants from the Ministry of Education expressed reservations about the reliability of out-of-school statistics and the overall national educational coverage across various educational levels and populations. This skepticism is due to the absence of data that can be verified annually, as reported by the Secretariat of Education. According to UNESCO data from 2021, in Honduras there are 841, 438 out-of-school adolescents and youth of primary and secondary school age, among which 278,896 are out-of-school of primary school age, 299,417 are out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age, and 263,125 are out-of-school youth of upper secondary school age (UNESCO, 2021d).

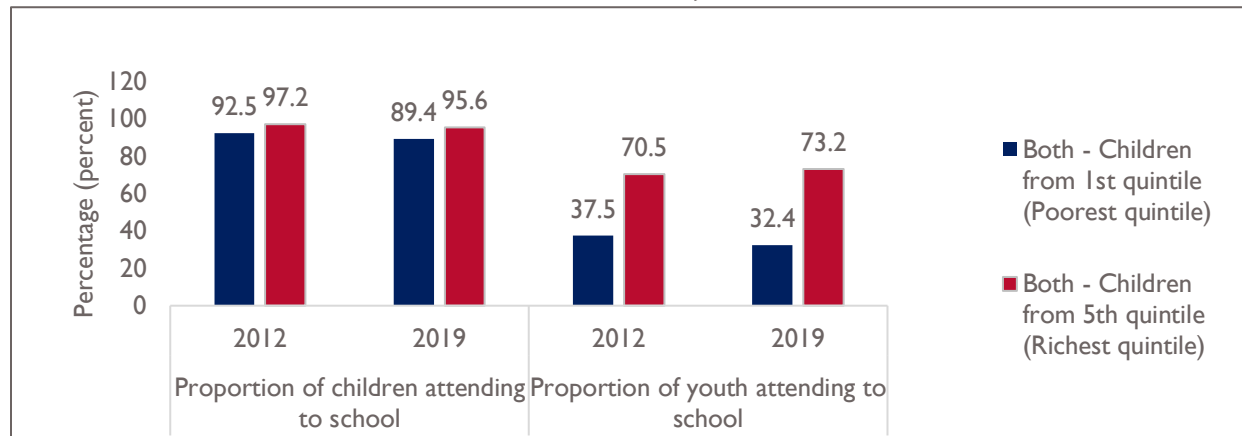
The research team used data school attendance data from CEPAL to analyze access to the educational system in Honduras for marginalized groups with available data. The following figures highlight differences in attendance for children and youth by geographic area (urban/rural) and SES.

FIGURE 21. HONDURAS. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ATTENDING SCHOOL BY COMMUNITY TYPE. 2012, 2019.



Source: CEPAL. CEPAL does not include data on statistical significance of the differences. Note: “Both” represents girls and boys.

FIGURE 22. HONDURAS. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ATTENDING SCHOOL BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS. 2012, 2019.

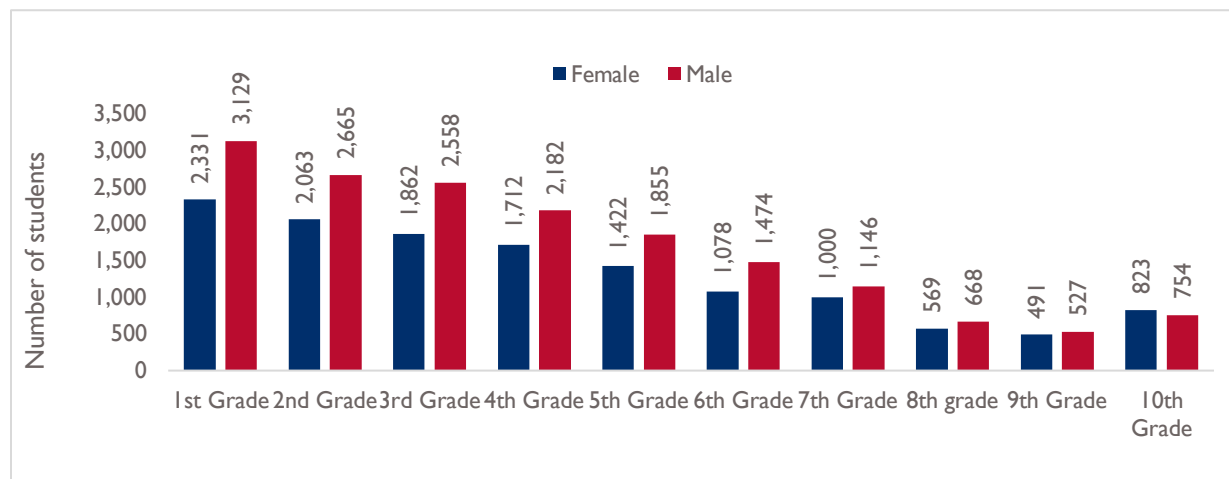


Source: CEPAL. CEPAL does not include data on statistical significance of the differences. Note: “Both” represents girls and boys.

In general, the proportion of children and youth who attend school from the richest socioeconomic quintile is higher than that from the poorest quintile. This difference is more pronounced for adolescent youth attending school than younger children.

Children from lower SES categories (including those living in rural and urban communities, and indigenous communities). Data from the Education Center Administration System (SACE) show that 49.1 percent of the students in the public system are rural. Of these rural schools, 70 percent have only one teacher, 20 percent have two, and only 10 percent have three or more (2020). It should be noted that the poorest municipalities in the country coincide with areas where some indigenous or Afro-descendant groups are present. The SACE reports the enrollment of 114,814 indigenous and Afro-descendant learners, belonging to the Garífuna, Lencas, Miskitos, Isleños, Chortí, Tolupán, Nahua, Pech and Tawahka peoples (2020).

FIGURE 23. HONDURAS. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ENROLLMENT. 2022



Source: Encuestas Niñez en Condición de Vulnerabilidad (*Survey on Children in Vulnerable Conditions*) - SACE 2022-FENAPAPEDISH-PNUD

The number of students with disabilities decreases as the educational level increases, with a greater number of boys who are disabled compared to girls who are disabled.

Children and youth with disabilities. The Ministry of Education in Honduras reports that, as of 2022, 30,438 children with disabilities are being served by the educational system. Of these, 47.5 percent have learning disabilities, 21.2 percent face visual difficulties, 9.7 percent have intellectual disabilities, 6 percent struggle with language disorders, 5.8 percent have motor disabilities, 3.4 percent are affected by multiple disabilities, 3.1 percent have hearing disabilities, 2.8 percent suffer from other types of disabilities, and 0.3 percent have cerebral palsy (Early Warning and Response System [SART], 2022). If estimates referenced above about the number of children with disabilities are correct, there are around 370,000 learners with disabilities out of the formal education sector.

Migrants and IDPs. Data from the ODK app in 2021 revealed that about 80,000 students, or roughly five percent of those enrolled, had interrupted their schooling at some stage during the year, with migration cited as the reason for half of these interruptions (Secretaría de Educación, 2022a). The Human Mobility Household Survey on unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with support from USAID between July and December 2022, revealed that less than a quarter of the 14,334 children and adolescents who returned to Honduras in 2022 completed their primary education. The survey found that males were less likely to have finished primary education, with only 19 percent having done so. In contrast, the trend is different at the secondary level: 10.6 percent of young returned migrant females did not completed their secondary education, which is more than triple the rate of their male counterparts at 3.5 percent. The survey also highlighted that over 50 percent of these children and adolescents are over-age for their grades when they rejoin the education system. This age discrepancy challenges their learning needs and impacts their adaptation and reintegration into school (IOM, 2023).

PRIMARY EDUCATION - LEARNING RESULTS BASED ON THE ERCE

The learning results are analyzed in four levels of performance, from lowest to highest, as shown by the ERCE exams, which were applied to 8,602 boys and girls (4,179 in third grade and 4,423 in sixth grade) to measure what students know and can do according to the national curriculum standards. General results are shown in TABLE 18.

TABLE 18. HONDURAS. ERCE RESULTS. 2019.

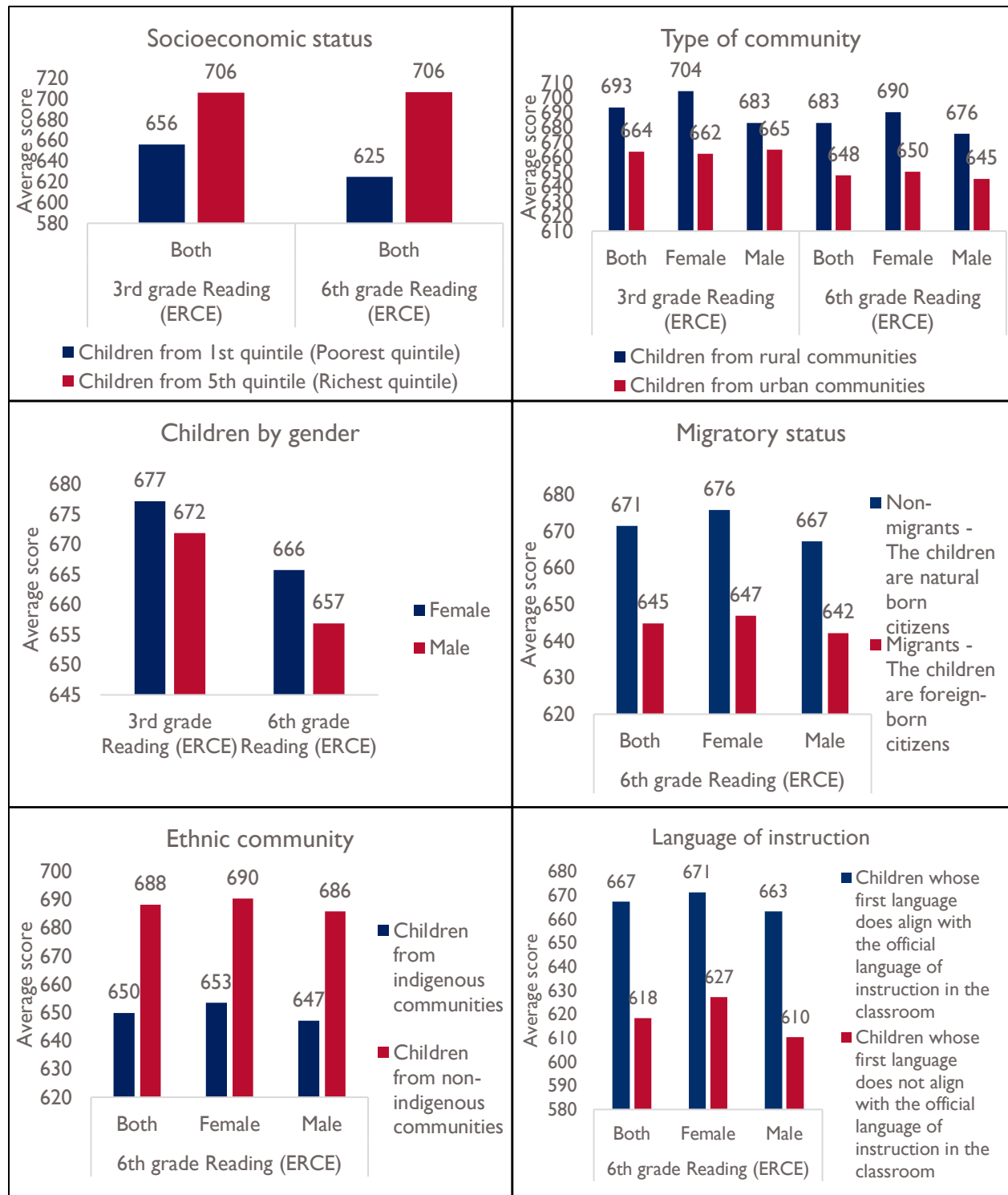
GRADE	CURRICULUM AREA	AVERAGE SCORE	COMPARISON WITH THE AVERAGE OF COUNTRIES	COMPARISON WITH TERCE	GENDER DIFFERENCES
3rd Grade	Reading	675	-22*	-6*	5 points higher among girls
	Math	702	+4	+22*	4 points higher among boys
6th Grade	Reading	661	-35*	-1	9 points higher among girls*
	Math	682	-15*	+21*	9 points higher among boys
	Natural Sciences	674	-28*	+6	2 points higher among girls

Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 study report for Honduras.

Note: The asterisk * indicates whether the differences are statistically significant.

Based on the table above, the learning results from ERCE 2019 show an increase for both grades in mathematics and science when compared to the 2013 TERCE study. However, they show no improvement in reading learning achievements. Next, the following figure shows learning results according to grade and study areas of scores obtained by gender, type of community, socioeconomic status, ethnic groups, social status and migratory status.

FIGURE 24. HONDURAS. ERCE READING SCORES BY MARGINALIZED GROUP. 2019.



Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/estudio-regional-comparativo-y-explicativo-erce-2019> and UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://github.com/llece/erce>.

Note: differences in all graphs are statistically significant, including by gender.

According to data above, girls obtain a higher mean reading score than boys at all educational levels. This difference seems to be greater in sixth grade students. On average, children in rural communities score higher in reading compared to children in urban areas. By socioeconomic level, children from the poorest quintile have a lower reading performance than children from the richest quintile. On average, reading performance is lower for children from marginalized groups compared to their peers.

3.5.5. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (RQ2)

The Honduran Ministry of Education, via the National Educational Information System Unit, actively manages the SACE. Teachers and directors from all public educational centers nationwide enter the data into the system. SACE tracks crucial statistics such as enrollment, repetition, and dropout rates, reporting them by gender, grade, school type, and location (urban or rural, municipality, and department).

Since 2019, the Ministry of Education, with backing from international partners like the Norwegian Refugee Council, German Cooperation, and USAID, has integrated the Early Warning and Response System (SART) into SACE. SART includes a survey component for school directors and teachers of educational centers to identify and monitor students who are at risk of dropping out of school and to profile minors moving within the country or returning for reintegration into schools, including those from marginalized populations, such as children with disabilities. According to key informants, the SART has been instrumental in the inclusion of migrant and returned children's data in recent years.

In 2019, the Honduras Local Governance Project, funded by USAID, endorsed the ODK mobile application to conduct what is essentially a semi-annual educational census, capturing various operational aspects of schools and classrooms.

Since 2007, the General Directorate of Curriculum and Evaluation, with USAID-funded technical support, has conducted standardized assessments in Spanish and mathematics. These assessments informed annual reports with data representative of national, departmental, and municipal levels. Reported variables include school grade, age, gender, geographic region, type of educational institution, and learning outcomes in these subjects. In 2015, 2017, and 2023, the studies were expanded to include municipal-level sampling and examined associated factors influencing academic results.

BARRIERS TO COLLECT AND USE DATA

Data fragmentation. According to governmental officials, the EMIS in Honduras presents a significant challenge due to its insufficient integration and poor information-sharing capabilities. The system's fragmented nature, incompleteness, and delays restrict gathering accurate and current educational data.

Limited trained teachers and staff to collect, report, and analyze the EMIS data. School staff also lack training to identify diverse types of disabilities. According to stakeholders, the lack of school infrastructure and training is often influenced by budgetary constraints and political will to make these populations visible.

Weak coordination between institutions in sharing information. For instance, the General Directorate of Curriculum and Evaluation, which falls under the Secretary of Technical Pedagogical Affairs, generates data unknown by other Ministry of Education branches.

BARRIERS TO COLLECT DATA ON CHILDREN FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS. Lack of school infrastructure. According to SACE, 76 percent of public schools in Honduras are in rural areas. Many of these schools lack computers, electricity, and adequate internet access, which forces school principals and teachers to travel to urban locations to find internet cafes or other means to upload educational data to the necessary platforms. The ODK Monitoring Report indicates that only 40 percent of teachers have access to a computer at home, which complicates their ability to update student enrollment and maintain accurate school records online (Ministry of Education, 2021). Key informants from the government and an NGO have reported that these technological barriers delay enrollment information uploading, impeding timely data recording. Consequently, this hinders the reporting of critical indicators and diminishes the capacity for data-driven decision-making in education.

BARRIERS TO COLLECT DATA ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. In Honduras, numerous organizations provide services to people with disabilities through special education centers, which may be funded publicly, privately, or internationally. However, these centers do not report to the SACE, which is tailored for formal educational institutions. Consequently, significant data on the population with disabilities served by these institutions remains unreported.

BARRIERS TO COLLECT DATA ON MIGRANTS AND IDPs. The Honduran legal framework, prioritizing privacy, restricts access to personal data. The constitution (Article 76) and the Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information protect individuals' privacy and safeguard against data that could lead to discrimination or harm. Consequently, when parents or guardians withhold sensitive information about their children's disabilities, educational records remain incomplete, and tracking individual students through their educational journey becomes challenging. Moreover, confidentiality concerns cause many internally displaced children, particularly those affected by violence, to conceal their locations for safety.

Data use. Despite the Ministry of Education of Honduras collecting data on enrollment and learning outcomes, key informants in this study explained that this information remains largely inaccessible and unknown to educational organizations and even officials within the ministry. While present in statistical reports and institutional databases, the data are neither widely disseminated nor analyzed, which becomes a barrier to informed decision-making. Due to these weaknesses, the ministry has partnered with external organizations, including USAID and the Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University's Quality Measurement Unit, to facilitate the management and reporting of national educational evaluations.

3.5.6. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES (RQ3)

The 1982 Constitution of Honduras stipulates that official education shall be free of charge and that primary education shall be compulsory and State-funded. The constitution also promotes the preservation and development of indigenous cultures, and the inclusion of people with disabilities in the education system (UNESCO, 2021c). In agreement, the Inclusive Education Policy of 2021, targets all marginalized populations and those subjected to discrimination due to their diverse backgrounds, and focuses on overcoming situations that generate lack of access, sustainability, and permanence in the educational system. However, according to key informants, inclusive policies are not widely socialized or known by departmental and district directors and teachers, which reduces their application.

TABLE 19 presents a summary of Honduras' policies for inclusive education and the level of progress of its legal framework and institutional coordination. As show in TABLE 19, the IELA research team classified the legal framework to guarantee quality education for children from lower socio-economic quintiles as established, and the coordination among institutions to implement the existing policies as emerging. For children and young people with disabilities, the team classified the legal framework as emerging, and the institutional coordination as emerging. Finally, for migrants and IDPs, the team classified the legal framework and the institutional coordination as emerging.

TABLE 19. HONDURAS. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LEGAL FRAMEWORK

POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION
CHILDREN FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS			Established	Emerging
Fundamental Law of education of 2011 (Decree 262)	Legislation that guarantees the universal right to education.	UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960 aims to combat discrimination in education on various grounds, including race, ethnicity, nationality and language. CRC convention on the rights of the child of 1990 that guarantees children and young people (aged 17 and under) free quality education.		
CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES			Emerging	Emerging
Law on Equity and Comprehensive Development for Persons with Disabilities of 2005 (Act 17)	States that the State, through the education systems, shall ensure access to education at all levels for people with disabilities.	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006: emphasizes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion for people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including education.		
MIGRANTS AND IDPs			Emerging	Emerging
Law for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons: decree 154 of 2022	Aims to prevent internal displacement, care for and protect people forced to flee their place of residence due to situations of armed conflict or generalized violence.	UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families of 1960: recognizes the right to education for migrant children, emphasizing that they should have access to education on an equal basis with nationals of the host country.		

POLICIES BY TARGET GROUP

Children from lower SES categories (overlapping with indigenous communities). The fundamental Law of Education of 2011 states that the Government of Honduras shall protect the right to education and ensure that everyone can exercise this right, without discrimination, with the highest possible coverage and quality, reaching the country's most remote and isolated populations. Also, there is an Inclusion Strategy and Protocol for the educational reintegration of boys, girls, and young people in marginalized conditions that is in progress but has not been approved yet. However, key informants and SIR participants expressed a low level of coordination across sectors, at the level of service delivery, and low mechanisms for coordination with non-state stakeholders.

Children and youth with disabilities. The Law on Equity and Comprehensive Development for Persons with Disabilities of 2005, states that the State, through the education systems, shall ensure access to education at all levels for people with disabilities, in both the public and private systems. Furthermore, the country has ratified international agreements such as the Marrakesh Treaty that facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind visually impaired, and recognizes Honduran Sign Language. However, according to the CRPD (2017), there is a standardized definition and criteria to certify disability are lacking. Additionally, in practice, special and segregated education based on evaluations of the person's disabilities is prevalent at all levels, and there is a lack of training in inclusive education for teachers, which impedes the transition to an inclusive education system. Also, there is a limited reach of specific measures for children with disabilities in rural areas and in indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities.

Migrants and IDPs. The Law for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons of 2022 includes comprehensive measures to prevent internal displacement through early warning systems, prevention and contingency plans, humanitarian assistance, and protection of affected rights, such as education. However, key informants and SIR participants expressed a low level of coordination across sectors, at the level of service delivery, and low mechanisms for coordination with non-state stakeholders.

Inclusive education practices. Key informants from the government, private institutions, and NGOs identified several key programs that eliminate barriers to accessing education:

1. Provision of school meals.
2. Free tuition.
3. Conditional cash transfer bonuses.
4. Scholarship opportunities to support students financially.
5. The Educational Bridge Program that works to bridge educational gaps.
6. The School Infrastructure Improvement Program that invests in enhancing the learning environment.

7. Rural alternative education programs that offer tailored approaches to schooling in non-urban areas.
8. Alternative care modalities that adapt to the varying needs of children and provide comprehensive social protection programs.

The implementation of the SART facilitates profiling minors who are either internally mobile or returning for reintegration into the educational system. This flexibility introduced into the registration process provides migrant children, who are returning, the opportunity to enroll in school at any point during the year and in any region of the country, thereby significantly reducing barriers to continued education.

3.5.7. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF EDUCATION QUALITY (RQ4)

The following sections will analyze the impact of school environments on marginalized learners' access to education (RQ4), emphasizing school, teacher, and classroom-level factors. They will also examine how community and family influences affect these learners' educational access (RQ5), with a focus on each marginalized group.

SCHOOL-LEVEL FACTORS

The school environment shapes students' participation and learning. In Honduras, the marginalized groups targeted for this study face important school environmental barriers to accessing quality education. These include lack of schools, especially upper primary and secondary levels, in the communities where marginalized populations live, inadequate school basic infrastructure, lack of reasonable accommodations, stigmatization, discrimination, and even access denial for students with disabilities. Conversely, enabling factors documented in this study include providing school meals, free tuition, and removing any school fees in public schools. Allowing registration at any point in the year has also facilitated enrollment of migrant and IDP learners.

Lack of articulation and sequence between the different educational levels. The Ministry of Education has crafted policies, regulations, and initiatives to enhance education for all. However, the failure to put this in practice and to monitor their implementation consistently - owing to frequent staff turnover for political reasons and a lack of monitoring tools - has impeded the attainment of these goals. Participants from KIs reported a lack of articulation and sequence between the different educational levels in Honduras, which directly impacts young people aged 13-18. This is primarily due to the lowest rates of educational coverage being observed in the third cycle of primary education and at the secondary education level.

Lack of school infrastructure. Due to insufficient public funding, many schools have deficient infrastructure that affects all students and disproportionately impacts those with disabilities. Issues include limited access to drinking water, structural damage to ceilings and walls, a shortage of furniture, and a lack of accommodations necessary for inclusive education.

Programs that contribute to inclusive education. Specific programs, such as school meals and free tuition, have successfully improved educational access for the most marginalized groups. Providing

school meals has proven to be a key motivator for attendance. Simultaneously, implementing free tuition has been instrumental in eliminating the economic hurdles that typically deter these children from enrolling in and attending school.

STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS. Participants in the SIR workshop, such as school principals, teachers, parents, and students, highlighted that children from poor families in rural areas struggle the most to get to school. The long journeys they have to make to reach educational centers are a major hurdle, making it hard for them to attend school regularly. In the case of low-income students who come from Afro-Honduran towns, the challenge of accessing schools primarily arises from the school distance and the inadequate condition of roads and communication channels.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. According to the CRPD (2017), in Honduras, special and segregated education based on evaluations of the person's disabilities is prevalent at all levels. Despite the existence of inclusive policies, SIR participants (including government officials, unions, parents, and NGOs) explained that schools frequently deny access to children with disabilities, forcing families to either take their children home or, when financially possible, enroll them in private institutions that can accommodate their needs. Another significant barrier is insufficient funding to create inclusive educational environments. In a 2022 survey of 16,974 educational centers, only 20 percent reported having any inclusive infrastructure for students with special needs (SART, 2022). Additionally, the CRPD (2017) identified the limited reach of specific measures for children with disabilities in rural areas and in indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities, which shows an intersection among vulnerabilities.

MIGRANT AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN. By implementing the SART platform, schools have adopted more flexible enrollment processes, enabling the registration of children and youth at any point during the school year. This flexibility has effectively removed a significant barrier for migrant and internally displaced children, who often face disruptions in their education due to their circumstances requiring them to move frequently. However, some schools lack the capacity to accommodate additional students.

TEACHER-LEVEL FACTORS

Insufficient teachers to meet the educational demands of students from lower SES categories. According to SACE (2020), 49.1 percent of students in the public system are from rural areas and regions with the highest poverty levels often have significant indigenous or Afro-descendant populations. In 2020, SACE reported that there were 114,814 students from various ethnic groups, including Garífuna, Lencas, Misquitos, Isleños, Chortí, Tolupán, Nahua, Pech, and Tawahka. These students often attend schools with limited teaching resources: 70 percent are in single-teacher schools, 20 percent are in schools with two teachers, and only 8 percent are in schools with multiple teachers. (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the country, the pupil teacher ratio is 22:1 and many of these teachers work with multiple grades (Ministry of Education, 2020). Most schools are staffed by monolingual teachers, however, there are some bilingual intercultural education centers in the country, and slight advances in the language of instruction. While this offering is not available in all schools, efforts are underway to increase the number of teachers trained to instruct in students in their mother tongues. Still, government officials, representatives from the academic sector, and NGOs who participated in the

SIR mentioned gaps in comprehensive teacher training programs that address the full range of factors impacting student learning.

Unqualified teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Access to quality education for children and youth with disabilities is impeded partly due to teachers lacking specialized training to meet these students' needs. In 2017 the CRPD reported concerns related to the National Autonomous University of Honduras dropping its course on sign-language interpretation. Additionally, classroom teachers are often overwhelmed, highlighting the need for support from staff trained specifically for these challenges. According to a key informant from the Ministry of Education, the ministry is addressing these issues by enhancing the role of educational psychologists and guidance teachers within the public education system. These professionals, particularly in secondary education, foster students' personal development and ensure their successful integration into school, family, and social settings. However, two primary concerns arise: guidance teachers are sometimes appointed based on political affiliations rather than competencies, and not all fulfill the specialized training needed for their roles.

Lack of training to provide socioemotional support to migrant children. Migrant and returned children often face emotional and psychological challenges due to their experiences of displacement and return. These experiences can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, alongside the struggle to adapt to new and changing environments. For instance, a returned girl shared in the SIR, "I went with my brother. I returned because I wanted to be with my mother. I felt calm and wasn't afraid during the journey, no bad things happened. But when I returned, I did feel sad because everything was different—new school, new classmates, new teachers, and I didn't know anyone." Teachers often lack the necessary training in socioemotional support to address the specific needs of these children effectively, and do not always have the pedagogical tools required to best serve migrant children. Additionally, SIR participants noted that these students sometimes need specialized staff, such as psychologists, to support their educational journey.

CLASSROOM-LEVEL FACTORS

Students need differential attention, flexible educational models and leveling programs.

The ministry recognizes that a standardized curriculum can hinder marginalized groups' access to quality education and is, therefore, moving toward educational models that accommodate diverse learning needs. The National Plan for Inclusive Education addresses the need for flexible education models and the adoption of a UDL. This approach, which aligns with international regulations on universal accessibility, benefits all students. Consulted governmental officials consider it urgent to adapt the vision of the national curriculum to contemporary realities. According to these key informants, the state should have an educational proposal that covers face-to-face, virtual, and semi-face-to-face modalities, and supports learning on platforms, which would resolve many of the access limitations of marginalized populations. The need for flexible education models is poignantly illustrated by the experiences of migrant students upon their return. A returned migrant girl in the SIR, shared her struggle: "When I came back from the U.S. and rejoined school, I felt lost. I couldn't grasp what the math teacher was explaining and feared failing the exams. They weren't my old classmates, so I felt I had nowhere to turn for help. I felt alone." A mother of a returned girl who also participated in the SIR explained, "She had to

repeat the year because she came back in mid-September, which was too late in the school year to catch up."

Students from lower SES categories. According to UNESCO (2023), during the COVID-19 pandemic, 31 percent of students worldwide - mostly the poorest (72 percent) and those in rural areas (70 percent) - could not be reached by remote learning, which forced educational institutions to find ways to maintain interactivity. In the case of Honduras, interviewees mentioned that educators have innovatively adapted to the lack of computer access in low socio-economic status households by transforming cell phones into teaching tools. Recognizing this digital divide, teachers have self-trained in technology to utilize platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok for educational purposes.

In classrooms across Honduras, **the lack of educational materials and assessments in indigenous languages presents a significant barrier to learning**, especially for children from lower SES households who often belong to ethnic minorities. Educational content predominantly available in Spanish disregards the linguistic needs of indigenous populations who speak languages such as Miskito, Garifuna, and Lenca, thereby impeding these students' ability to engage fully with the curriculum.

Students with disabilities. Highlighting the resource gap, the CRPD (2017) has called attention to the urgent need for educational materials tailored to diverse learning needs, including Braille textbooks, easy-to-read formats, accessible electronic formats, and sign language interpretation services.

3.5.8. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS (RQ5)

FAMILY FACTORS

Students from lower SES categories. When looking at gender differences, SIR participants mentioned that early-age pregnancies in the rural female population is an important barrier to attending school and learn as parents often prefer that girls in this condition remain at home.

Children and youth with disabilities. According to SIR participants (including government officials, school principals, teachers, students, parents, and NGOs), families of children with disabilities may lack the knowledge and resources to foster their children's social and emotional skill development, thereby necessitating school-based support.

Migrants and internally displaced people. Government officials, representatives from multilateral agencies, and NGOs who participated in the SIR explained that there are notable gaps in educational support in cases where parents have emigrated, leaving their children in Honduras with other family members. These children often lack proper supervision and guidance to continue their schooling, as their guardians may be unprepared or unaware of how to effectively facilitate their educational needs. However, sometimes access to education is facilitated with non-formal education projects promoted by churches, NGOs, mayors, civil society, aid workers, private companies, etc. that develop and finance educational projects.

COMMUNITY FACTORS

Violence and high rates of insecurity. According to SIR participants (including government officials, representatives from the academic sector, school principals, teachers, unions, parents, and NGOs), insecurity stands out as a primary community-level obstacle in Honduras, affecting both the attendance of marginalized children and the ability to remain in school. This insecurity arises from various sources, including pervasive violence and high crime rates, which not only threaten children's safety but also foster a climate of fear that discourages families from allowing their children to travel to school, especially on foot.

Organizational support. However, SIR participants, such as teachers and parents, explained that support from organizations external to the formal education system has been vital in facilitating access to education for marginalized children. Non-formal education projects, artistic, leisure, sports and cultural events championed by churches, NGOs, mayoral initiatives, civil society groups, humanitarian aid workers, and private companies, provide essential services that help bridge educational gaps. These collaborative efforts have been instrumental in offering alternative learning opportunities and resources that cater to the unique needs of the three marginalized populations.

3.5.9. MULTILATERAL SUPPORT

Several international organizations and donors are funding and implementing inclusive education programs in Honduras. These include interventions to improve access to quality education for learners from the poorest households, for learners with disabilities, and for migrants. Some recent examples include: the World Bank and the World Food Program support for free school meal programs; the World Bank and the IDB-funding for conditional cash assistance for poor households; IOM's training for teachers to support migrant students in cities with the larger number of returnees; the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) funding for basic infrastructure for rural schools; the Norwegian Refugee Council, GIZ, and USAID financing an educational statistics subsystem called the SART; and USAID's funding for the Honduras Local Governance Project to promote the use of the ODK telephone application to record a series of variables related to school operation, which is equivalent to an educational census updated four to six times a year. TABLE 20 shows international support for inclusive education projects by target group.

TABLE 20. HONDURAS. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION SUPPORT TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROJECTS BY TARGET GROUP

ORGANIZATION	TARGET GROUP		
	CHILDREN FROM WITH SESs	CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	MIGRANTS
INTERNATIONAL NGOS			
World Vision	x	x	
Pestalozzi Foundation	x		x
Catholic Relief Services	x		
Plan International	x		x
Save the Children	x		x
Child Fund	x		x
International Committee of the Red Cross			x
MULTILATERAL AGENCIES			
UNICEF	x	x	x
UNFPA	x	x	
IOM			x
World Bank	x		
IDB	x		
BILATERAL DONORS			
USAID (United States Agency for International Development)	x		x
German Cooperation	x		x
Spanish Cooperation	x		

Children with disabilities. Organizations that provide educational services for children with disabilities are mostly local NGOs and CSOs. They operate with either private, public-private hybrid, or public funding and work as a network. Many of them are affiliated with the *Coordinadora de Instituciones y Asociaciones de Rehabilitación de Honduras*, an organization that acts as a coordinating agency for disability services. These organizations complement, and in some cases, fill the gap of government services provided through the Ministry of Education. In many cases, students do not receive formal system services and are referred to these specialized centers to receive care. These organizations include the Teleton, the Pilar Salinas Institute for the Blind, the Juana Leclerc Psychopedagogical Institute, the Cerebral Palsy Rehabilitation Program, the Center for the Support of Children and Youth who Are Disabled, the Luis Braille Foundation, the Workshop School for the Deaf (vocational), the Franciscan Institute for the Training of the Blind, Lengua de Señas Hondureñas, Asociación Centro Intercomunitario de atención a personas con discapacidad "Solidaridad", Centro de Rendimiento Educativo Especial "Renacer", Centro de Estimulación para el Niño, Centro de Rehabilitación Municipal "Gabriela Alvarado", Escuela de Educación Especial Emilia D'Cuire, and Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, among others.

Likewise, there are several civil associations and organizations that defend the educational rights of children and youth with disabilities, including the Organization of Persons who Are Disabled and Family Members, Association of Parents and Friends of Special Children and Youth, and the National Federation of Mothers, Fathers and Families of Persons with Disabilities of Honduras that also offer educational services, specifically learning therapies.

Migrant children and youth. Public sector organizations that provide support to facilitate migrants' access to education are the Directorate for Children, Adolescents and Family, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' National Institute for Migration and Foreigners. Different CSOs and NGOs work to provide migrants with access to education while they are transiting to the U.S., and once they return to the country. Among the most mentioned by those consulted are Proyecto Retorno a la Alegría, Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado Honduras, and the Honduran Red Cross.

Children and youth from low SES categories. The 2020 Educational Statistics report of the Honduran Ministry of Education indicates that slightly more than 10 percent of the total number of students receive development aid to attend public schools. Multilaterals finance some state programs and local implementing partners from the non-state sector. Programs vary and include interventions to guarantee access and retention, such as school lunch, conditional social assistance, academic scholarships and social scholarships, school kits and school infrastructure. Examples of programs are the School Infrastructure Improvement Program, the PROHECO Project, Community Centers for Pre Basic Education, Educatodos, "Maestro en Casa" and "Tercer Ciclo Acelerado" of the Honduran Institute of Education by Radio, Tutorial Learning System, and the National Program of Rural Educational Networks.

HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES.

Highlighted Programs

- Stakeholders who participated in the SIRs believe the following programs/strategies in Honduras effectively promote school enrollment and retention: free school meals, vouchers or conditional

transfers, school scholarships, school material kits, student monitoring or tracking systems, and curricular adaptations, such as open enrollment during the year, and remote and shorter-term educational services. For instance, a key informant mentioned that "When they are given scholarships, or study vouchers and the provider follows up and monitors the children, the child and the families are conditioned so that while they are in the educational system, they receive a bonus. That motivates the parents and children to be within the educational center. It may seem incredible, but a school kit motivates a child not to drop out of school or to enter the educational system" (governmental official at the Ministry of Education).

Challenges

- **Education technology as a single issue.** According to interviewed governmental officials, the projects that have worked the least in expanding educational access for marginalized groups have been those related to free internet access and technology. Some of the reasons why these programs have had little success may be related to tackling a single issue (providing internet) without addressing the systemic needs (the lack of basic conditions in educational centers in rural areas and/or in students' homes, such as electrical connection, technological equipment and adequate maintenance services). A governmental official mentioned: "The Internet in towns is something that did not work. A gigantic effort was made, but it did not pay off. And there are other projects just like it that could be identified, that did not yield the expected results."
- **Program sustainability.** Several programs promoted by multilateral organizations operate in the short or medium term with little investment in sustainable partnerships to continue implementation and with few possibilities of achieving sustainability when assumed by the State. In the words of a governmental official "The Catholic Relief Services school lunch program could improve expanding coverage. There are two million children, and this program reaches approximately 20 percent, it is very little. What we need to do is to look for public-private partnership."

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION ACCESS AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT DATA

1. Prioritizing marginalized populations for education investments.

Results from this assessment indicate that one of the greatest challenges to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Sustainable Development Goal 4), is to respond to the diverse learning needs of marginalized groups, particularly rural youth in secondary education, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, children with disabilities, girls with early pregnancies, migrants and internally displaced children and youth, and those from indigenous communities. Governments and international organizations should prioritize resources and offer technical cooperation to bridge these populations' educational service and outcome gaps and meet SDG4 in the next six years. Governments in this study should consider strengthening their domestic revenue mobilization and increasing the share of expenditure for inclusive education, while international organizations should prioritize development assistance to close the gap in education services and outcomes between marginalized groups and the rest of the population. Investments to foster inclusion are critical across the education system, encompassing governance, regulatory frameworks, EMIS, student assessments, and support for educators, classrooms, families, and communities.

2. Governments should promote standardization and dissemination of education systems performance data.

This recommendation transects other recommendations under RQ2 related to the EMIS platforms. Governments should promote both the standardization and dissemination of their performance data, particularly related to marginalized groups. Increasing data availability would allow policymakers and donors to have a better understanding of the education system's needs. Even though data is available for several variables, resources are too dispersed across government platforms or international organizations' databases, and not readily available on governments' official webpages. Additionally, the availability of indicators and education data varies by webpage, demonstrating the difference in scope and function of platforms. To improve data availability and policymakers' understanding of the education system's needs, governments should create direct lines of communication with international organizations and standardize the presentation and disaggregation of results. The Ministries of Education and Statistics would also benefit from standardization in data processing.

3. Conduct and disseminate national level, representative learning outcomes assessment to track learners' performance in light of external shocks such as COVID-19.

This report found that learning outcomes data post-pandemic is very limited in the region. Education systems indicators such as retention rates and approval or pass rates are not good predictors of learning outcomes. Without precise learning outcomes data, governments will not track how learners most affected by the pandemic during 2020 and 2021 are catching up to learning loss, and their remedial education measures could become ineffective. Donors could support local governments in the design

and / or implementation of learning outcomes assessments that provide valuable data on the effectiveness of remedial education strategies, including marginalized groups.

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

1. Refine EMIS data and improve intersectoral data cross-referencing.

Governments and international organizations should refine their education management information systems. USAID could play a leading role in supporting these governments to understand what is working in their EMIS and what is needed to ensure that data on marginalized populations is collected, analyzed, disseminated, and connected with information systems from other sectors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of education. An international benchmarking tool such as the World Bank SABER tailored for education data on equity and inclusion could support this process across countries. As part of this effort, a national intersectoral task force to document the current state of data-sharing across government agencies should be established. The task force would determine where data-sharing exists and when links are critical. The task force would also identify policy and technical challenges and promising national and international practices and develop a national plan of action to cross-reference data aligned with the national education strategy. One suggestion for this process is inclusion of a unique education ID number for the EMIS to support tracking learners from one location to another as they progress in education levels. EMIS should flag children who have dropped out and support data triangulation with other sectors. With a cross-sectoral protocol to identify out-of-school children, service providers such as doctors and hospital staff could check the educational status of the children being served, making referrals where answers provided by parents or children are unsatisfactory.

2. Examine practices to collect data on out of school learners.

The intersectoral task force, should explore the feasibility of cross referencing census data and data from the civil registry with education data to identify the out-of-school population. The task force should determine what resources are needed for schools to conduct a census of children in their catchment area (geographic location of communities assigned to that school) and triangulate with school enrollment data and other EMIS data. Honduras uses the Open Data Kit (ODK) mobile application to conduct a semi-annual educational census, capturing various operational aspects of schools and classrooms. These types of interventions would be useful to determine the school-eligible population in other countries as well. For example, conduct multi-sector raids and truancy sweeps in partnership with organizations such as child rights protection agencies in locations where children may be at high risk of labor exploitation; launch multi-sector campaigns to ensure that children are enrolled in school before the start of the academic year.; and or make hotlines available to report out of school children (UNICEF, 2013).

3. Determine if an early warning system is an effective investment and conduct a pilot.

EWS identifies students at risk of dropping out of school by the presence of ‘red flags,’ or factors that contribute to dropout. The tool also supports teachers through strategies and interventions to encourage children to stay in school. Honduras has integrated the SART into SACE. SART includes a survey component for school directors and teachers of educational centers to identify and monitor

students who are at risk of dropping out of school. However, an EWS as a standalone intervention cannot solve the dropout problem entirely. Evidence suggests that in locations where dropout rates are very high, EWS may be inadequate (UNICEF, EWS Vol2). Thus, the rest of the countries in this study (governments with the support of multilaterals) should assess if an EWS is a viable option to reduce dropout in their own contexts. This assessment should consider a combination of supply and demand-side interventions that address structural issues within the education system such as the number and location of schools, school infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum, positive discipline, child-friendliness, poverty, addressing the opportunity cost of education through financial subsidies (e.g. social benefits), waiving of fees for meals, textbooks or transports, addressing education demand and raising families' awareness, and addressing compensation measures for students who dropped out of the system (e.g. second chance education) (UNICEF, EWS Vol2). Finally, countries that find EWS promising could conduct a pilot before making this a national intervention.

4. Tackle the school-level barriers that prevent data collection.

Countries would partially overcome structural barriers related to infrastructure, such as lack of electricity and internet at schools, by providing mobile phones and training on basic use of technology and data collection methods to pre-service and in-service teachers. Interventions similar to the ODK mobile application in Honduras, where school staff receive mobile phones with apps to collect data, could achieve this. The government should also explore training community teams for data collection across sectors to support school staff.

5. Uncover the reasons for EMIS reservations to share education data.

A critical concern for data sharing for open access is individual data identifiers. The government should consider the benefits of making EMIS publicly available, in part or in full. The public could also organize to demand transparency with education data and push policymakers to move towards this practice. When technological system constraints prevent data sharing, the government should develop a plan to update or expand the systems' capacity to process and share data.

6. Adapt data collection instruments to become accessible to different learning needs.

Student assessments, stakeholder interview questionnaires, guides, and observation tools need to be available in the language in which students communicate, accessible for learners with disabilities, and contextualized to their own realities. Following the progress in Colombia, governments should establish or strengthen partnerships with ethnic minority institutions and organizations for people with disabilities to make these accommodations.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

I. Update inclusive education laws and policies.

In countries where inclusive education policies are not established or advanced, it is critical to update legislation to respond to the current needs of marginalized groups including clear definitions of the protected groups and their rights. Governments should develop these policies in tandem with national education strategies to implement them in coordination across sectors and with adequate financing. USAID could support this process by furthering the policy framework analysis started in this study to

identify policy gaps and bring promising policies from other countries with similar contexts for their consideration and development.

2. Develop an inclusive education national curriculum.

All countries should consider curricular reform to mainstream inclusive education to ensure all students have the accommodations they need and to reduce stigma and rejection. This reform requires the development of an overarching guideline for general inclusive education practices and curricular content for specialized education to address the needs of the different marginalized populations (e.g. deaf and hard of hearing, blind, post-traumatic stress, etc.). USAID has started this process in countries like Morocco with the Inclusive Teacher Training Activity and should draw on its lessons to support the LAC governments in this study.

3. Consider options to simplify processes.

To ensure school access for marginalized populations, governments should consider simplifying application and graduation processes and requirements. Allowing open enrollment through the year is an important step in this direction. Other practices the government should examine include streamlining regulatory approval processes to avoid delays and reducing requirements and information demands that are not critical for school enrollment or graduation.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY EDUCATION.

1. Invest and coordinate efforts to remove learning barriers for children with disabilities (CWD).

USAID could support national governments conducting nuanced and robust diagnosis of the extent of the issues mentioned in this report to ensure CWD enroll and succeed in school. USAID could also support the government convening the different stakeholders to promote collaboration. This assessment would inform the development of the national curriculum for inclusive education and teacher training practices.

2. Strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Governments in these four countries would benefit from national instructional programs that cover inclusive education comprehensively. All teachers should be prepared to teach all students. At minimum, general education teachers should understand the tenants of inclusive education and obtain skills to actively promote tolerance, empathy, collaboration, and critical awareness of inequality. Further training could include specialized courses to address the needs of marginalized learners. USAID could draw on current inclusive teaching programs such as the Morocco Inclusive Teacher Training Activity (MITTA) to develop Bilingual Deaf Education introductory and in-depth courses for teacher training colleges and institutions.

3. Increase the supply of teachers in remote areas and schools that cater to the poorest children.

Countries that, in particular, show evidence of teacher shortages (such as Honduras and Haiti) should increase the supply of teachers in remote areas and schools that cater to the poorest children.

Governments should conduct assessments of teacher supply and demand. They should also consider (1) revising teaching requirements to allow expansion strategies such as allowing qualified candidates to work and earn before completing teacher training qualifications, (2) promoting teacher mobility, (3) improving the status and social standing of the teaching profession to attract more candidates, and (4) providing targeted incentives to retain teachers and bring new teachers into the profession. **Adopt UDL as a central part of the national inclusive education policies and designing targeted interventions for specific marginalized populations.**

UDL is a set of principles to guide the design of learning environments aimed at the inclusion of all learners, irrespective of the kind of barriers to learning that they face. USAID could support dialogues with the four governments to discuss UDL and how tools such as the UDL Toolkit could be applied to help all children read, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable.^{23, 24} In addition, governments should capitalize on the existing programs that respondents mentioned in this study including after school programs, education services for children with disabilities, support services for adolescent girls, and the flexible educational models in Colombia and Honduras, by determining what works and investing in scaling them up.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DETERMINANTS

1. Develop a comprehensive intersectoral strategy to tackle education exclusion.

Given the intersectionality between poverty and educational exclusion, especially for marginalized groups that face the double or triple challenge of poverty, a disability, ethnic minority status, migrant status, or early pregnancy, multi-sector interventions are necessary. The ministries of education should be actively involved in the design and implementation of poverty reduction plans that include demand-side incentives such as cash and non-cash transfers and other benefits/safety nets to families (unemployment benefits, tax exemptions, pensions, etc.) to ensure children attend and remain in school. The government should also consider developing social sector strategies that include access to health interventions in school and service referencing for parents, including skill training and employment programs.

2. Establish community engagement and education campaigns.

After mapping communities where patriarchal norms are limiting girls' access to education, USAID could develop a program to promote family and community engagement in schools and the importance of education in collaboration with local partners. The program could also include a mentorship program component that connects girls with female professionals who can provide guidance and support throughout their educational journeys and create safe spaces within schools or community centers where girls can access resources, receive academic help, and build a network of like-minded peers.

²³ <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/universal-design-learning>

²⁴ <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/universal-design-learning-help-all-children-read>

3. Mitigate the effects of community violence with school-based support.

As part of national violence prevention strategies, governments in the four countries should consider partnerships with local organizations to train school staff in using trauma-informed education approaches including compassion, clear behavioral expectations, and promotion of mental health and a positive school climate. USAID in collaboration with local partners, could develop interventions to prioritize mental health by training school staff to conduct mental health screenings for students and providing ongoing education to staff and students about trauma, including how to find help or provide support to those in need.

4. Guarantee meaningful consultation with communities and parents.

Governments should guarantee the option for parents and community representatives to participate in any public education discussion, with conscientiousness toward securing representation from marginalized groups. Results from this study show the positive effects of parent involvement in marginalized children's learning and the negative consequences of disengagement. Thus, spaces for parents to understand options, voice preferences about their children's learning, and increase interaction and connection between schools and other community organizations, are crucial.

MULTILATERAL SUPPORT

1. Establish a Harmonized Coordination Plan and Platform.

Governments should revise their national strategies for international cooperation in education and require that these respond directly to the goals and needs in the national education strategy. A single source digital platform could enable collaboration amongst partners to ensure alignment with the national priorities and amongst each other. Standardized reporting formats allow for easier data comparison and identification of areas for collaboration or streamlining efforts. The government should consider establishing regular joint planning workshops where representatives from different development agencies can discuss proposed projects, identify potential overlaps, and explore opportunities for joint implementation or complementary initiatives.

2. Empower Local Stakeholders with Capacity Building.

USAID could build local stakeholders' capacity by conducting comprehensive needs assessments in collaboration with local governments and community leaders to ensure programs address locally-identified priorities and foster a sense of ownership. Training workshops for local stakeholders on project management, data collection, and M&E techniques should also be considered to empower active local participation in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, local advisory boards with representatives from civil society organizations, women's groups, and community leaders could ensure programs are culturally appropriate and responsive to local needs.

3. Strengthen Monitoring & Evaluation with Collaborative Frameworks.

International donors and multilaterals should ensure their M&E frameworks are aligned with international goals and indicators, including the SDGs / SDG4, and with national education priorities.

Multilaterals should budget and include independent program evaluations as a standard project practice from its design. For this purpose, multilaterals should commission independent evaluations conducted by reputable research institutions to assess the long-term impact and effectiveness of development programs. These evaluations should involve local stakeholders in data collection and analysis.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING TO SCHOOL

PROPORTION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING TO SCHOOL	VALUE	YEAR	SOURCE
COLOMBIA			
Children and youth from ethnic minority groups	98.75	2023	Estimated based on Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares - GEIH - May 2023. Available at: https://microdatos.dane.gov.co/index.php/catalog/782/get-microdata
Children and youth who do not belong to any ethnic minority groups	97.08	2023	
Children from indigenous communities	98.68	2023	
Children from non-indigenous communities	97.21	2023	
Children and youth with disabilities of all different types	70.71	2023	
Children and youth without disabilities	97.66	2023	
Migrants - The children are foreign-born citizens	92.92	2023	
Venezuelan migrants - The children are foreign-born citizens from Venezuela	92.38	2023	
Children were born in the country	97.70	2023	
Non-Venezuelan migrants - The children are foreign-born citizens, Venezuelans are excluded	97.37	2023	
Children from urban communities	97.63	2023	
Children from rural communities	96.40	2023	
Children from 1st quintile (Poorest quintile)	94.30	2021	
Children from 2nd quintile	94.90	2021	
Children from 3rd quintile	96.20	2021	
Children from 4th quintile	97.80	2021	
Children from 5th quintile (Wealthiest quintile)	97.60	2021	
EI SALVADOR			

PROPORTION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING TO SCHOOL	VALUE	YEAR	SOURCE
Children from 1st quintile (Poorest quintile)	96.30	2022	Estimated based on Survey: 'Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples'
Children from 2nd quintile	96.60	2022	
Children from 3rd quintile	97.80	2022	
Children from 4th quintile	98.40	2022	
Children from 5th quintile (Wealthiest quintile)	99.30	2022	
Children from rural communities	96.90	2022	
Children from urban communities	97.60	2022	
HAITI			
Children from rural communities	81.40	2007	ENQUÊTE SUR L'EMPLOI ET L'ECONOMIE INFORMELLE (EEI). (p. 24, Table 6)
Children from urban communities	88.70	2007	
HONDURAS			
Children from 1st quintile (Poorest quintile)	89.40	2019	CEPAL
Children from 2nd quintile	92.50	2019	
Children from 3rd quintile	95.90	2019	
Children from 4th quintile	98.30	2019	
Children from 5th quintile (Wealthiest quintile)	95.60	2019	
Children from rural communities	91.30	2019	
Children from urban communities	96.10	2019	

Source: Own calculations and/or preparation with the sources cited in the table.

ANNEX B. COLOMBIA DATA

BI. ENROLLMENT REPORT BY SECTOR AND ETHNIC GROUP 2018-2021

BI. ENROLLMENT REPORT BY SECTOR AND ETHNIC GROUP 2018-2021

Group	2018		2019		2021		2022	
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
N/A	7.256.102	1.913.709	7.255.319	1.947.085	7.158.867	1.924.900	7.270.895	1.745.468
Indigenous	417.832	6.742	431.771	7.303	431.917	7.411	464.563	7.384
Black	327.731	17.511	307.527	16.189	271.252	15.071	250.616	13.316
Rom	135	17	173	35	195	14	192	18
Other ethnic groups	3.944	363	2.853	300	1.952	221	1.353	150
Raizales	2.388	405	3.036	445	3.208	578	3.363	544
Afro Colombians	153.683	4.029	181.324	5.745	199.635	7.291	216.155	7.421
Palenquero	93	13	97	12	132	12	140	10
Total ethnic groups enrollment by sectors	905.806	29.080	926.781	30.029	908.291	30.598	936.382	28.843
Total ethnic groups enrollment	934.886		956.810		938.889		965.225	
Total enrollment	10.104.697		10.159.214		10.022.656		9.981.588	

Source: SIMAT/MEN 2021. Cited by MEN, 2022b, p.65

B2. NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ENROLLED IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS, FROM 2018 TO 2021

SIMAT DISABILITY VARIABLES	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Visual- irreversible low vision	9.863	1.064	9.651	1.117	5.156	881	4.391	680
Visual-blindness	900	132	981	139	4.077	325	4.152	469
Autism Spectrum Disorder	3.715	1.218	4.859	1.845	3.248	1.992	3.696	2.003
Intellectual	94.797	10.769	98.964	12.049	93.178	12.092	91.053	10.167
Multiple	12.184	1.482	14.353	2.007	14.962	2.228	15.410	1.920
Another disability	10.314	2.612	4.248	1.782	1.799	1.084	1.032	691
Auditory- Colombian Sign Language	4.043	272	5.115	437	2.756	321	2.481	231
Auditory- Spanish	2.670	330	3.438	450	5.522	603	5.709	667
Deaf/blindness	253	44	200	38	193	46	178	41
Physical	8.241	1.105	8.937	1.382	9.930	1.602	10.371	1.493
Systemic	6.790	517	9.368	860	3.029	682	1.402	399
Mental- psychosocial	25.679	2.602	30.818	4.171	30.513	5.052	29.595	5.163
Permanent voice and speech disorder	6.296	551	6.720	734	2.410	595	1.203	365
Total student enrollment with disabilities by sector	185.745	22.698	197.652	27.011	176.773	27.503	170.673	24.289
Total student enrollment with disabilities	208.443		224.663		204.276		194.962	

SIMAT DISABILITY VARIABLES	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Total student enrollment	10.104.697		10.159.214		10.022.656		9.981.588	

Source: Simat/MEN, 2021, November (MEN, 2022, p.46)

The table above shows that, on average, for the years 2018 to 2021, 88 percent of students with disabilities were studying in public schools. The total number of students with disabilities represents an average of two percent of the total enrollment at all levels and cycles of preschool, primary, and secondary education (MEN, 2022, p.46)

B3. DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY AGE AND SEX REPORTED IN SIMAT, 2018-2021

AGES	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN
0 to 4 years old	613	987	667	1.142	540	920	355	697
5 to 9 years old	19.332	34.781	20.639	37.322	16.017	29.087	13.348	24.154
10 to 14 years old	35.212	59.574	37.619	64.000	34.684	59.150	33.011	56.300
15 to 19 years old	20.246	30.568	22.326	33.463	22.155	34.467	23.425	35.928
20 to 24 years old	2.162	2.767	2.221	2.963	2.126	2.975	2.240	3.118
25 years old or more	1.123	1.078	1.132	1.169	1.050	1.105	1.181	1.205
Total general	78.688	129.755	84.604	140.059	76.572	127.704	73.560	121.402

Source: SIMAT/MEN, 2021, November (MEN, 2022b, p.47)

The table above presents the distribution of students in six age ranges, between 2018 and 2021, and it specifies the number of men and women. There is a greater number of men than women, and there is a higher concentration of registered people with disabilities between the ages of 10 and 14.

B4. APPROVAL, DROPOUT, AND FAILURE RATES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY SECTORS, 2018-2020 (TOTAL ENROLLMENT)

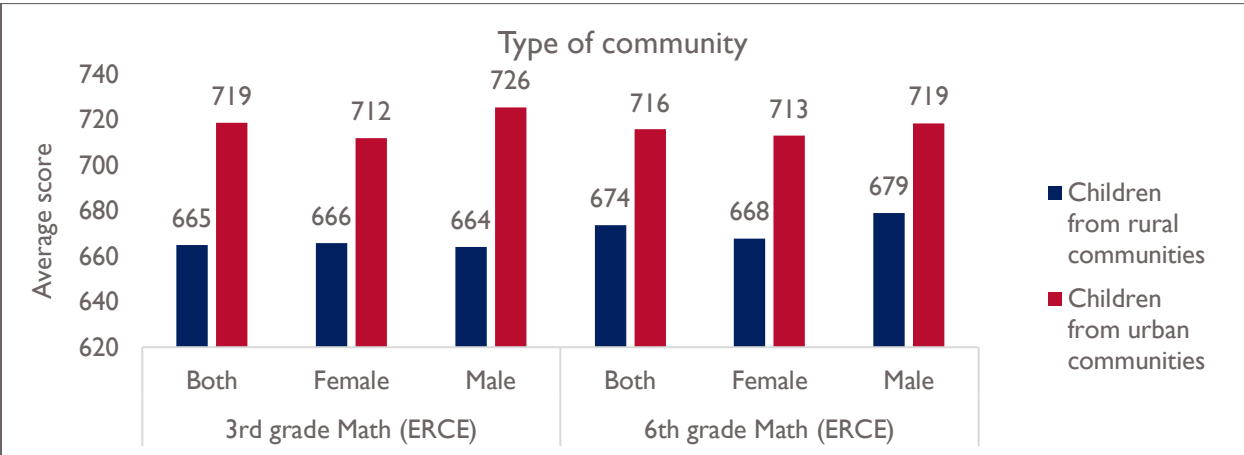
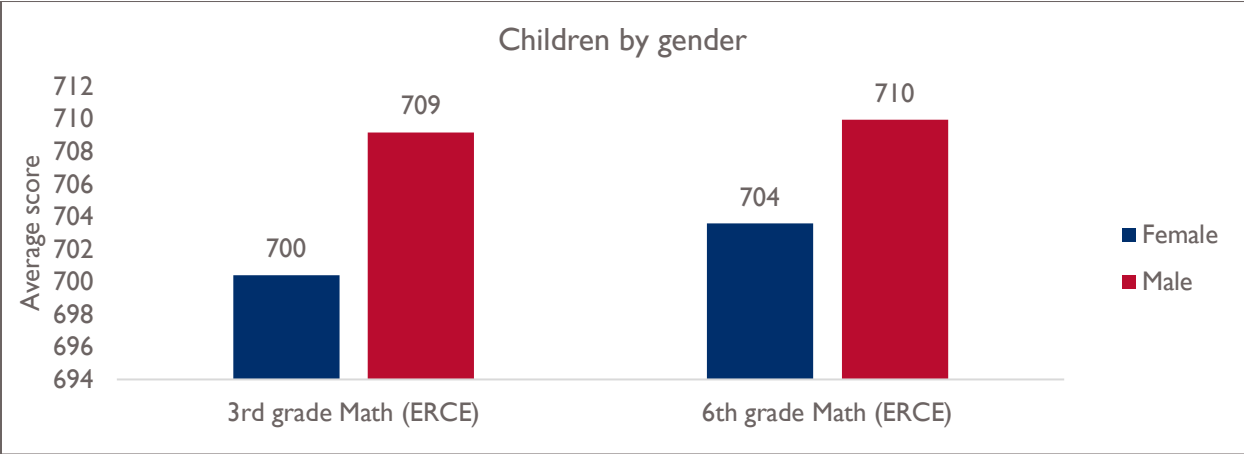
ENROLLMENT	SECTOR	2018			2019			2020		
		A	D	F	A	D	F	A	D	F
Disability	Public	86,19%	5,05%	8,76%	86,70%	4,90%	8,39%	88,82%	3,44%	7,74%
	Private									

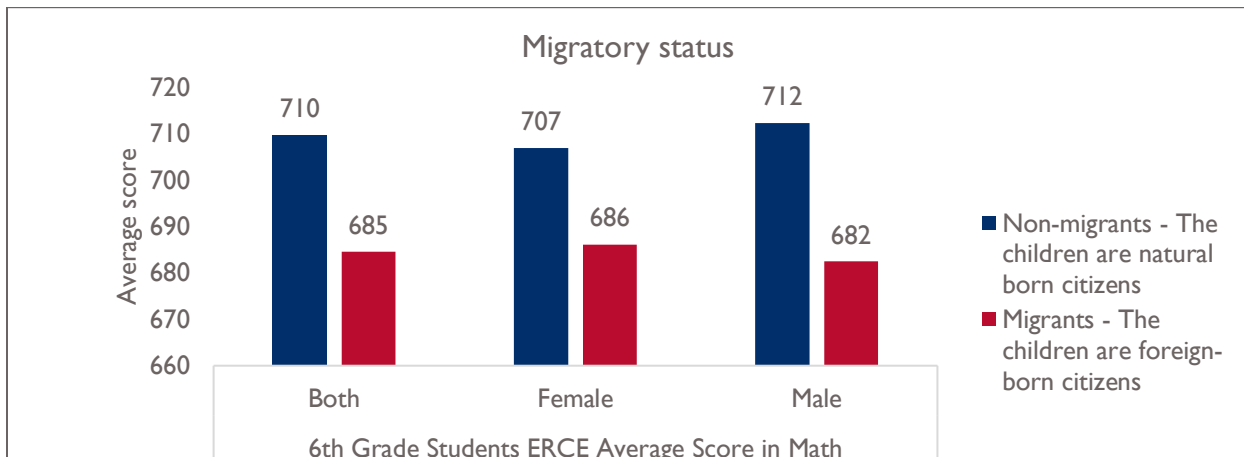
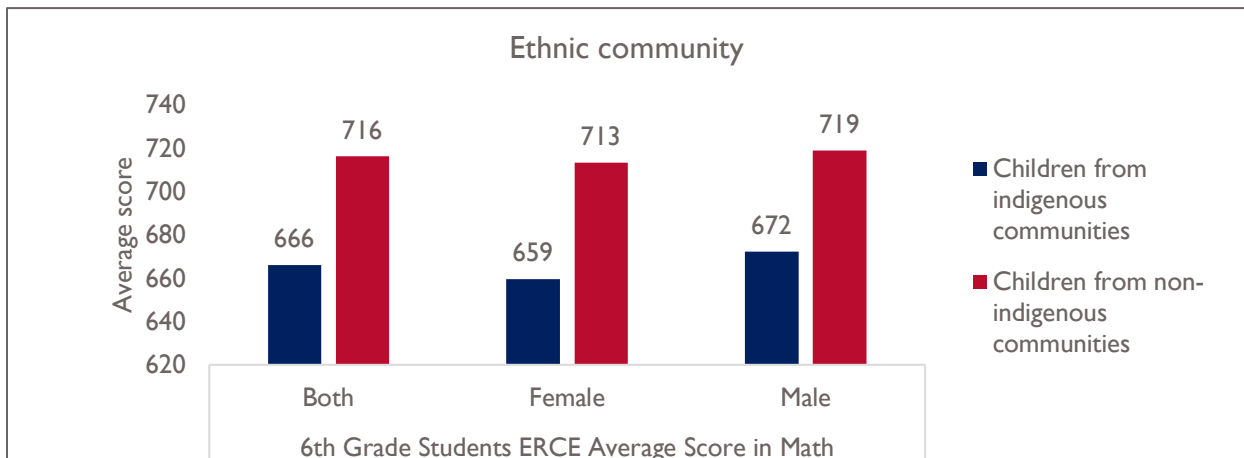
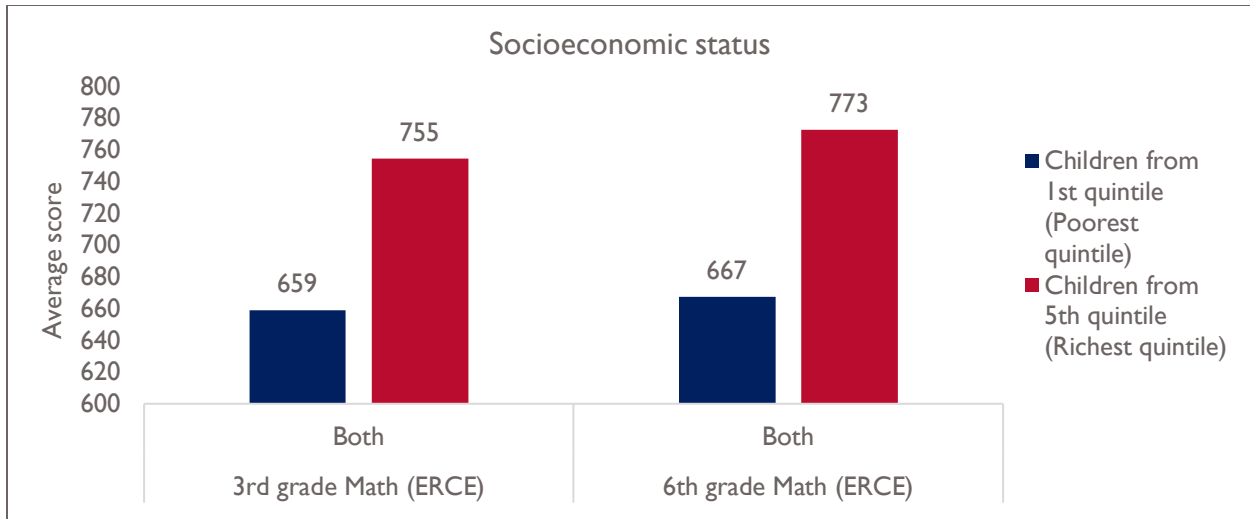
ENROLLMENT	SECTOR	2018			2019			2020		
		A	D	F	A	D	F	A	D	F
		94,27%	3,35%	2,38%	93,39%	3,74%	2,87%	91,52%	6,88%	1,60%
Total enrollment	Public	90,80%	3,75%	5,44%	90,50%	3,88%	5,62%	90,26%	2,85%	6,88%
	Private	96,42%	2,47%	1,11%	96,00%	2,95%	1,05%	94,03%	5,22%	0,75%
	Total	91,88%	3,51%	4,61%	91,57%	3,70%	4,73%	90,99%	3,31%	5,68%

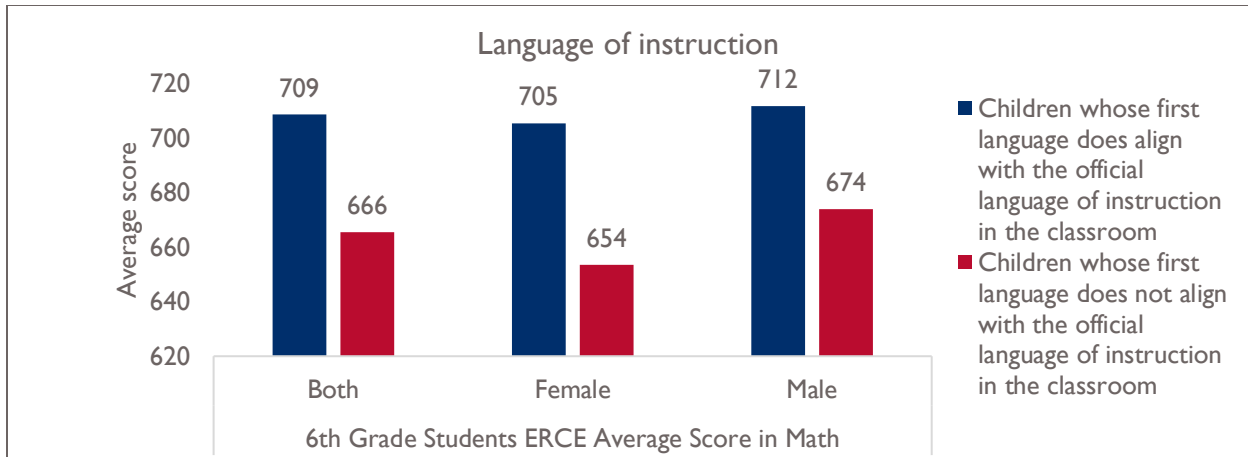
Approval (A), Dropout (D), and Failure (F)

Source: SIMAT, cited by MEN, 2022b, p.48

B5. COLOMBIA – ERCE MATH SCORES BY GROUP

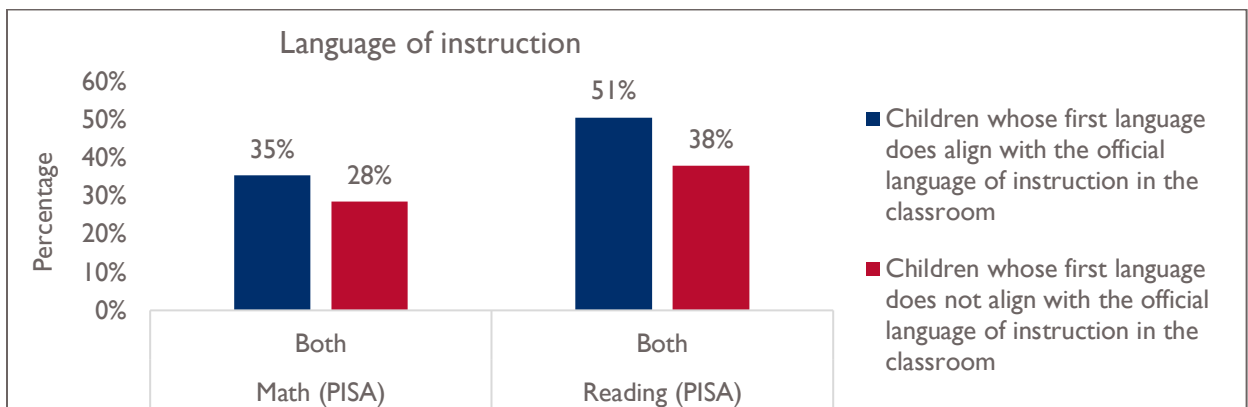






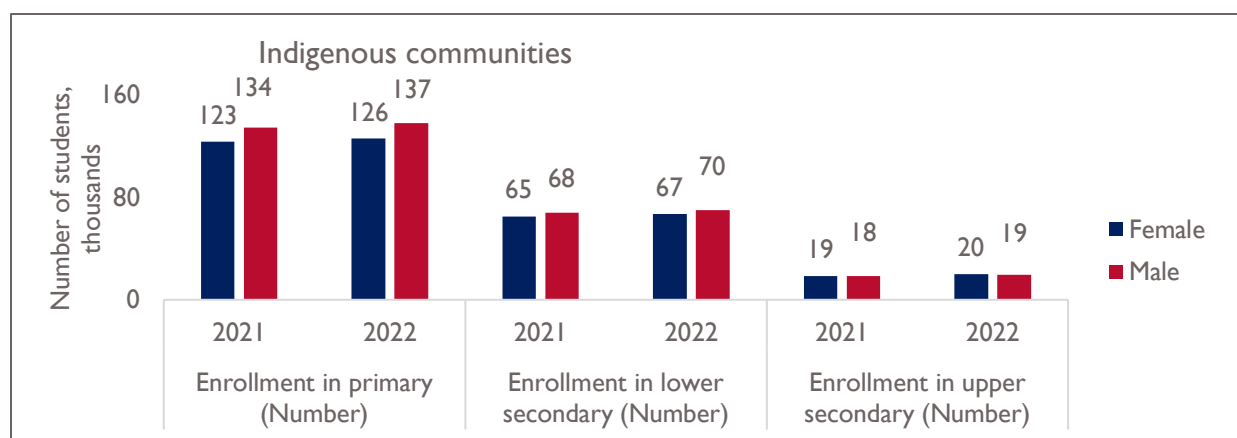
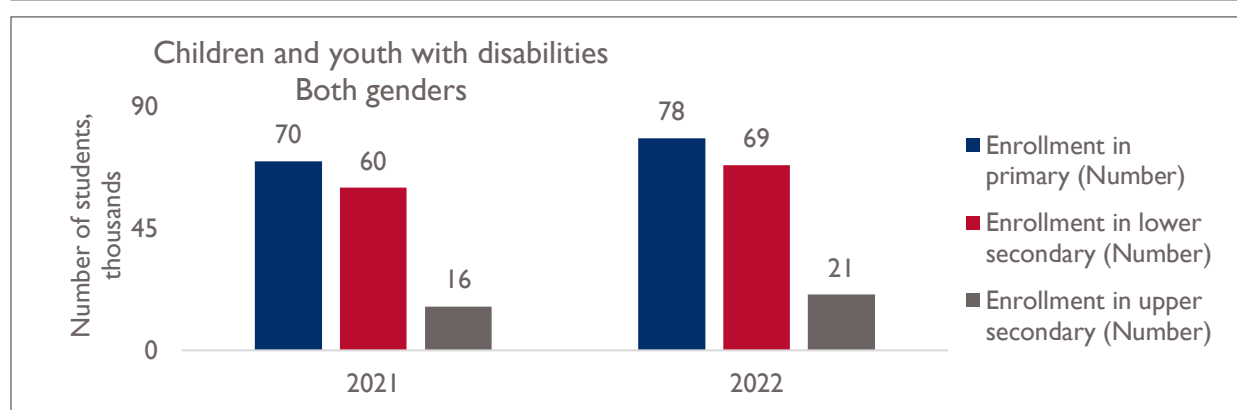
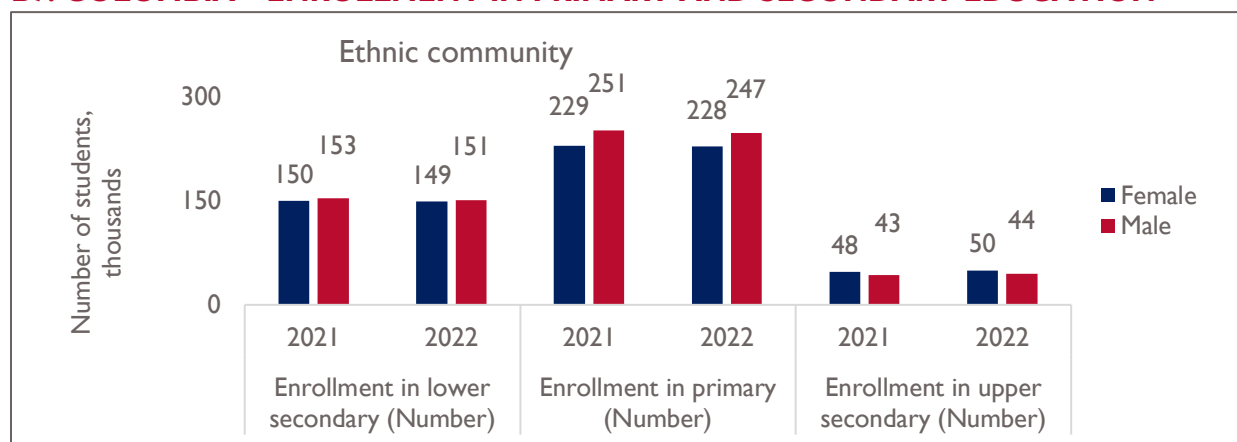
Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/estudio-regional-comparativo-y-explicativo-erice-2019> and: <https://github.com/llce/erice>

B6. COLOMBIA – PISA READING AND MATH SCORES BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION



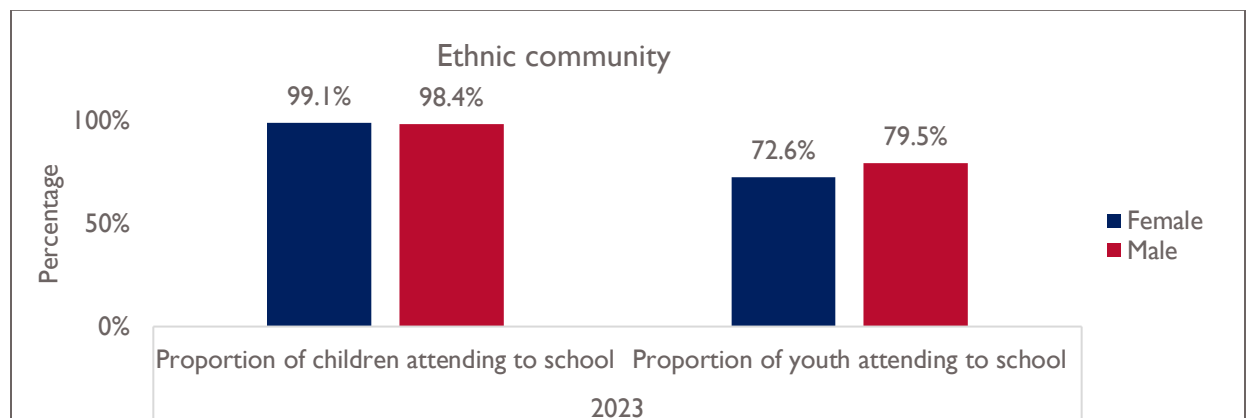
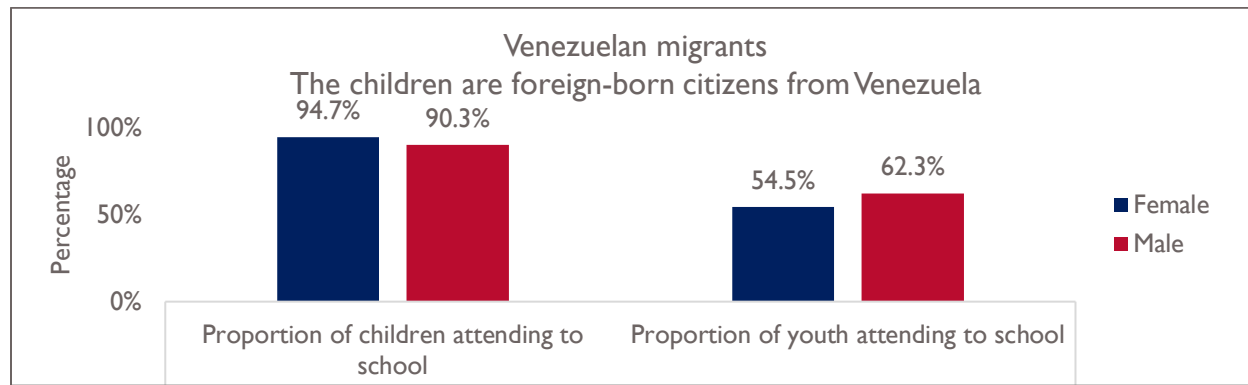
Source: Learning achievement in mathematics (End of lower secondary) in Colombia - Education inequalities - UNESCO. Available at: <https://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/colombia#dimension=null>

B7. COLOMBIA – ENROLLMENT IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION



Notes and source: The indicators values show how many cases were discovered, according to the school census. They must not be interpreted as representative of the population. In the case of Colombia, regarding the educational levels: primary covers students between first grade and fifth grade, lower secondary ranges from sixth to ninth grade, and upper secondary include students from high school and vocational training. In addition, we considered the number of students enrolled in the education system for educational levels of interest. The types of ethnic minority groups included are, indigenous, Romani (rom), “raizal del archipelago”, palenquero, black, mulatto (afro-descendant). Estimated based on Educación Formal 2021 and 2022 - ANDA - DANE. Available at: <https://microdatos.dane.gov.co/index.php/catalog/752/get-microdata>

B8. COLOMBIA – PROPORTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ATTENDING SCHOOL



Notes and source: The indicators values show how many cases were discovered, according to the household survey. They must not be interpreted as representative of the population as a whole, but rather the population between the ages 7 to 12 (children) and 13 to 19 (youth) as a percentage of the total population with same age, who were enrolled in formal educational programs at the time of the survey. This was estimated based on Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares - GEIH - Mayo 2023. Available at: <https://microdatos.dane.gov.co/index.php/catalog/782/get-microdata>

B9. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN COLOMBIA FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

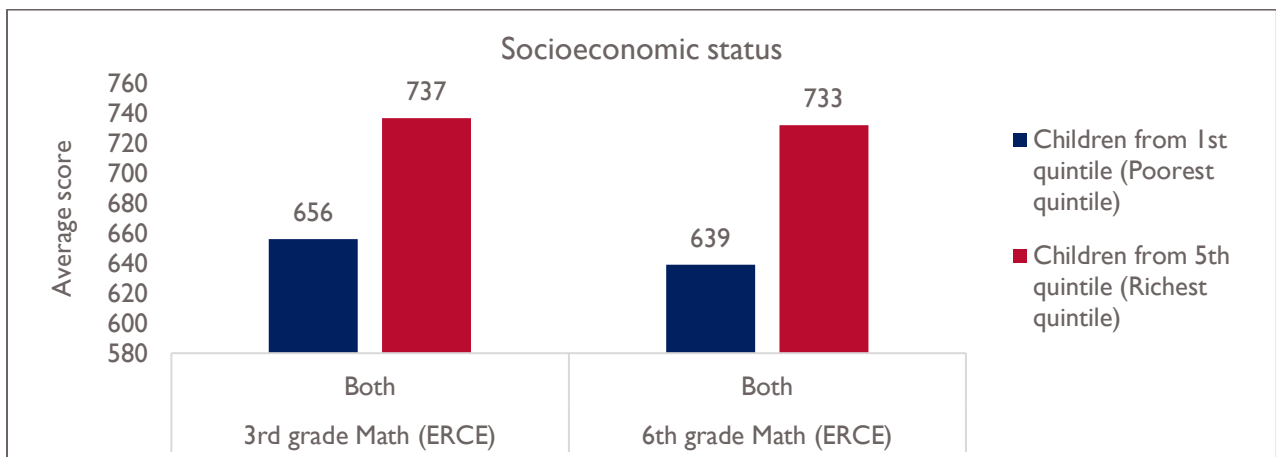
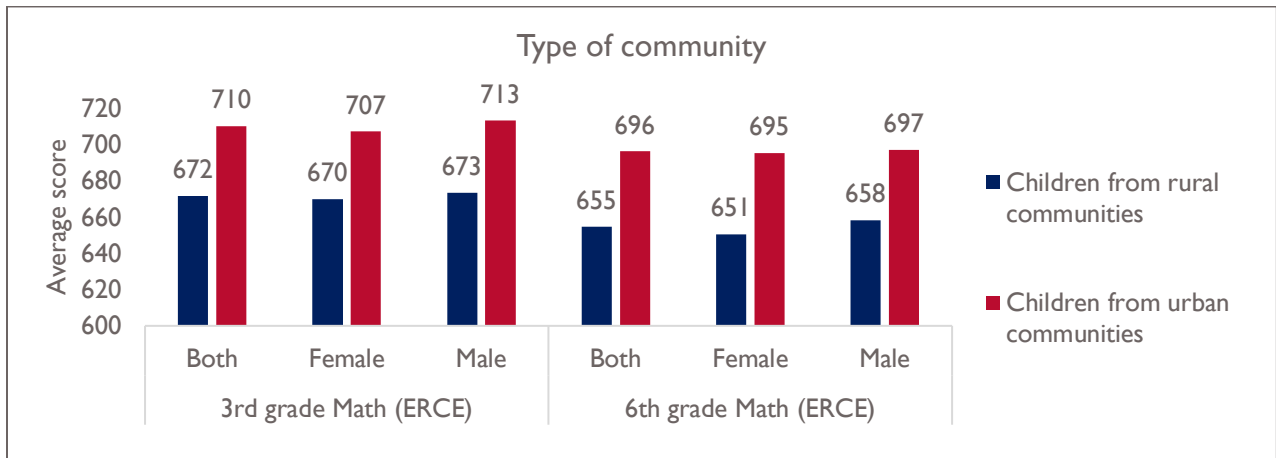
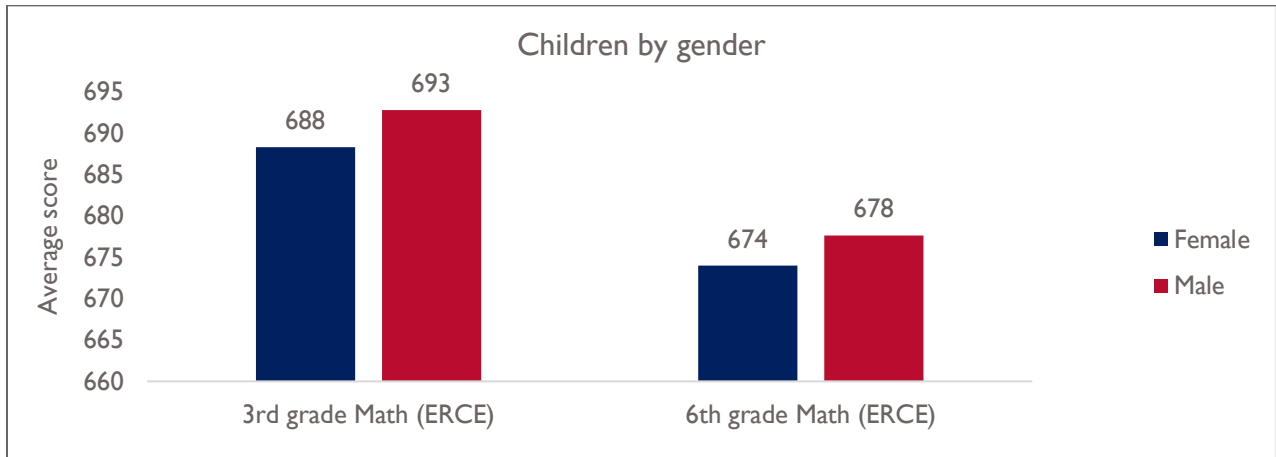
POLICY	POLICY DESCRIPTION	ALIGNMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL POLICIES	POLICY IMPLEMENTATION	IMPLEMENTATION GAPS
CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES				
Law 026 of 2020	Promotes the educational inclusion and comprehensive development of girls, boys and adolescents with learning disorders.	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006: emphasizes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion for people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including education.	Advanced legal framework	Emerging intra- and inter-institutional coordination
Law 1346 of 2009	Approves the "Convention on Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities", adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 13, 2006.			
Law 1618 of 2013	Establishes the provisions to guarantee the full exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities.			
Decree 1421 of 2017	Regulates the educational attention to the population with disabilities, within the framework of inclusive education.			

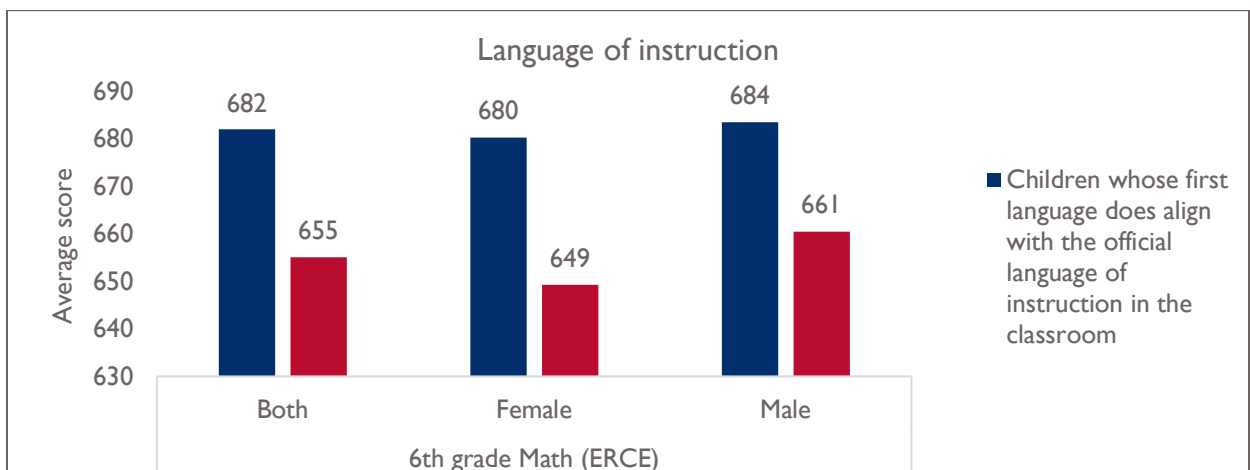
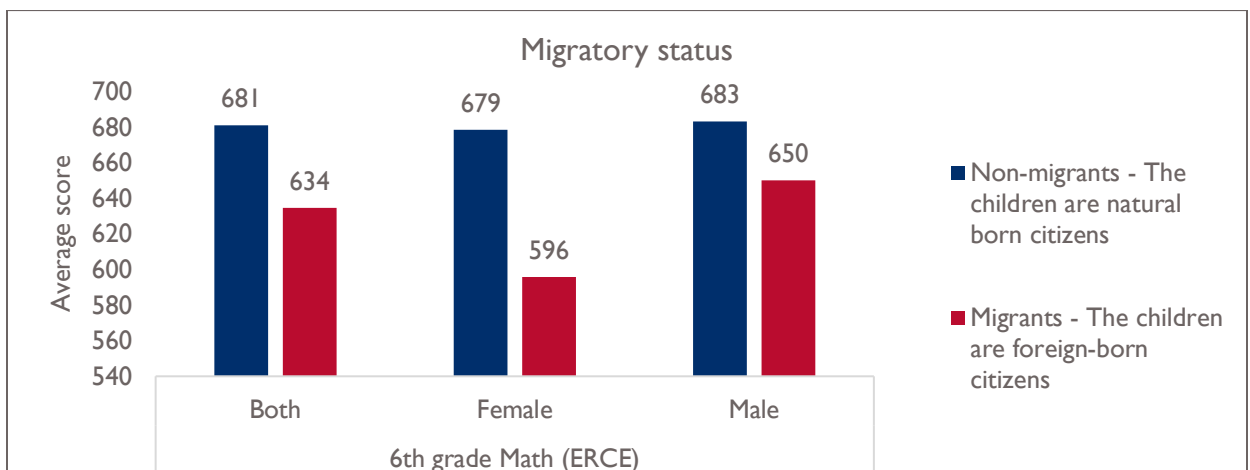
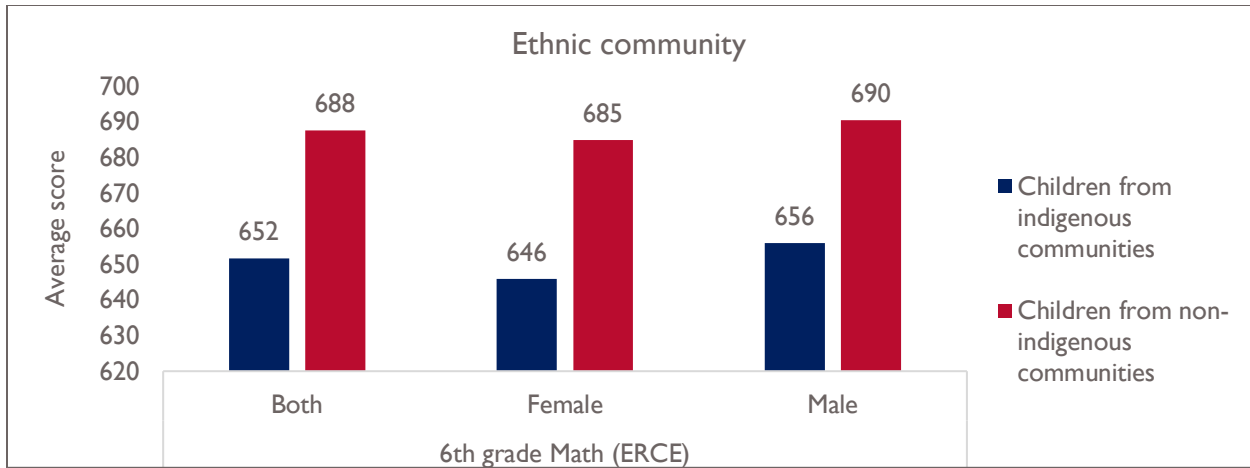
At the regulatory level, Colombia has made significant strides in ensuring the right to education for people with disabilities within the framework of inclusive education, primarily through Law 1618 of 2013 and Decree 1421 of 2017 (Fundación Saldarriaga Concha and LEE, 2023, p. 7). The country has also established numerous regulations to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, along with various coordination and articulation institutions like MEN and ICBF, indicating formal progress in guaranteeing rights to health, education, work, and access to technical and technological aids (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 11).

However, recent assessments reveal disparities in the perception of these advances among people with disabilities, with 63 percent feeling excluded from the Colombian educational system. When analyzing the reasons behind this exclusion, the lack of willingness within the educational community (35 percent) and insufficient support or mobility adjustments (20 percent) emerge as the most common obstacles (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 35-36). Moreover, the disabled population aged 5 to 17 attends school less frequently, and only 6.2 percent receive scholarships, subsidies, or credits to pursue their studies. Among those not attending school, 29.3 percent attribute their absence to the need for special educational services (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 39). Additionally, there is a need for better preparation and capacity-building for teaching staff to effectively include (i) students with disabilities (key informants from Multilateral agencies, and governmental offices), (ii) increased availability of specific pedagogical materials for this population (governmental officials), and (iii) improved data collection on the status of children and adolescents with disabilities (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2021, p. 11). It is worth noting that "SIMAT does not guarantee updated information on permanence or reasonable adjustments (governmental officials)."

ANNEX C. EL SALVADOR DATA

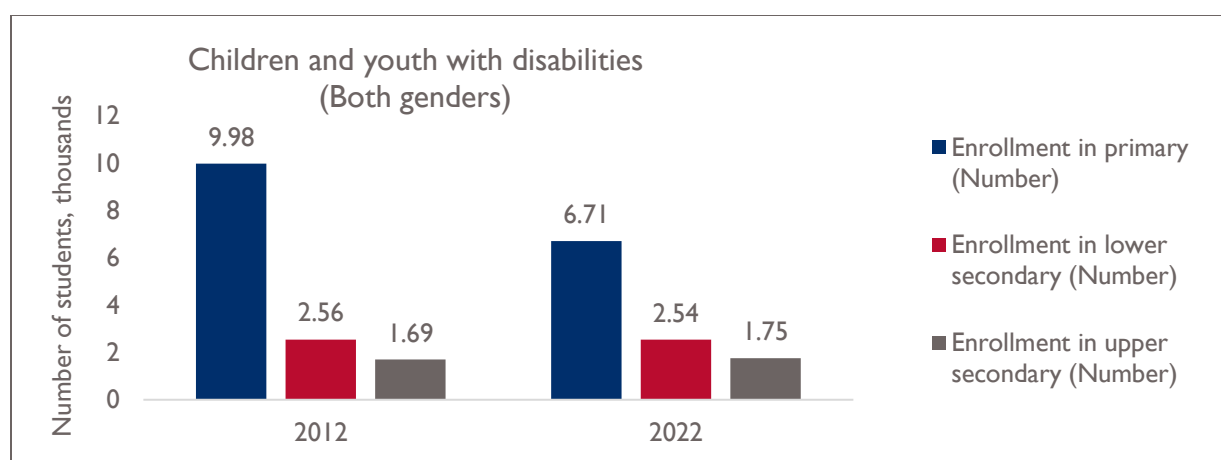
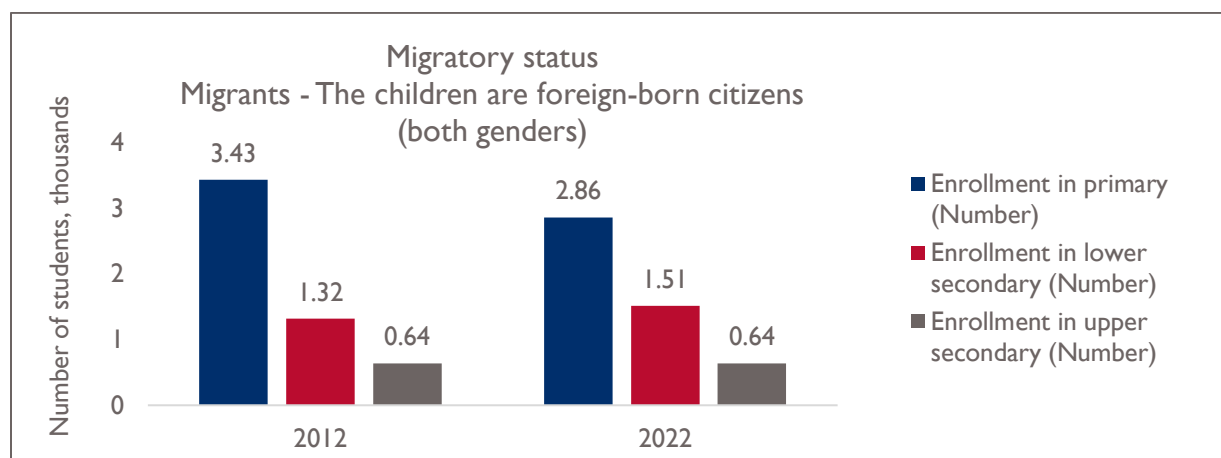
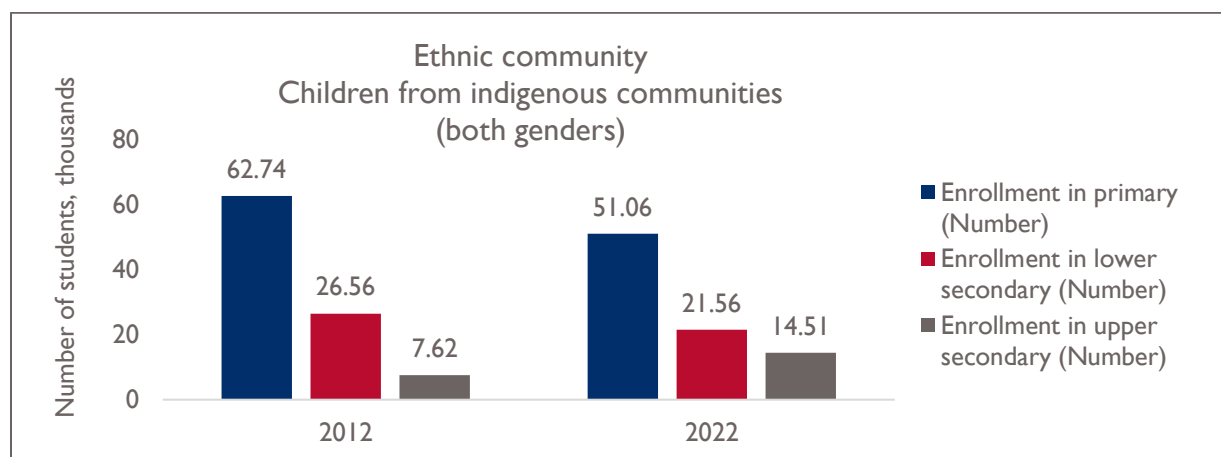
CI. EL SALVADOR – ERCE MATH SCORES BY GROUP





Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/estudio-regional-comparativo-y-explicativo-erce-2019> and UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://github.com/lece/erce>

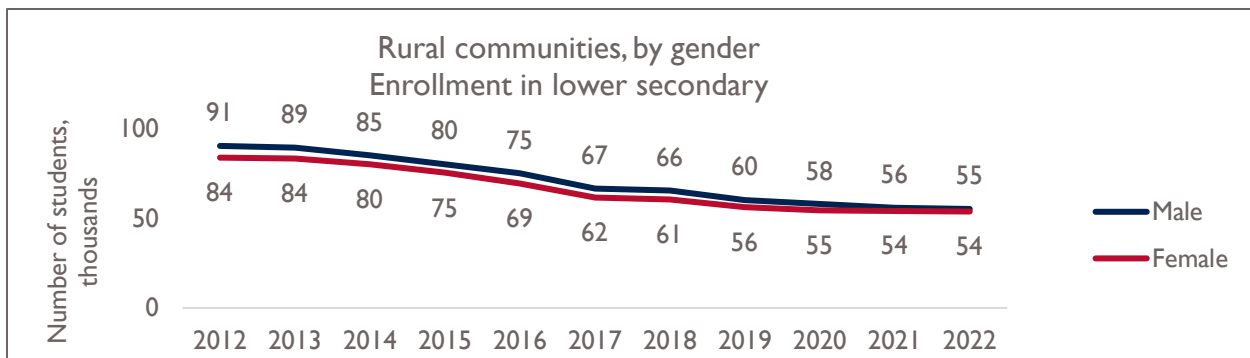
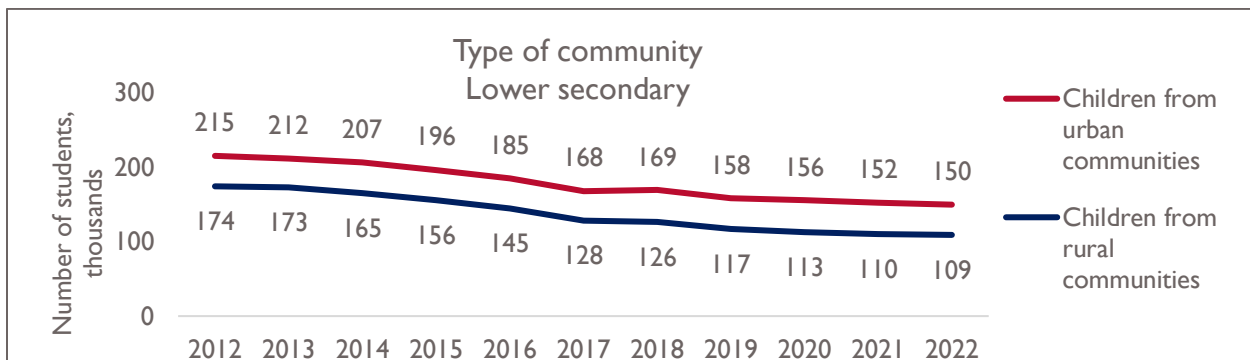
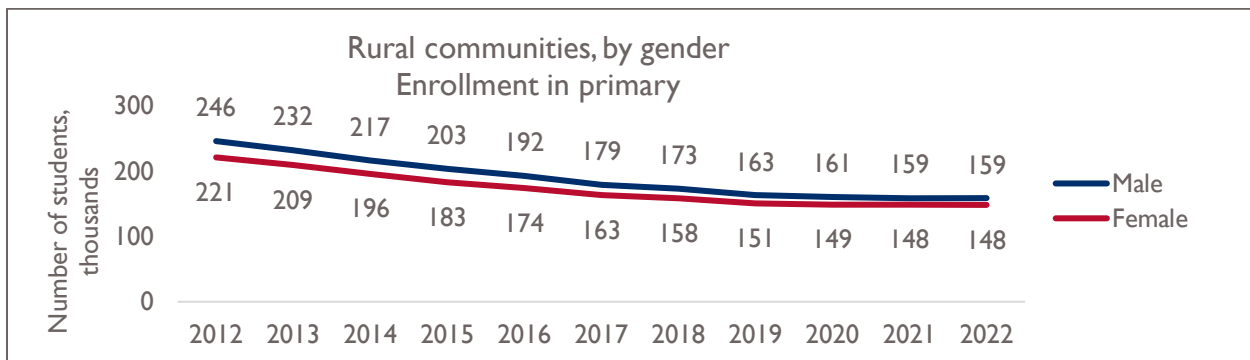
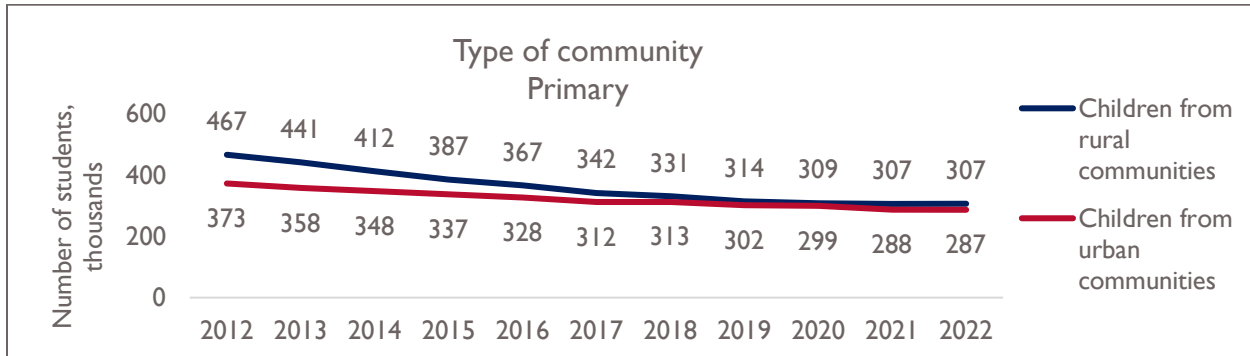
C2. EL SALVADOR – ENROLLMENT IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION



Source: Estimated based on Censo escolar, Ministerio De Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología (2012, 2022).

Notes: The educational level was modified for comparison purposes with other countries. Primary covers students between first grade and sixth grade students. Lower secondary ranges from seventh to ninth grade; and upper secondary include students from high school and vocational training. Originally, in the case of El Salvador, primary

involved students between first grade and ninth grade and secondary students from high school and vocational training. In addition, we considered the number of students enrolled in the education system between 7 and 19 years old.

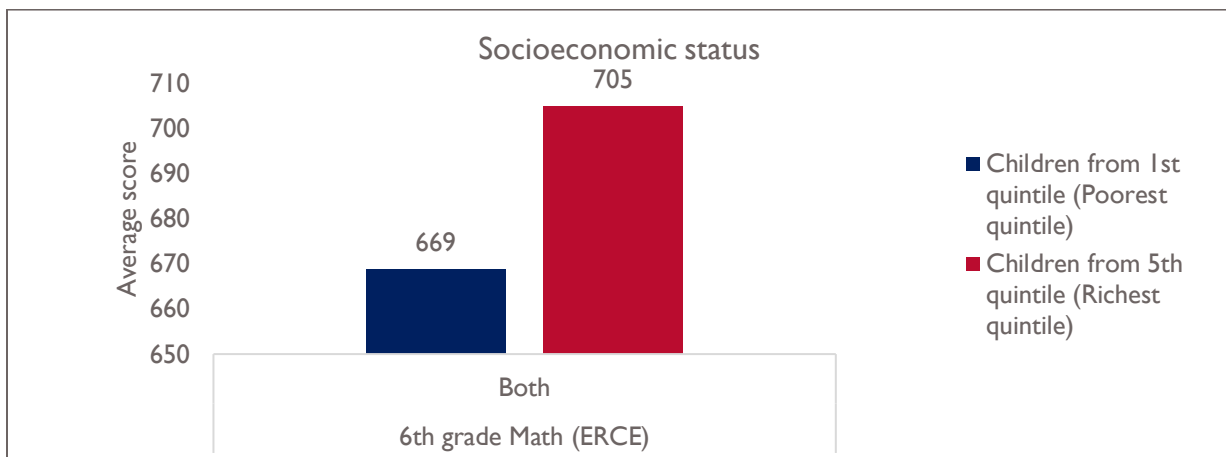
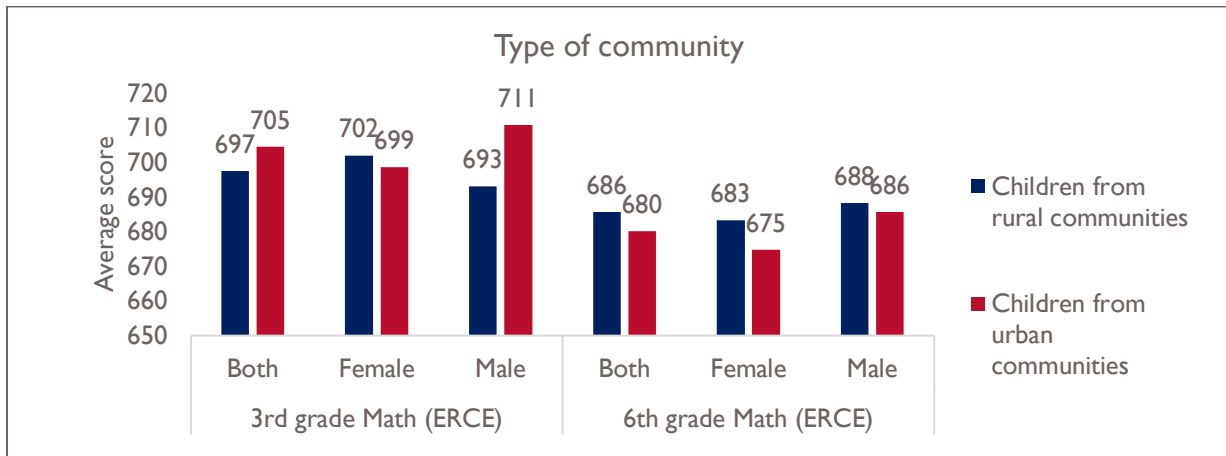
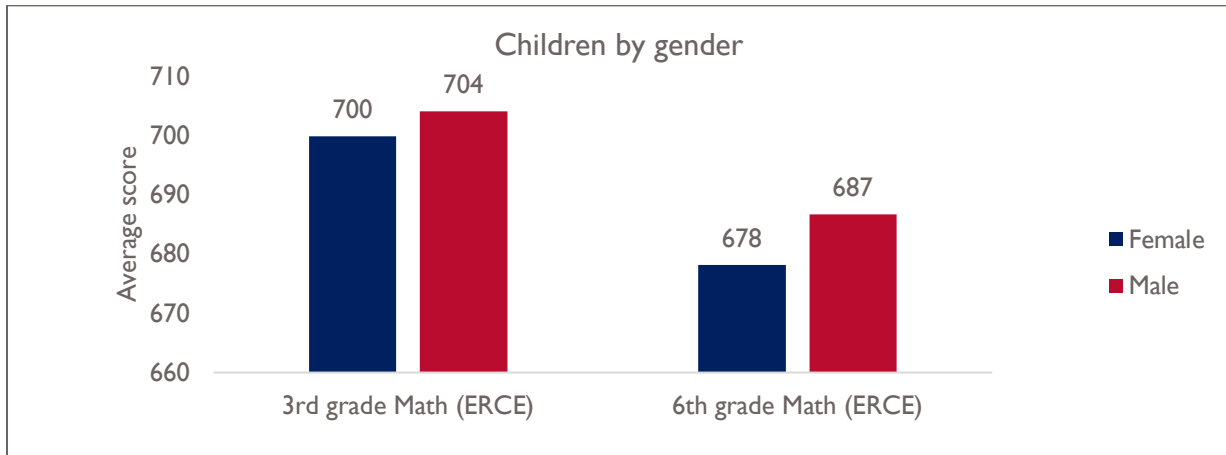


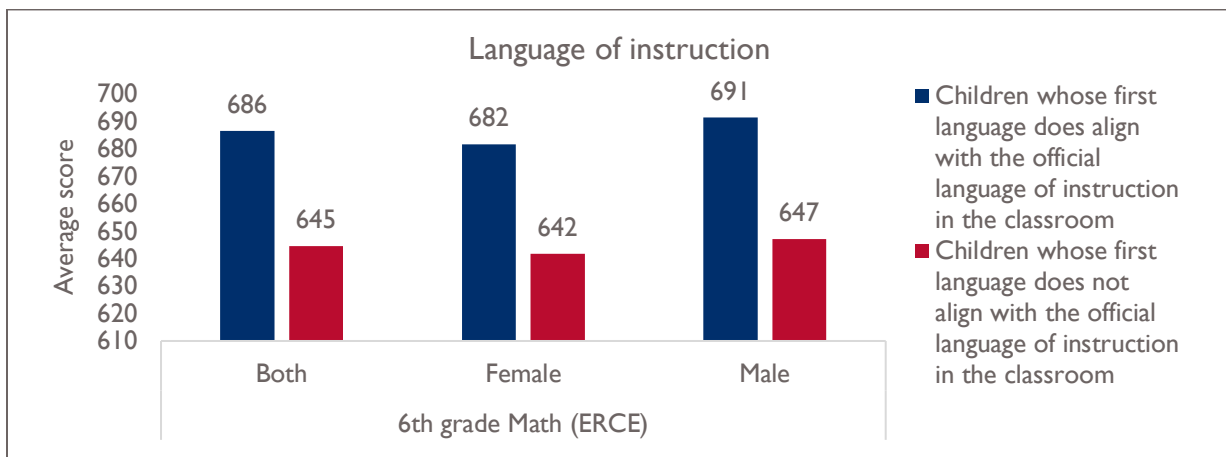
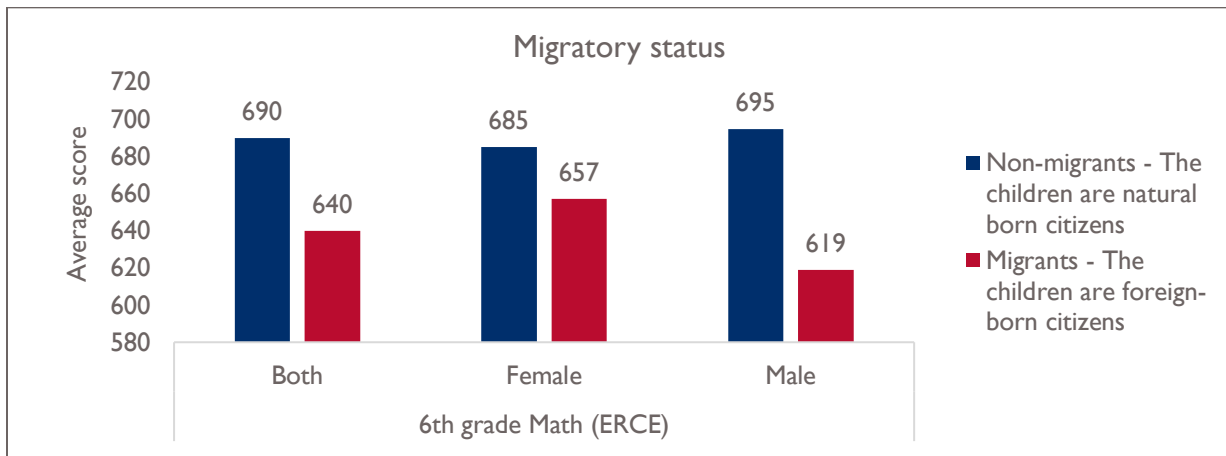
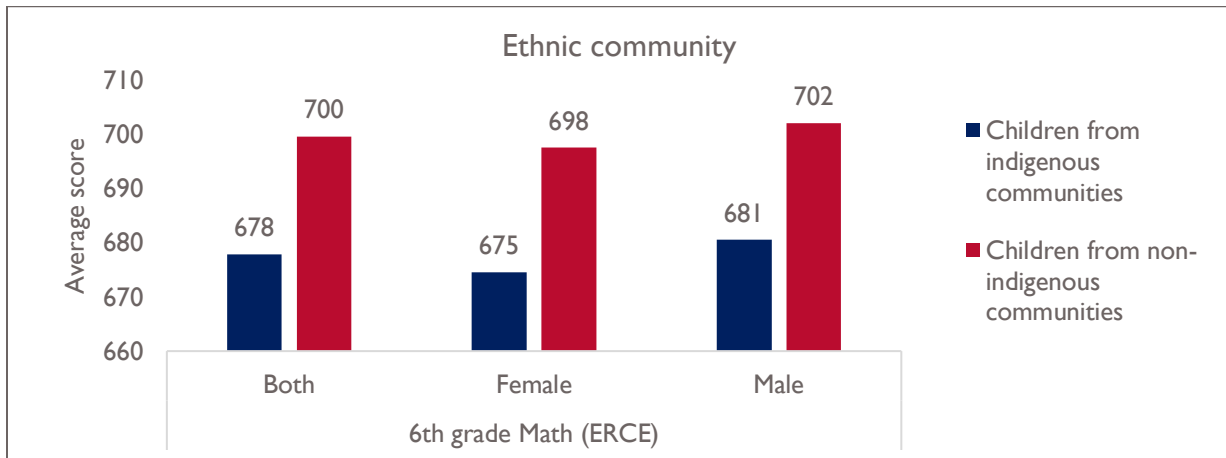
Source: Censo escolar, Ministerio De Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología (2012, 2022).

Notes: The educational level was modified for comparison purposes with other countries. Primary covers students between first grade and sixth grade students. Lower secondary ranges from seventh to ninth grade; and upper secondary includes students from high school and vocational training. Originally, in the case of El Salvador, primary involved students between first grade and ninth grade and secondary students from high school and vocational training. In addition, we considered the number of students enrolled in the education system between 7 and 19 years old.

ANNEX D. HONDURAS DATA

DI. HONDURAS – ERCE MATH SCORES BY GROUP





Source: UNESCO ERCE 2019 database. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/estudio-regional-comparativo-y-explicativo-erce-2019> and: <https://github.com/llece/erce>.