

Factbook Education System: El Salvador

CES Chair of Education Systems

CES Factbook Education Systems, No. 28, 2023



Editing and Acknowledgement

This Factbook was edited by Ditjola Naço. We want to thank Leotrim Zukaj for the elaboration of the contents.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword | 6 |
| 1 El Salvador's Economy and Political System | 8 |
| 1.1 El Salvador's Economy | 8 |
| 1.2 The Labour Market | 11 |
| 1.2.1 Overview of the El Salvador Labour Market | 11 |
| 1.2.2 The CES Youth Labour Market Index | 14 |
| 1.2.3 The CES YLMI for El Salvador | 15 |
| 1.3 El Salvador's Political System | 16 |
| 1.3.1 Overview of the Salvadoran Political System | 16 |
| 1.3.2 Politics and Goals of the Education System | 16 |
| 2. Formal System of Education | 18 |
| 2.1 Formal System of Education | 18 |
| 2.2 Pre-Primary Education | 20 |
| 2.3 Primary and Lower Secondary Education | 21 |
| 2.4 Upper Secondary Education | 21 |
| 2.5 Postsecondary and Higher Education | 22 |
| 2.6 Continuing Education (Adult Education) | 22 |
| 2.7 Teacher Education | 23 |
| 3. The System of Vocational and Professional Education and Training | 24 |
| 3.1 Vocational Education and Training (VET; Upper Secondary Education Level) | 24 |
| 3.2 Professional Education and Training (PET; Post-Secondary Level) | 26 |
| 3.3 Regulatory and Institutional Framework of the VPET System | 27 |
| 3.3.1 Central Elements of VPET Legislation | 27 |
| 3.3.2 Key Actors | 28 |
| 3.4 Educational Finance of the VPET System | 29 |
| 3.4.1 Educational finance of the VET system | 29 |
| 3.5 Curriculum Development | 29 |
| 3.5.1 Curriculum Design Phase | 30 |
| 3.5.2 Curriculum Application Phase | 30 |
| 3.5.3 Curriculum Feedback Phase | 31 |
| 3.6 Supplying Personnel for the VPET System (Teacher Education) | 31 |
| 4. Major Reforms in the Past and Challenges for the Future | 32 |
| 4.1 Major Reforms | 32 |
| 4.2 Major Challenges | 32 |
| 5. References | 34 |

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| BCR | Banco Central de Reserva |
| CDE | El Consejo Directivo Escolar |
| CONED | Consejo Nacional de Educación |
| DIGESTYC | La Dirección General de Estadística y Censos |
| ECLAC | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| GCI | Global Competitiveness Index |
| GII | Global Innovation Index |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GER | Gross Enrolment Rate |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education |
| INSAFORP | Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional |
| KOF | Swiss Economic Institute |
| LAC | Latin America and Caribbean |
| LFPR | Labour Force Participation Rate |
| MINED | Ministerio de Educación |
| MPI | Multidimensional Poverty Index |
| NER | Net Enrolment Rate |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PCC | Proyecto Curricular de Centro |
| PET | Professional Education and Training |
| UCA | Universidad Centroamericana |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| VPET | Vocational Professional Education and Training |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |
| YLMI | Youth Labour Market Index |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Employment by sector (as % of total employment), 1991-2019 | 11 |
| Figure 2: CES YLMI for El Salvador | 15 |
| Figure 3: CES YLMI for El Salvador and OECD | 15 |
| Figure 4: ISCED 2011 Mapping for El Salvador | 19 |
| Figure 5: Percentage of drop-outs | 20 |
| Figure 6: Enrolment across higher education institutions in 2020 | 22 |
| Figure 7: Enrolment rates in formal TVET programmes in 2018 | 25 |
| Figure 8: Results of PAES 2017 | 26 |
| Figure 9: Enrolment in Higher Education | 27 |
| Figure 10: Curriculum Value Chain | 30 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Key Statistics and Information on El Salvador | 8 |
| Table 2: Head Count Ratio of Multidimensional Poverty Index in El Salvador and Neighbouring Countries | 9 |
| Table 3: Share of Gross Value Added (GVA) by sector and employment by sector, 2020 | 10 |
| Table 4: Labour force participation rate and unemployment rate in % in 2021 by age | 13 |
| Table 5: Employment and unemployment rate by educational attainment in 2019 (persons aged 25–64) | 13 |
| Table 6: Net enrolment rate (NER) and gross enrolment rate (GER) of 2022 in per cent | 18 |
| Table 7: Distribution of training in the basic and technical area for the Health Care programme | 25 |

Foreword

The increasing competitiveness of the world economy as well as the high youth unemployment rates after the worldwide economic crises in 2008/9 have put pressure on countries to upgrade the skills of their workforces. Consequently, vocational education and training (VET) has received growing attention in recent years, especially amongst policy-makers. For example, the European Commission defined common objectives and an action plan for the development of VET systems in European countries in the Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for 2011-2020 (European Commission, 2010). In addition, a growing number of US states and other industrialized, transition, and developing countries (for example Hong Kong, Singapore, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nepal) are interested in either implementing VET systems or making their VET system more labour-market oriented.

The appealing outcome of the VET system is that it improves the transition of young people into the labour market by simultaneously providing work experience, remuneration and formal education degrees at the secondary education level. If the VET system is optimally designed, VET providers are in constant dialogue with the demand-side of the labour market, i.e. the companies. This close relationship guarantees that the learned skills are in demand on the labour market. Besides practical skills, VET systems also foster soft-skills such as emotional intelligence, reliability, accuracy, precision, and responsibility, which are important attributes for success in the labour market. Depending on the design and permeability of the education system, VET may also provide access to tertiary level education (according to the ISCED classification): either general education at the tertiary A level or professional education and training (PET) at the tertiary B level. PET provides occupation-specific qualifications that prepare students for highly technical and managerial positions. VET and PET systems are often referred to together as “vocational and professional education training (VPET)” systems.

Few countries have elaborate and efficient VPET systems. Among these is the Swiss VPET system, which is an example of an education system that successfully matches market supply and demand. The Swiss VPET system efficiently introduces adolescents to the labour market, as shown by Switzerland’s 2007-2017 average youth unemployment rate of 8.1 percent compared to 14.8 percent for the OECD average (OECD, 2017).

Though not many countries have VPET systems that are comparable to Switzerland’s in terms of quality, efficiency and permeability, many have education pathways that involve some kind of practical or school-based vocational education. The purpose of the CES Education System Factbook Series¹ is to provide information about the education systems of countries across the world, with a special focus on vocational and professional education and training.

In the CES Factbook Education Systems: El Salvador, we describe El Salvador’s vocational system and discuss the characteristics that are crucial to the functioning of the system. Essential components comprise the regulatory framework and the governance of the VPET system, the involved actors, and their competencies and duties. The Factbook also provides information regarding the financing of the system and describes the process of curriculum development and the involved actors.

The Factbook is structured as follows: First, we provide an overview of El Salvador’s economy, labour market, and political system. The second part is dedicated to the description of the formal education system. The third section explains El Salvador’s vocational education system. The last section offers a perspective on El Salvador’s recent education reforms and challenges to be faced in the future.

¹ From 2013 to 2019, the Factbooks were produced within the framework of the Education Systems research division at the CES Swiss Economic Institute. From 2020 they will be produced by the Chair of Education Systems (CES) group.

Suggested citation:

CES Chair of Education Systems (2023). Factbook Education Systems: El Salvador CES Factbook Education Systems, ed. 1. ETH Zurich.

The Education System Factbooks have to be regarded as work in progress. The authors do not claim completeness of the information which has been collected carefully and in all conscience. Any suggestions for improvement are highly welcome!

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1 El Salvador's Economy and Political System

Table 1: Key Statistics and Information on El Salvador

| Category | Outcome |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Population | 6,325,827 |
| Area | 21,040 km ² |
| Location | Central America |
| Capital City | San Salvador |
| Government | Multiparty Republic |
| Official Language | Spanish |
| National Currency | USD |

Source: Own table based on Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022) and DIGESTYC (2021)

One of the main purposes of an education system is to provide the future workforce with the skills needed in the labour market. The particularities of a country's economy and labour market are important factors in determining the current and future demand for skills. Therefore, these factors are briefly described in the first chapter of this Factbook. Additionally, this chapter provides an overview of El Salvador's political system with an emphasis on the description of the country's education politics. Table 1 reports key statistics and information about El Salvador, which are further discussed in this chapter.

1.1 El Salvador's Economy

El Salvador's economy is characterised by its dollarised nature and exposure to natural hazards attributable to its location in Middle America. Annually, natural hazards cost El Salvador approximately 2.5% of its GDP, which is one of the highest shares in the world. Moreover, natural hazards disproportionately affect poor populations (World Bank, 2022).

The country's economic development has stagnated since 1992, the year which marks the end of the civil war. After the war, El Salvador recorded a 13% decline in GDP growth. In the first half of 1990, the economy grew significantly quickly. This growth was mainly driven by the rebound effect. However, the initial extensive growth has not been sustainable, and the economy has grown modestly since the mid-90s. More specifically, El Salvador is reported to have the slowest growing economy amongst countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region. From 2013 to 2019, the economy annually grew by an average of 1.8%, which is considerably lower compared to El Salvador's aspirational peers,² which grew 4.3% during the same time period. However, compared to its structural peers,³ El Salvador performed identically (1.7%) (Ulku & Zaourak, 2021). In 2020, El Salvador suffered a negative growth rate due to the measures taken to control the pandemic (IMF, 2022). Nevertheless, the Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador (*Banco Central de Reserva* [BCR]) announced a GDP growth of 2.4% in the first quarter of 2022, indicating a recovery from the recent recession (BCR, 2022).

² Dominican Republic, Georgia, and Bulgaria

³ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Honduras, Jamaica and Jordan

Although El Salvador has managed to reduce poverty and inequality over the last years, the rate of growth has not been substantial enough to move towards the standards of high-income countries. Nonetheless, the share of people living in extreme poverty, which is defined as earning 1.90 USD a day, declined to 1.5%(2018) from a 13% high in 1995. This development is attributable to the autonomy of the national bank established in 1991 and the dollar's integration into El Salvador's economy, which was catalysed by the introduction of the monetary integration law in 2001. This constellation enabled the central bank to ensure high price stability and modest growth. Additionally, free-trade agreements and reforms induced an increase in trade flows. However, most households that live in the edge of extreme poverty remain vulnerable to falling back (Ulku & Zaourak, 2021).

Table 2: Head Count Ratio of Multidimensional Poverty Index in El Salvador and Neighbouring Countries

| Dimension | Indicators | El Salvador | Guatemala | Honduras | Nicaragua |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Health (deprivation in %) | Nutrients | 2.6% | 19.0% | 5.2% | 4.5% |
| | Child mortality | 0.4% | 2.1% | 0.6% | 0.6% |
| Education (deprivation in %) | Years of schooling | 5.2% | 16.0% | 6.1% | 12.5% |
| | School attendance | 3.3% | 12.1% | 5.9% | 3.7% |
| Living Standards (deprivation in %) | Cooking fuel | 6.3% | 27.8% | 11.3% | 16.2% |
| | Sanitation | 5.0% | 10.8% | 6.0% | 6.2% |
| | Drinking Water | 1.9% | 10.5% | 1.8% | 13.6% |
| | Electricity | 2.4% | 10.1% | 5.1% | 11.5% |
| | Housing | 6.1% | 22.7% | 8.9% | 13.5% |
| | Assets | 2.5% | 10.9% | 5+.5% | 9.1% |
| MPI | | 0.032 MSCI (2019) | 0.136 DHS (2014/15) | 0.051 MSCI (2019) | 0.074 DHS (2011/12) |

Source: own table based on (OPHI, 2022)

To better understand the sources of poverty, the authors of this Factbook consult the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which is summarised in Table 2. The MPI aims to measure acute multidimensional poverty using publicly available survey data on general human development and health indicators from UNICEF or USAID. Regarding the MPI, El Salvador performs particularly well compared to its neighbouring countries (OPHI, 2022). The strong performance might be explained by the low child mortality and safe and accessible drinking water. Additionally, considering the Human Development Index (HDI), in 2021 El Salvador ranked 125th with a value of 0.675. The HDI is an average measure which captures a country's achievements in key human development measures. Interestingly, El Salvador's neighbour Nicaragua ranked 124th with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of 5,625 USD, whereas El Salvador had a GNI per capita of 8,296 USD. Nevertheless, El Salvador's HDI has consistently increased from 0.617 in 2000 to 0.675 in 2021 (HDR, 2022).

El Salvador's economy has performed particularly well in the export sector: The country's exports consist mainly of low-complexity products, such as textiles or food items. However, these exports have lost importance in recent years due to the competing Asian market. Exports of services are not significant but have risen in the latest years (IMF, 2022). Nonetheless, the service sector is the fastest-growing sector within El Salvador's economy, accounting for 67.5% of the total value added in 2020 (BCR, 2021).

When comparing El Salvador's gross value added (GVA) to the EU-27 average across various industries, as shown in Table 3, a similar structure can be observed. The tertiary sector is responsible for the largest share of GVA for both the EU-27 countries and El Salvador. For El Salvador only 6% of GVA is attributable to the agricultural sector, which is similar for the EU-27 countries. Importantly, the agricultural sector is highly susceptible to the aforementioned exposure to natural hazards and remains very labour intensive (employing 15.9% of the workforce). Nonetheless, the secondary sector is an important factor in El Salvador's economy, comprising 26.5% of the GVA. Interestingly, the EU-27's GVA is more skewed towards the tertiary sector than El Salvador's. Furthermore, the economic importance of the primary sector has diminished, which is indicated by the decline in the labour force displayed in Figure 1.

Table 3: Share of Gross Value Added (GVA) by sector and employment by sector, 2020

| Sector | El Salvador Value added (%) | EU-27 Value added (%) | El Salvador Employment ⁴ (%) | EU-27 Employment (%) |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Primary sector | 6.0 | 1.8 | 15.9 | 4.5 |
| Agriculture, hunting and forestry, fishing | 6.0 | 1.7 | 15.9 | 4.5 |
| Secondary sector | 26.5 | 25 | 23.3 | 22.6 |
| Manufacturing, mining, quarrying and other industrial activities | 20.4 | 19.5 | 16.5 | 16 |
| Manufacturing | 16.5 | 16.2 | 14.8 | 14.4 |
| Construction | 6.1 | 5.5 | 6.8 | 6.6 |
| Tertiary sector | 67.5 | 73.1 | 60.8 | 72.9 |
| Wholesale and retail trade, repairs, hotels and restaurants, transport, information and communication | 23.6 | 23.3 | 35.5 | 27.1 |
| Financial intermediation, real estate, renting and business activities | 22.6 | 15.8 | 5.9 | 3.3 |
| Public administration, defence, education, health, and other service activities | 21.3 | 34 | 19.4 | 42.5 |

Source: own table based on BCR (2021), SEDLAC (2022), and Eurostat (2020).

El Salvador is classified as a lower-middle income country and densely populated, with 6.36 million inhabitants within a surface area of 21,050 km². Its demographic distribution is shaped by a young population, as 26.6% of the population is aged between 15 and 29 years (1,681,121). The relatively young population offers the government an opportunity to further foster economic growth. Additionally, 12.9% of the population is aged 7–14 years, which suggests a high demand for education services associated with this particular age group. El Salvador's policy makers must consider the growth of the proportion of over 60-year-olds in policy planning. In 2021 over 60-year-olds represented about 14% of the population, which might indicate a higher demand for public services, mainly in social security, health care, and care policies or programmes in the future (Ulku & Zaourak, 2021).

In 2017, El Salvador reported 1.39 million emigrants,⁵ who are responsible for a large part of the financial inflows. Remittances are a significant source of income for a large proportion of Salvadorans: An estimated 57% of households have relatives abroad who support their families financially. Significantly, in 2018 remittance equalled 20.6 % of GDP. During the 2010s, the share of emigrants stabilised; however, the willingness to emigrate is still high. Approximately every fourth Salvadoran would like to leave the country in the next three years. A significant fraction of Salvadoran emigrants are low-skilled young men

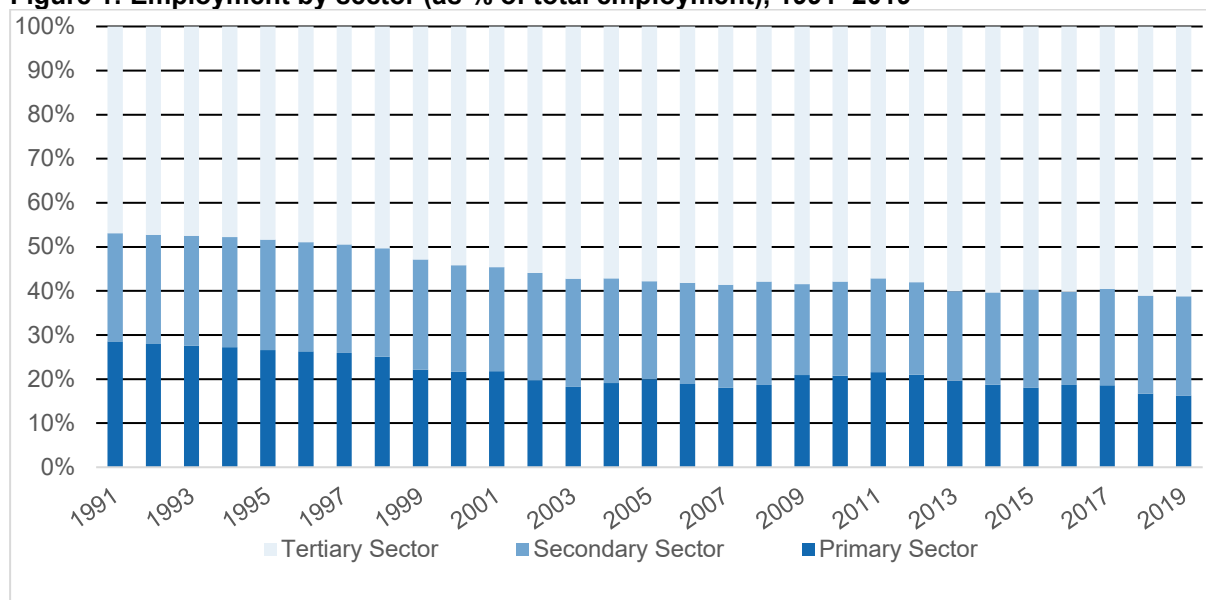
⁴ Data from 2019

⁵ 89 percent of which in the United States

moving to the United States. Therefore, the outflow of young men and the low fertility-rate have resulted in an increase of the relative proportion of older people in El Salvador (Ulku & Zaourak, 2021).

El Salvador was ranked 103rd out of 141 countries on the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 (GCI) issued by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2019 with a score of 52.6 out of 100 (WEF, 2019). The GCI evaluates a country's international competitiveness regarding different dimensions (e.g. entrepreneurial culture and companies embracing disruptive ideas). According to the *Global Competitiveness Report*, El Salvador's low rank is largely driven by weak institutions and low innovation capabilities. El Salvador was ranked 132nd and 121st respectively (WEF, 2019).

Figure 1: Employment by sector (as % of total employment), 1991–2019



Source: own figure based on ILOSTAT (2022)

Finally, the Global Innovation Index (GII) analyses a country's innovative capabilities and innovation success by considering two different subindices: the Innovation Input Index and the Innovation Output Index. These are composed of different metrics from various categories that are considered when calculating the final index (Input: institutions, human capital, infrastructure, market sophistication, and business sophistication; Output: knowledge and technology outputs and creative outputs). El Salvador ranked 100th out of 129 countries with a score of 19.9 out of 100 (Dutta, Lanvin, & Wunsch-Vincent, 2022). The total is explained by a low score in knowledge and technology outputs, human capital, research, and institutions.

Importantly, in 2021 the Salvadoran government recognised the cryptocurrency Bitcoin as legal tender (Renteira, 2022). The Economist reports an estimated investment of 105 million USD in Bitcoins with public funds. As of December 2022, the market value of the initial investment reached a low of 40 million USD (The Economist, 2022).

1.2 The Labour Market

The first part of this section describes the general situation of El Salvador's labour market, and the second part focuses on the youth labour market.

1.2.1 Overview of the El Salvador Labour Market

In El Salvador, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTPS) is the governing institution of the public labour administration and is responsible for designing, executing, and supervising the country's labour policy. According to the MTPS, the key objectives of Salvadoran labour market policies are to promote labour relations by cooperating with the representative organisations of employees and employers, to facilitate the development of the labour market, and to provide services to the Salvadoran population (MTPS, 2022).

The Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS) is the public entity that plans, directs, and administers social security: health and occupational risks, disability, retirement, death, and involuntary unemployment. It functions as an autonomous entity. Typically, workers pay 7.25% of their monthly earnings into social security (SSA, 2019).

In accordance with the labour law, workers have the right to defend their respective interests, from professional associations or unions, and enter collective contracts. Interestingly, Article 7 of the labour law states that at least 90% of an employer's workforce must be Salvadoran. Moreover, Article 309 governs maternity leave regulations: The employee can take 12 weeks of maternity leave and the employer must pay 100% of the wage for this period. Paternity leave is regulated to last for three days (Government of El Salvador, 2017). Generally, El Salvador has strict labour law regulation particularly regarding flexible employment. For example, minimum wages must be paid in full if the employee works between 5 and 8 hours a day. Thus, people working part-time face significant barriers when entering the labour market since employers tend to favour full-time workers. This legislation mainly affects women who, according to general social norms, are still seen as the caregiver (Banegas & Winkler, 2020). Therefore, more flexible working conditions might foster women's integration into the labour market and positively impact their labour market outcomes.

Minimum wages are regulated by the MTPS, and data are available online. As of 2017 the lowest minimum wages are paid in the agricultural sector at 200 USD per month or 0.83 USD per hour. In contrast, the industry sector reports the highest minimum wage at 300 USD per month or 1.25 USD per hour (MTPS, 2020).

In 2019 the unemployment rate in El Salvador was reported to be 6.3%. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a significant increase in the number of unemployed people. The increase in unemployment is expected to heterogeneously affect the population. Thus, similarly to the 2008–09 global economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic was expected to significantly impact the employment and employment opportunities of the vulnerable portion of the population. However, the unemployment rate stabilised in 2021 and is currently reported to be 4.5% (ILOSTAT, 2022). Compared to the OECD average, El Salvador boasts a significantly lower unemployment rate. This might be attributable to El Salvador's large share of employment in the informal sector. According to the latest household survey (*Encuesta de Hogares de Proposito Multiples*, EHPM), published in 2021, 44.6% of the population works in the formal sector (DIGESTYC, 2021). Thus, low unemployment rates do not necessarily indicate desirable labour market situations. El Salvador still faces socioeconomic inequities in job opportunities. Moreover, the quality of the jobs offered is poor, which is also reflected in the paid wages. Lastly, the economy shows a limited capacity to create better job opportunities in the future (Banegas & Winkler, 2020).

Additionally, Table 4 indicates high unemployment amongst the youth (aged 15–24 years), who also experience high underemployment. Youth unemployment, in addition to demographic dynamics, remains the main challenge of the Salvadoran labour market. Moreover, youth and women face worse labour market outcomes compared to other socioeconomic groups: 76% of women are economically inactive, and most economically active women work in the informal sector (DIGESTYC, 2021).

Table 4: Labour force participation rate and unemployment rate in % in 2021 by age

| Age group | Labour force participation rate | | Unemployment rate | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | El Salvador | OECD average | El Salvador | OECD average |
| Total (15–64 years) | 64.5 | 72.4 | 4.5 | 8.7 |
| Youth (15–24 years) | 46.7 | 47.5 | 10.0 | 12.8 |
| Adults (25–64 years) | 63.5 | 78.0 | 3.1 ⁶ | 5.4 |

Source: Own table based on ILOSTAT (2022) and OECD (2021).

Table 5 shows an increasing unemployment rate for an increasing education level. This might indicate a skill mismatch between labour market demand and supply (i.e. a low demand for high skills). Furthermore, the skill premium of university graduates has significantly decreased over the last decades (Banegas & Winkler, 2020).

Table 5: Employment and unemployment rate by educational attainment in 2019 (persons aged 25–64)

| Education level | Employment rate | | Unemployment rate | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | El Salvador | OECD average | El Salvador | OECD average |
| Less than upper secondary education | 59.9 | 44.3 | 3.4 | 9.3 |
| Upper secondary education | 66.6 | 62.3 | 6.2 | 5.5 |
| Tertiary education | 82.7 | 76.8 | 6.5 | 3.8 |

Source: Own table based on OECD (2021) and International Labour Organisation ILO (2020).

Lastly, the Ease of Doing Business Index measures the ease of establishing a business in a country. To this end, the index uses 10 indicators to measure a country's business-friendliness. However, this index must be considered carefully, as it exclusively collects data in the largest city of the country. Consequently, the index might not precisely represent the average regulatory framework of a country. Additionally, the index typically focuses on businesses of a particular size and legal framework (e.g. limited liability companies; World Bank, 2022). In 2020 the Doing Business Indicator ranked El Salvador 91st out of 190 countries in terms of business-friendliness. Although El Salvador performed particularly well in the category of giving credits, dealing with construction permits and the procedure to start a business seem burdensome according to the 2020 report (World Bank, 2020).

Thus, the Salvadoran labour market must confront numerous challenges: the incapability of the private sector to generate jobs needed for the future, the weak integration of youth and women, and the low quality of employment (Banegas & Winkler, 2020). Additionally, high underemployment and inflexible working condition dampen the attractiveness of the labour market in general.

⁶ Refers to 25+

1.2.2 The CES Youth Labour Market Index

The CES Youth Labour Market Index (CES YLMI) was developed to compare the youth labour market situation across countries (Renold et al., 2014). This index was founded on the critique that a single indicator, such as the widely used youth unemployment rate, does not sufficiently describe the youth labour market situation nor provide enough information for a comprehensive cross-country analysis. To increase the amount of information considered and to foster a multidimensional view, the CES YLMI considers twelve indicators that are grouped into four dimensions (see the information box to the right).

The first dimension is the **Activity State**. It contains three indicators and captures the extent to which youth are active. Youth refers to all individuals aged 15–24. The indicators are the Unemployment Rate, the Relaxed Unemployment Rate, and the NEET Rate. The **Working Conditions** dimension consists of five indicators that capture the quality of employment. Those are the Temporary Worker Rate, the Involuntary Part-time Worker Rate, the Atypical Working Hours Rate, the In-work At-risk-of-Poverty Rate, and the Vulnerable Employment Rate. **Education**, the third dimension, aims to portray the quantity and quality of education and training via two indicators: the Formal Education and Training Rate and the Skills Mismatch Rate. Finally, the **Transition Smoothness** dimension describes the dynamics of the transition process between school and work. The indicators Relative Unemployment Ratio and Long-Term Unemployment Rate comprise this dimension.

Before the aggregation of the indicators into a single index, each indicator value is rescaled into an indicator score that takes values between 1 and 7, where higher scores suggest more desirable outcomes. The data for the indicators are collected from different international institutions and cover up to 178 countries from 1991 onwards. Because data are not available for all countries every year, one of the major limitations of the CES YLMI is data availability. When data are lacking, a dimension can occasionally be based on a single indicator or must be omitted entirely when no indicator for that category has data available. Missing values for certain indicators can render comparisons across countries or groups of countries problematic and sometimes even impossible.

| Dimensions and corresponding indicators of the CES YLMI | |
|---|--|
| Activity State | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unemployment Rate - Relaxed Unemployment Rate⁷ - Neither in Employment nor in Education or Training (NEET) Rate |
| Working Conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporary Worker Rate - Involuntary Part-time Worker Rate - Atypical Working Hours Rate - In-work At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate⁸ - Vulnerable Employment Rate⁹ |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal Education and Training Rate - Skills Mismatch Rate |
| Transition Smoothness | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relative Unemployment Ratio¹⁰ 2. Long-term Unemployment Rate¹¹ |
| Source: Renold et al. (2014). | |

⁷ Is calculated as the number of unemployed and discouraged workers as a share of the entire labour force. Discouraged workers have given up the search for work (not actively seeking), although they have no job and are currently available for work (also: “involuntary inactive”).

⁸ Those who cannot make a decent living out their earnings. It is calculated as the number of youth at work but earning less than 60% of the median national income as a percentage of the total working population.

⁹ Share of the employed population working on their own account or those working in their family business and thus contributing to the entire family income. Both are less likely to have formal work arrangements and are therefore less protected by labour laws and more exposed to economic risk.

¹⁰ Is defined as the youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) divided by the adult unemployment rate (25+). If the youth cohort is affected in the same way than the adult group with respect to unemployment, then the relative unemployment ratio will be equal to one. If the youth are relatively more affected, then the ratio will be larger than one.

¹¹ Those unemployed for more than one year (52 weeks) as a share of the total number of unemployed (according to the ILO definition).

1.2.3 The CES YLMI for El Salvador

Figure 2: CES YLMI for El Salvador

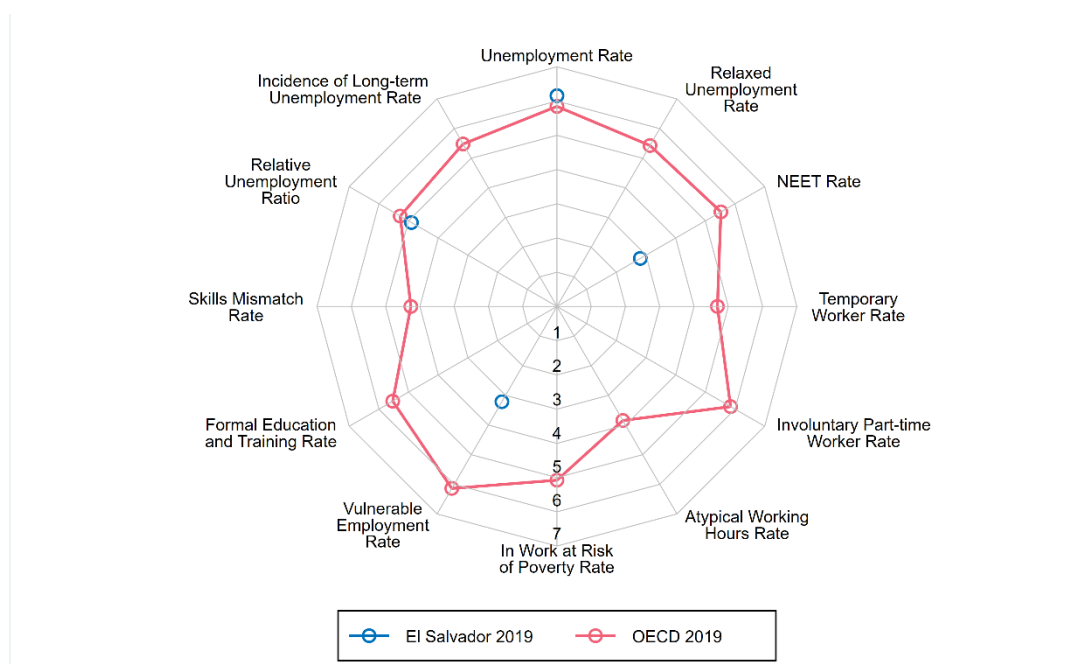
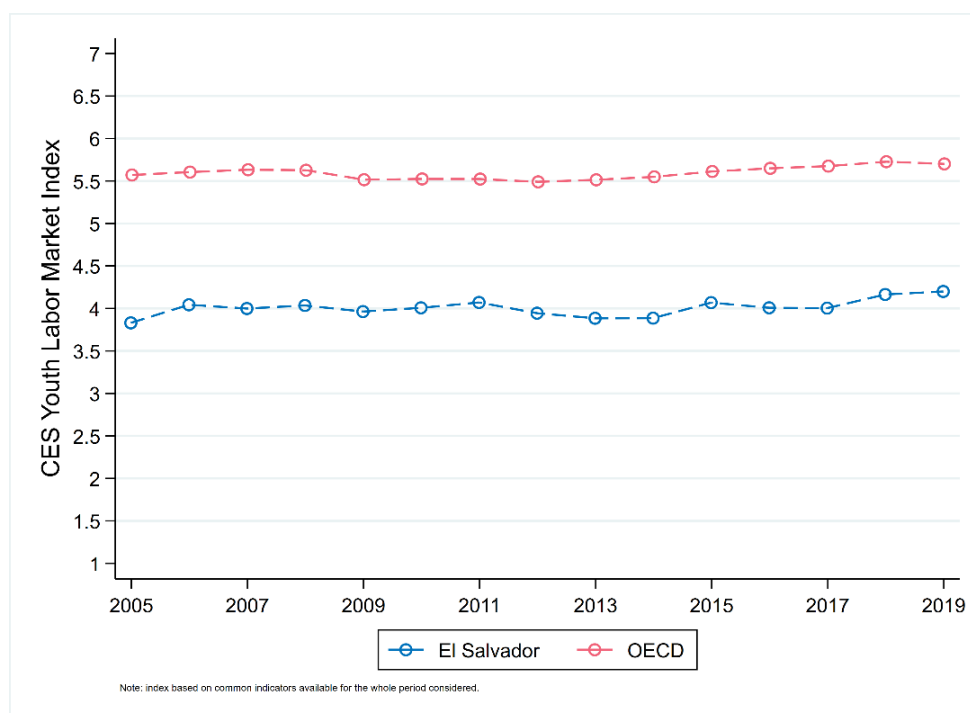


Figure 3 visualises the progression of CES YLMI scores for El Salvador and the OECD from 2005 onwards. With regards to the comparison between El Salvador and the OECD average, only the commonly available indicators are considered. The OECD's CES YLMI scores are consistently higher than El Salvador's, indicating a better situation in the labour market for Salvadoran youth. The NEET Rate and Vulnerable Employment Rate are relatively low for El Salvador, which explains the difference between OECD and El Salvador. Notably, the development for El Salvador since 2005 has been slightly upwards sloping, leading to the impression that the youth labour market situation measured by the YLMI has improved marginally.

Figure 3: CES YLMI for El Salvador and OECD



1.3 El Salvador's Political System

Understanding the basics of a country's political system and familiarising oneself with the political goals for its education system are crucial points for a broader understanding of the education system. Therefore, Section 1.3.1 begins by presenting El Salvador's general political system, then Section 1.3.2 focuses on the politics and goals of the education system.

1.3.1 Overview of the Salvadoran Political System

El Salvador and the other Central American provinces claimed independence from Spain in 1821. The five Central American republics founded the United Provinces of Central America in 1823. El Salvador's declaration of independence in 1840 resulted in the formation of a republic. The subsequent decades were marked by repeated uprisings (US Government, 2022). In the 1980s El Salvador's history was shaped by an intense civil war, which began shortly after a military coup. The US-supported government of El Salvador fought a coalition of left-wing groups (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front [FMLN]). The civil war lasted for 12 years and over 75,000 people lost their lives. After the war, a new president and national assembly were elected. However, violent crimes remained high after the war and are still a significant issue in El Salvador today (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022a).

Currently, El Salvador is a multiparty constitutional republic with a democratically elected government. The Salvadoran Congress is unicameral, is called the Legislative Assembly, and consists of 84 deputies and their alternates. Terms are limited to three years, with the possibility of indefinite re-election. Legislative elections are held every three years in conjunction with municipal elections. Thus, according to the constitution of El Salvador, the president and vice president of the republic, the deputies to the legislative assembly, and the members of municipal councils are publicly elected. However, the presidential term is limited to five years (Government of El Salvador, 1983). As of 2021 the president may be re-elected once (Reuters, 2022).

The government of El Salvador faces high crime rates, although the rates have decreased in recent years. In 2017 homicide rates were reported at 61 per 100,000 people, which was the second highest rate after Venezuela worldwide (Motlagh, 2019). The decrease in crime rates is partly associated with the government's rigorous intervention. The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has expressed concerns about the excessive violence, which does not align with international human rights standards, committed by military forces in gang stronghold areas (Throssell, 2022). Contrary to the decline in the homicide rate, the rate of femicide increased in 2020. El Salvador has one of the highest rates of femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean region (ECLAC, 2020). In addition to violence, poverty and exposure to natural hazards remain challenges for the Salvadoran government. As briefly mentioned, poverty in El Salvador has declined in recent years. Nevertheless, a large fraction of the population is still vulnerable to falling into poverty. Moreover, 58% of the population lives in the Central American Dry Corridor, a region that is prone to recurrent droughts and flooding (Läderach, et al., 2021).

To further evaluate El Salvador's political system, the authors of this Factbook consider the Democracy Index in which El Salvador scores 5.72 points (77th of 167 countries). The moderate ranking might be explained by a weak commitment to a democratic political culture, which allows the fostering of authoritarian regimes (Economist, 2022). Additionally, the Corruption Perception Index ranks El Salvador 115th out of 180. The index measures the perception of corruption in a country's institutions. To this end, the index relies on opinions of experts and businesspeople (Transparency International, 2022).

1.3.2 Politics and Goals of the Education System

The Ministry of Education (MINED) is responsible for ensuring the coverage, quality, and efficiency of the education system in El Salvador. It establishes the national curriculum and the normative framework that regulates the teaching and administration of educational institutions.

Profoundly transforming El Salvador's education system to provide quality education is one of the central goals for the 2019–2024 presidential term. To this end, the government developed the Cuscatlán Plan, which considers educational innovation, student participation, and the constant training of the teaching

staff as objectives for enhancing education in El Salvador. This plan aims to lay the foundation for institutional innovations. Additionally, MINED introduced the Institutional Strategic Plan (PEI), which identifies five strategic priorities to guide the actions of all the ministry's organisational units (MINED, 2020):

- quality and meaningful learning with a relevant and inclusive curriculum
- further teacher education to ensure the quality of education
- sufficient educational infrastructure ensuring quality and safety standards
- a school environment that favours prevention of crimes through education for coexistence, inclusion, and diversity
- a transformed and innovative institution governing the education system

To summarise, the main challenges of the Salvadoran education system are unequal access to education, low academic achievement, grade repetition, school dropout, and the quality of infrastructure. Additionally, gang activities affect the daily lives of students and families. Consequently, public schools are seen as unsafe and parents aim to send their children to private schools instead (Francis, Martin, & Burnett, 2018). Furthermore, accelerated brain drain and a decline in skill premium suggest a mismatch between the labour market and education system. More specifically, weak demand for high skilled graduates and slow adoption of new technologies in the private sector have resulted in high unemployment amongst graduates. Thus, increasing the link between education and the private sector might benefit El Salvador's economy (Banegas & Winkler, 2020).

2. Formal System of Education

There are many reasons which highlight the importance of an education system. One such reason is the contribution of education to outcomes and personal and economic growth. Thus, this section aims to deepen the understanding of El Salvador's education system. To this end, the formal system of education is discussed and mapped according to ISCED. Moreover, each educational step is discussed and presented as a base to understanding the subsequent chapters discussed in this Factbook.

2.1 Formal System of Education

Education in El Salvador is governed by the Ministry of Education MINED (*Ministerio de Educación*). According to the Law on Education, the purpose of the Salvadoran education system is severalfold. Besides creating an environment to physically and intellectually develop Salvadorans, the education system aims to balance curricula according to the demand of the country's economic and social development (MINED, 1996).

Generally, El Salvador's education system distinguishes between formal and nonformal education. Formal education is taught in authorised institutions that follow a standardised curriculum. Thus, students receive a diploma after successfully completing a school cycle. Nonformal education offers training and education aimed at supplementing academic and work-related training and is tailored to respond to the short-term needs of the labour market (MINED, 1996).

Table 6: Net enrolment rate (NER) and gross enrolment rate (GER) of 2022 in %

| Education level | ISCED 2011 | Net Enrolment Rate | Gross Enrolment Rate |
|--|------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Early childhood education development programmes | 010 | 5.7 | 6.8 |
| Preprimary education | 020 | 50.0 | 61.6 |
| Primary education | 1 | 81.2 | 88.2 |
| Secondary education | 2–3 | 41.1 | 78.1 |
| <i>Lower secondary education</i> | 2 | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Upper secondary education</i> | 3 | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Percentage enrolled in vocational secondary education</i> | 2–3 | N/A | N/A |
| Compulsory education age group | 1–3 | N/A | N/A |
| Postsecondary nontertiary education | 4 | N/A | N/A |
| Tertiary education | 5–8 | 11.88 ¹² | 19.89 |
| <i>Short-cycle tertiary education</i> | 5 | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Bachelor or equivalent level</i> | 6 | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Master or equivalent level</i> | 7 | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Doctoral or equivalent level</i> | 8 | N/A | N/A |

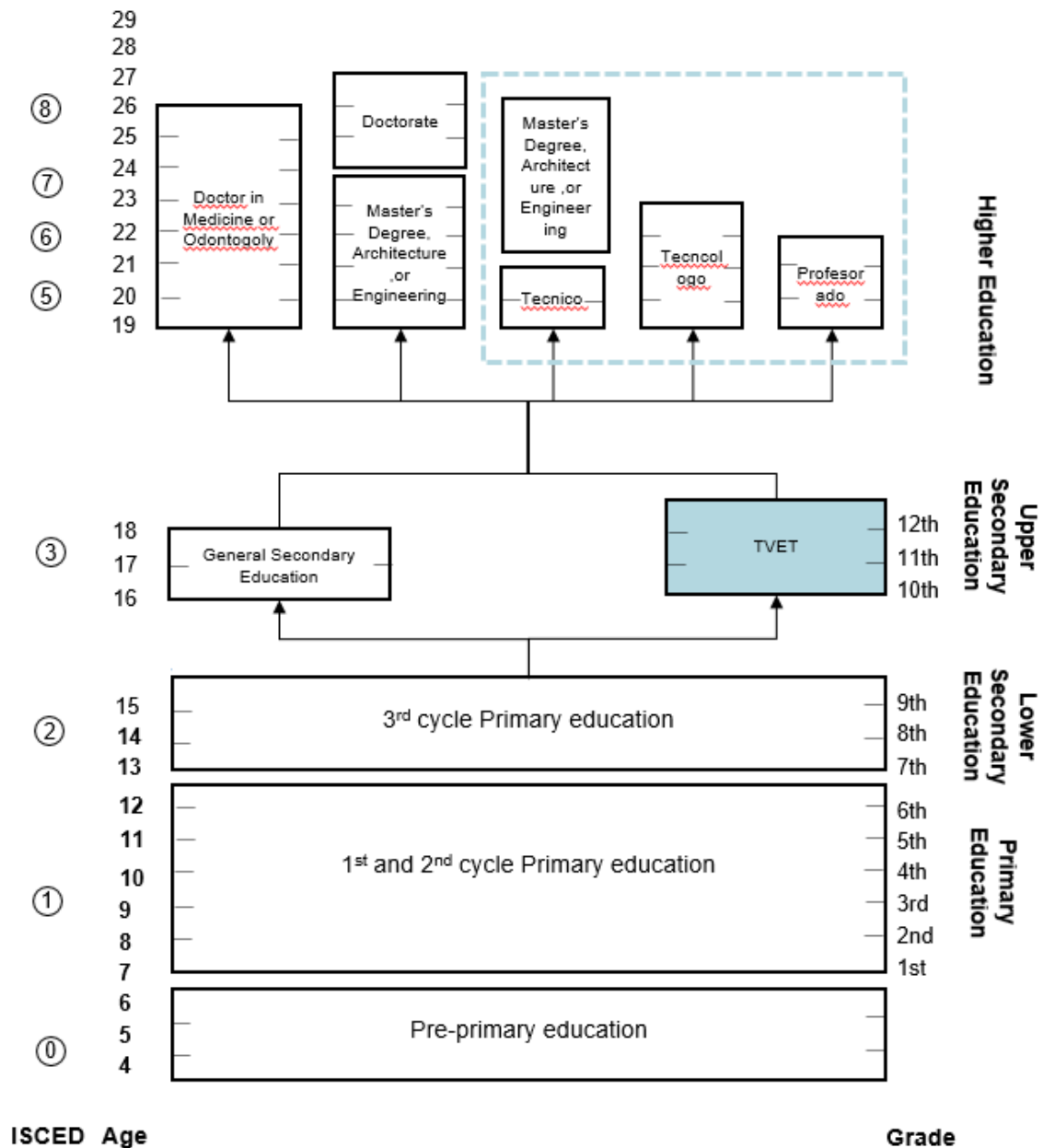
Source: Own table based on MINED (2023) and MINED (2020)

¹²Data from 2020 (superior dingens)

More specifically, El Salvador's formal education system consists of initial, preschool, basic, middle, and higher education, with preschool and basic education being the only mandatory elements of the education system (MINED, 1996). Figure 2 summarises the Salvadoran education system based on the ISCED 2011 mapping.

Educational institutions can be public or private. The former is funded by the government but may be supported by voluntary private contributions. Private schools offer formal education services based on own resources (e.g. tuition fees), or they may depend on subsidies. To receive subsidies, the schools must be non-profit and comply with the coverage and quality strategies promoted by the MINED (SIT-EAL, 2019).

Figure 4: ISCED 2011 Mapping for El Salvador

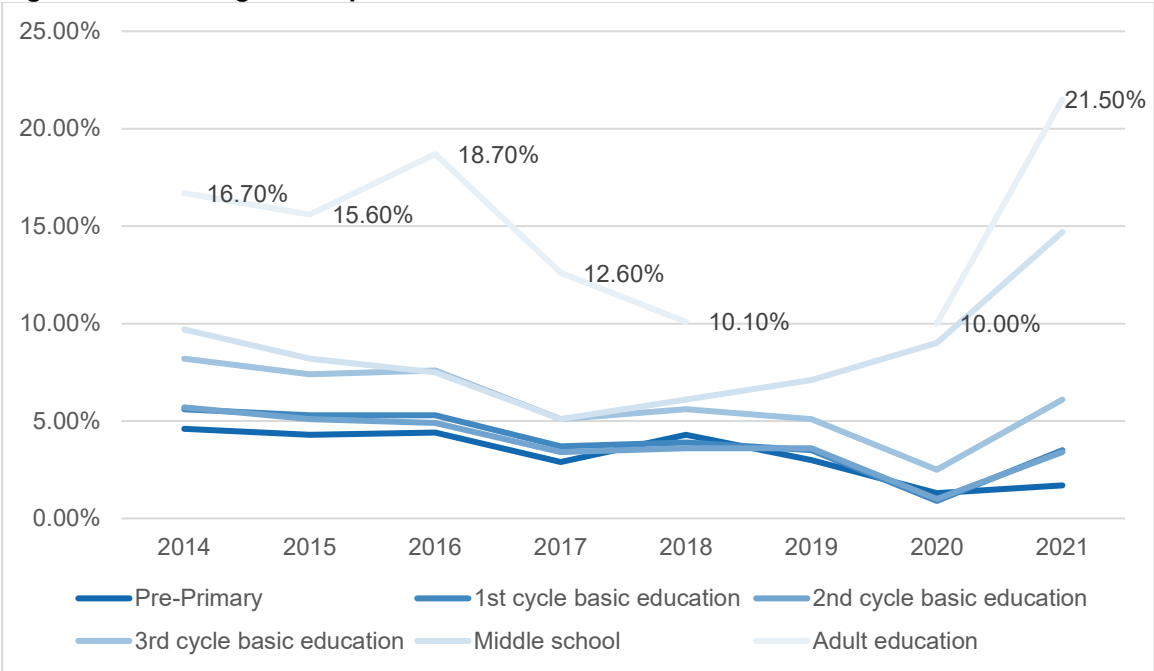


Source: Own figure based on MINED (1996).

Table 5 displays the GER¹³ and NER¹⁴ by education level for 2022 (or 2017 with regards to tertiary education). The NER quantifies the number of students in the theoretical age group for a given education level who are enrolled at that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population of that age group. The GER quantifies the number of students enrolled at a given education level – irrespective of their age – as a percentage of the students who are officially the correct age for that education level. For example, regarding primary education, the NER indicates how many students of typical primary school age are actually enrolled in primary school, while the GER gives the actual number of students in primary education – irrespective of their age – in relation to those who are of the official age to attend primary education.¹⁵ With respect to the NER, enrolment in Salvadoran pre-primary education has decreased over the last years. In 2014, the NER was at 58.5%, which would indicate a decline of 8.5 percentage points compared to data from 2022 (as presented in Table 5). A similar picture emerges when considering primary education. Only middle school (secondary education) has shown an increase, the NER rising from 37.5% in 2015 to 41.1% in 2022 (MINED, 2023a). Lastly, for 2017 the net enrolment rate in the tertiary education was 11.73% (MINED, 2020b).

The following chapter introduces each stage of the education system in El Salvador and is inspired by the structure of Figure 2.

Figure 5: Percentage of dropouts



Source: Own figure based on (mined 2022).

2.2 Pre-primary Education

As previously mentioned, pre-primary education is mandatory in El Salvador. Pre-school education is designed for children aged 4–6 years. Gross enrolment in pre-primary education has steadily decreased from 67.8% in 2014 to 61.6% in 2022 (MINED, 2023a). The main goals of pre-primary education are to strengthen the identity and self-esteem of the students and equip them with the necessary knowledge

¹³ The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) defines the gross enrolment rate as the “number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education (UIS, 2023a).”

¹⁴ The UIS defines the net enrolment rate as the “total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group (UIS, 2023b).”

¹⁵ A gross enrollment rate of 100 corresponds to a situation where each child in a given country is enrolled in the corresponding education level. A value above 100 could occur due to students who are older than the typical enrolment age for primary education (e.g. have to repeat grade, adult learners). A value below 100 implies that not everyone who is in the typical age for primary education is actually enrolled.

to transition to basic education (MINED, 1996). To enhance enrolment in pre-primary education and counteract the concerning trend of declining enrolment rates, the government of El Salvador is committed to improving the quality of education and increasing infrastructure availability for kindergartens and nursery schools (CONED, 2016).

2.3 Primary and Lower Secondary Education

Mandatory basic education in El Salvador is structured in three cycles. Each cycle has an expected duration of three years. Pupils entering basic education are typically 7 years old. Six-year-old pupils may also be eligible to enter basic education if they meet certain criteria (MINED, 1996). In 2022 the GER for basic education was 88.2%. Moreover, the latest data available suggest no significant difference in gross enrolment rates between genders. Promotion rates are higher for girls than boys (MINED, 2023a).

Nevertheless, the GER for basic education has declined in recent years. In 2014 the GER was reported to be 99.5%, which indicates a decrease in gross enrolment rate of 11.3 percentage points over the last eight years (MINED, 2023a). Moreover, the repetition rate has increased from 3.1% in 2016 to 6.5% in 2022. In 2021 only 80.2% of students transitioned from lower secondary to upper secondary education. Dropout rates have decreased in recent years except for in 2021, as Figure 5 indicates. Nonetheless, dropout rates are the highest in the last cycle of basic education, reaching 6.1% in 2021. In conclusion, basic education in El Salvador faces several challenges (CONED, 2016):

- low quality of learning, which is mirrored in low standardised test scores
- high dropout and low literacy rate
- limited job opportunities and low involvement of the labour market in the education system

Public spending on basic education has been high in El Salvador. In 2021 expenditure per student when expressed as a fraction of GDP per capita was 25% for basic education compared to 19% in pre-primary education (MINED, 2020a).

2.4 Upper Secondary Education

After successfully completing the ninth grade, students are eligible to enter upper secondary education (*educación media*), which is not mandatory. Upper secondary education is divided into two pathways: one general and one technical–vocational, both of which allow students to continue to higher education or enter the labour market (MINED, 1996).

General education lasts two years and graduating students receive the baccalaureate, whereas the technical baccalaureate can be obtained in three years. Students might transition from technical vocational education and training (TVET) to general education in the first year of the programme (MINED, 1996). TVET programmes are offered in the industrial, commercial, construction, computer science, health care, and agricultural areas (USAID & MINED, 2020). Chapter 3 of this Factbook further evaluates El Salvador’s TVET system.

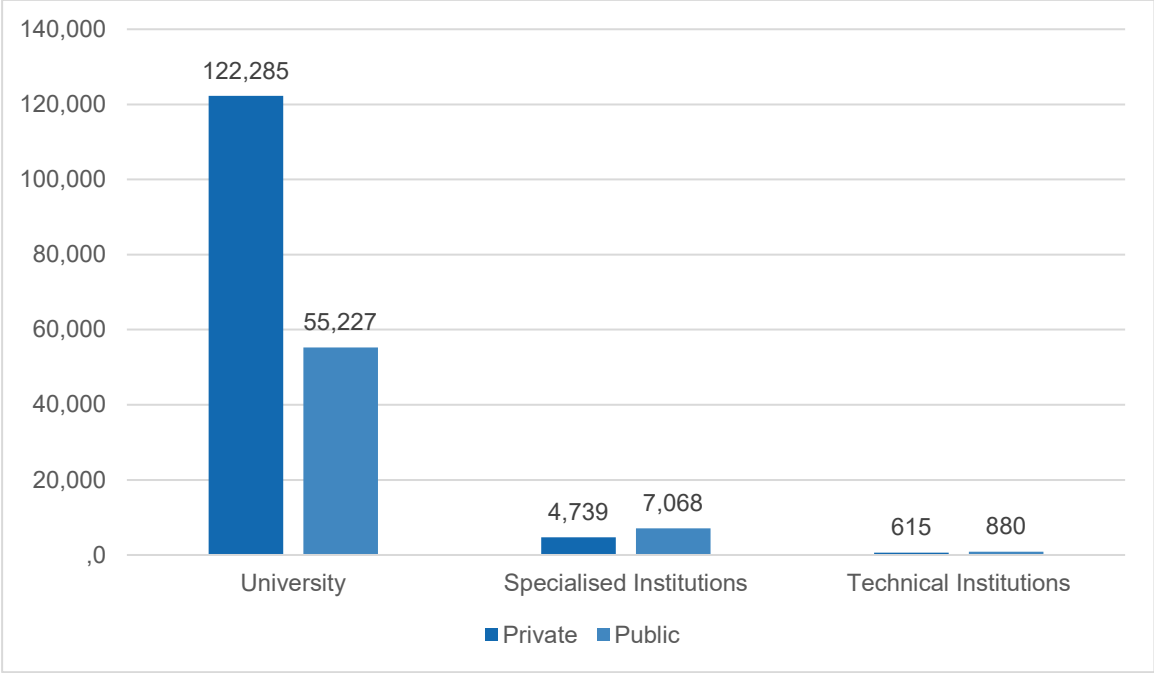
The GER in upper secondary education has grown in recent years. In 2014 the GER in the upper secondary level was 49.5% compared to 73.8% in 2022 (MINED 2022). Although this increase is promising, rising dropout rates are a main concern of secondary education. In 2021 the dropout rate in upper secondary education amounted to 14.7%, indicating an 11.6 percentage point increase compared to 2017 (MINED, 2023a). According to MINED, dropout rates are influenced by the “changing of addresses”. Reasons for students moving address are diverse. For example, one reason is classified as “forced internal displacement”, which has gained significance in recent years. Threats and harassment by gangs force families to move residence to guarantee their safety. Consequently, displacement leads to the loss of employment, housing, and property, and the affected families suffer from psychological problems. In other cases, children are forced to leave their schools. Another significant reason for students dropping out of school is emigration (USAID, 2018).

2.5 Postsecondary and Higher Education

The entrance requirements for higher education are (a) a baccalaureate degree or an equivalent degree which is obtained abroad but recognised in El Salvador and (b) the fulfilment of a particular higher education institution's admission requirements (MINED, 1996).

Typically, higher education is offered in three institutions: technical schools, universities, and specialised institutions. Technical higher education teaches skills demanded in the industry or technical sector of the country. On the other hand, universities focus on developing qualified professionals in all areas, which provides solutions to the diverse needs of El Salvador's society. The admission requirements for both educational paths are identical. However, the programmes offered vary across institutions (USAID & MINED, 2020). To this end, higher education is offered in 24 universities, 11 specialised institutes, and six technological institutes. Enrolment is distributed according to Figure 6, which indicates high enrolment in private universities in 2020 (MINED, 2020b).

Figure 6: Enrolment across higher education institutions in 2020



Source: Own figure based on MINED (2020).

The most popular field of study is business administration (at 22.8% of enrolment) and health care (19.92% of enrolment). For private universities, the average annual fees of academic courses fluctuate between 675 USD and 3,040 USD per year. A large proportion of public universities offer education without tuition fees (MINED, 2020b).

2.6 Continuing Education (Adult Education)

In 2017 MINED launched the *Modalidades Flexibles de Educación* (EDÚCAME) initiative, a free educational offer which gives adults the opportunity to continue and complete the third cycle of basic education and the baccalaureate. The objective of this initiative is to offer free educational services to young people and adults who have abandoned their studies and wish to continue and obtain the baccalaureate. Importantly, students must be able to verify the level of education they have received prior to applying to this programme by providing a degree certificate (MINED, 2017).

Moreover, the Literacy and Adult Education Programme (*El Programa de Alfabetización y Educación Básica de Adultos* [PAEBA]) aims to teach adults basic knowledge (i.e. knowledge equivalent to the sixth grade level). The programme is organised into three levels to ensure the best learning environment

for the students. However, according to the census of 2021, 10% of the Salvadoran population remains illiterate (DIGESTYC, 2021).

Additionally, universities offer various courses which aim to deepen skills in certain fields. These education programmes are typically aimed at professionals who are willing to gain new skills (UCA, 2022).

2.7 Teacher Education

El Salvador's teacher education is fully incorporated into higher education, and two types of paths lead towards a teacher's diploma: a degree in education science or the *profesorado* (teacher) degree. Students typically study five years to obtain a bachelor's degree in education and three years for a *profesorado*. The *profesorado* degree offers training in various fields, such as technical or constructional. Teacher education is offered exclusively by universities or higher education institutes. However, admission requirements are based on receiving a certain score in the final exam of upper secondary education, which is not the case for other fields of study (Government of El Salvador, 1996b).

According to the Teacher's Law, aspiring teachers holding a degree other than a *profesorado*, bachelor of education, master of education, or doctor of education might pursue a pedagogical career in their specialised area if they obtain an additional pedagogical degree which lasts at least one year. Importantly, teachers can only teach in the education level which is equivalent to their degree. As an example, to teach in basic education institutions, a teacher must hold the *profesorado en educación básica* (Government of El Salvador, 1996b). In 2018, MINED recorded 58,077 teachers in El Salvador, 70% of whom were women. 78% of the teachers were employed in the public sector (MINED, Boletines estadísticos, 2018b).

3. The System of Vocational and Professional Education and Training

This section of the Factbook describes the VET system at the upper secondary level and the PET at the tertiary level in more detail. Thereby, the term vocational and professional education and training (VPET) refers to both the VET and the PET system.

3.1 Vocational Education and Training (VET; Upper Secondary Education Level)

El Salvador's TVET system consists of institution-based programmes which begin at the upper secondary education level. In Chapter 2, Figure 4 illustrates this section of the education system in the context of the entire educational landscape. TVET education starts at age 16 (upper secondary level) and lasts for three years.

TVET in El Salvador is divided into formal and nonformal education. Both public and private formal institutions, which provide technical and technological (non-university) secondary education, fall under the jurisdiction of MINED. Nonformal education is managed by an autonomous body called the *Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional* (INSAFOR). However, INSAFOR is also involved in formal TVET programmes, which are offered under the regulation of MINED (Government of El Salvador, 1993b).

The Department of Technical and Technological Secondary Education (Gerencia de Educación Media Técnica y Tecnológica) is responsible for planning, coordinating, and evaluating the objectives of formal TVET programmes as well as allocating resources for the implementation of curricula. The entry requirement for formal programmes is the completion of the ninth grade (Government of El Salvador, 1996a). Some TVET programmes have additional requirements, such as a specific final score (MINED & USAID, 2020). Formal institutions offer programmes in the following areas:

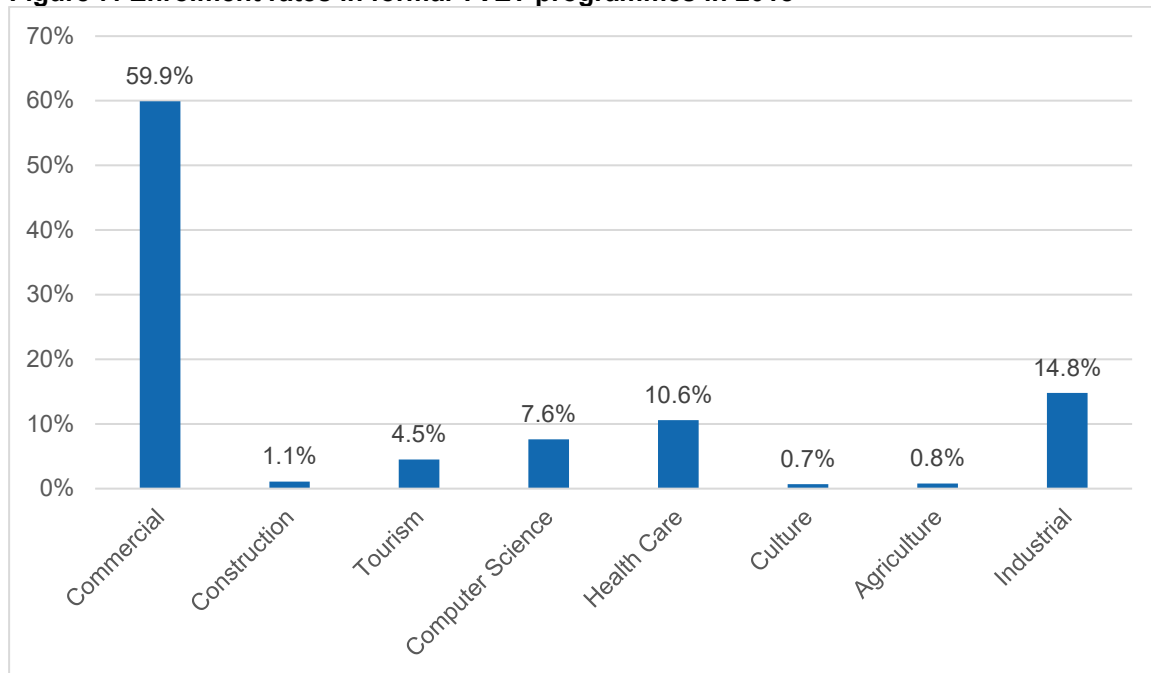
- industrial
- commercial
- construction
- culture and art
- agricultural
- computer science
- health care
- tourism

Each area offers specialisation in a specific profession. For example, students from the field of construction can choose to pursue a career in civil engineering or architecture (MINED & USAID, 2020). In 2018, 91,778 students were enrolled in formal TVET programmes. Figure 7 depicts the distribution of enrolled students with respect to the programmes offered. The figure indicates high enrolment in the commercial area, which offers the most programmes (MINED, 2018a).

The Educational Reform Plan 2005–2021 introduced the vocational training model MEGATEC (*modelo educativo gradual de aprendizaje técnico y tecnológico*) in January 2006. The model promotes the training of skilled workers in upper secondary education (*educación media*) and postsecondary education (*educación superior tecnológica*) (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023). The

model links secondary education with postsecondary and tertiary education to provide a phased technical vocational education. As a result, MEGATEC reduces overall study time without sacrificing the quality of the training by coordinating with the local private sector and the coordinative work of the educational centres (FEDISAL, FEDISAL, 2023). The programme starts with the first year of the technical baccalaureate and offers various degrees in technical and academic education (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023).

Figure 7: Enrolment rates in formal TVET programmes in 2018



Source: Own figure based on MINED (2018).

The curricula of the different formal TVET programmes at the upper-secondary level are divided into basic areas and competence-based (technical) areas. Each programme contains area-specific training which aims to develop the competences required to perform the specific profession. Industry experts and representatives of the higher education help to specify curricula in the technical area. The basic module delivers general education in the fields of science and of art and culture. For example, during their first two years in the health care or business administration and accounting TVET programme, students spend 29 hours a week on the basic module and 18 hours on the technical. The last year of their technical and vocational training focuses exclusively on the technical part of the education. Table 6 provides information about the distribution of training across the modules. The specific composition of the basic and technical module might differ for other TVET programmes (MINED, 2015).

Table 7: Distribution of training in the basic and technical area for the health care programme

| | 1 st year | 2 nd year | 3 rd year |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Basic Area | 62% | 62% | 0% |
| Technical Area | 38% | 38% | 100% |

Source: Own table based on MINED (2015).

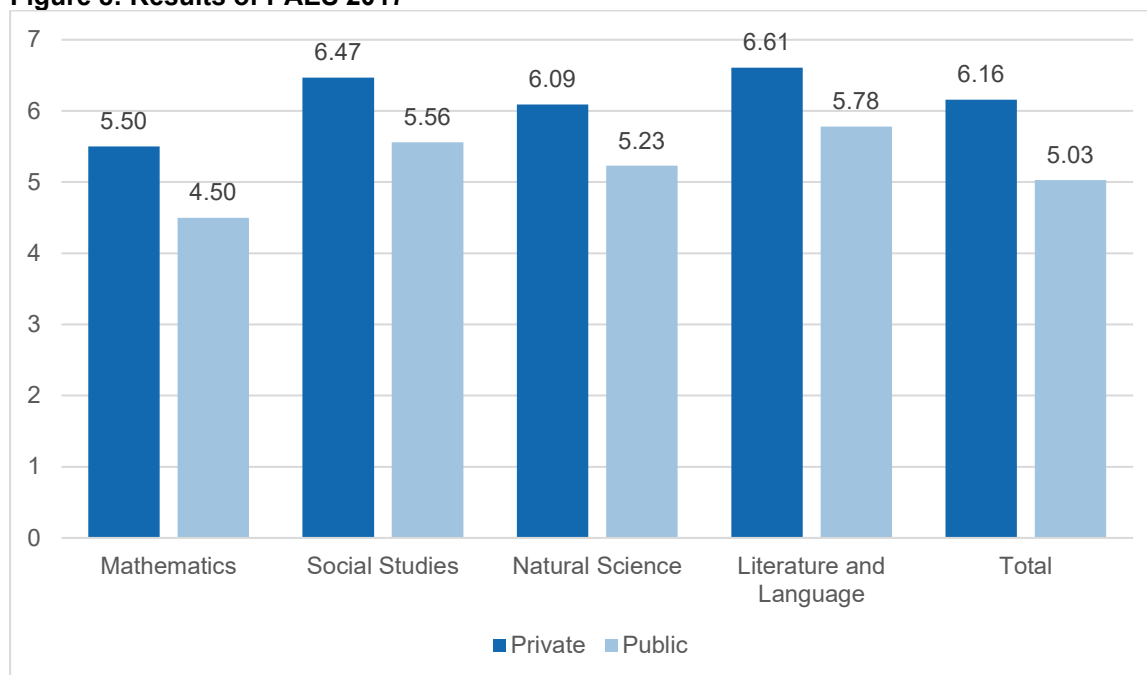
To graduate and receive the diploma, students must fulfil the following criteria:

- Students must pass the assessment of the exams in the technical and basic module.
- Students must pass the final exam (formerly *Prueba de Aprendizaje y Aptitudes para Egresados de Educación Media* [PAES], since 2021 AVEC).

In 1997 MINED implemented the *Prueba de Aprendizaje y Aptitudes para Egresados de Educación Media* (PAES) for upper secondary students. The PAES serves as a benchmark for evaluating students' knowledge and cognitive skills and aims to deliver general data on the quality of the education system. The PAES focuses on the subjects in the basic module, which include mathematics, social studies,

natural sciences, and literature and language. The test is taken in the second year of general or vocational education (MINED, 2017). The exam was revised and renamed AVANZO in 2021. The new exam includes a survey which aims to assist students by generating career suggestions based on the answers provided (MINED, 2021).

Figure 8: Results of PAES 2017



Source: Own figure based on MINED (2017).

Figure 8 illustrates the PAES performance of publicly and privately educated students in 2017. In each category, private school students appear to perform better on average than students in the public sector (MINED, 2017).

INSAFORP is the governing body of El Salvador's nonformal TVET System. According to the Law on Vocational Training (*Ley de Formación Profesional*), INSAFORP aims to train qualified workers who are necessary for El Salvador's national and social development. Moreover, INSAFORP is responsible for securing certain labour conditions for workers (Government of El Salvador, 1993a). In addition to offering dropouts and unemployed youth nonformal educational pathways, INSAFORP collaborates with MINED and offers formal dual apprenticeship programmes (INSAFORP, 2019). In 2021 295,782 Salvadorans were enrolled in INSAFORP-provided programmes. The trend is increasing, and the training offered will be further expanded (INSAFORP, 2021).

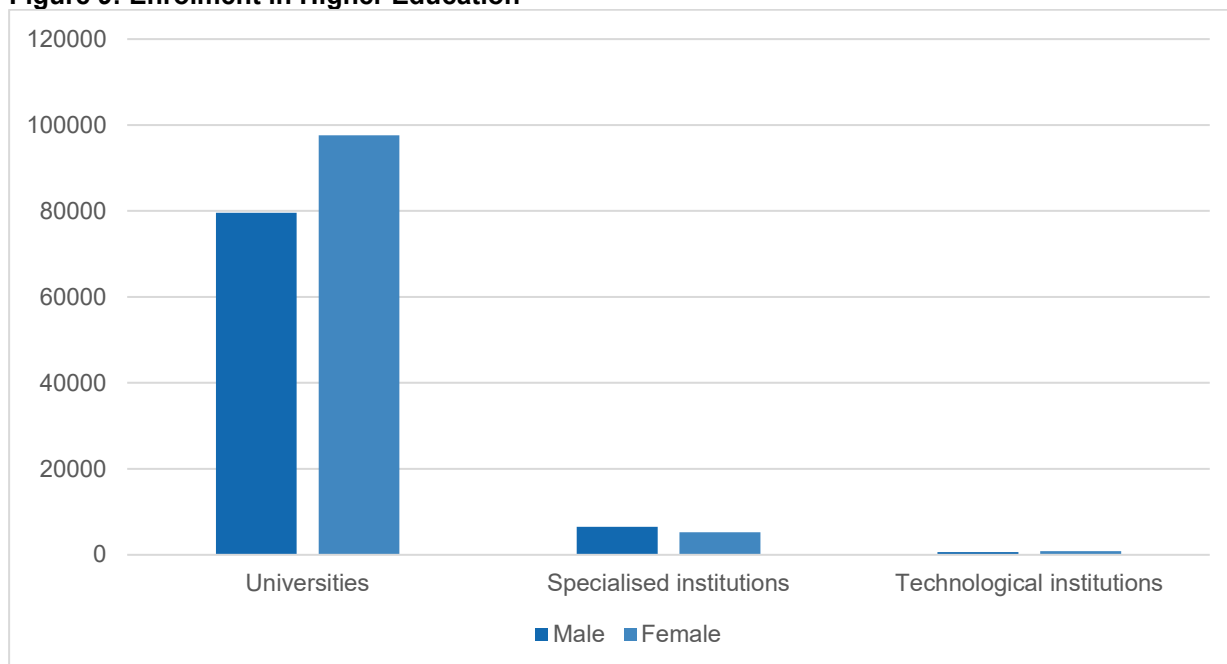
3.2 Professional Education and Training (PET; Postsecondary Level)

Postsecondary technical education is offered at technological institutes (*institutos tecnológicos*) and specialised institutions (*institutos especializados*). Technological institutes aim to train professionals and experts, focusing on the application of knowledge and skills in different scientific or humanistic fields. Technological institutes may only award the *técnico* degree, which corresponds to the European *técnico* degree. The duration of a technician's academic training is a minimum of two years (Government of El Salvador, 1993). In 2020 there were six public and six private specialised institutions, one public and 23 private universities, and two public and three private technological institutes (MINED, 2020b).

In addition to the *técnico* degree, postsecondary technical education institutes offer the *tecnólogo* and *profesorado* degree. The *técnico* degree allows specialisation in a large variety of fields, while the *tecnólogo* trains nursing professionals and the *profesorado* degree, educational professionals (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023).

In 2020 206 types of training were offered at the *técnico* degree level, 70 at the *profesorado*, and seven at the *tecnólogo*. Figure 9 depicts enrolment across genders at universities (i.e. public universities and universities of applied sciences) and technological and specialised institutes (MINED, 2020b).

Figure 9: Enrolment in Higher Education



Source: Own figure based on MINED (2020b).

Significantly, the percentage of female graduates in STEM fields is very low. Figure 9 illustrates the number of enrolled students in 2017.

Table 7: Graduates of PET degrees

| Degree | Male | Female | Total |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Tecnólogo | 48 | 160 | 208 |
| Profesorado | 191 | 411 | 602 |
| Técnico | 3,068 | 2,776 | 5,844 |

Source: Own table based on MINED (2020b).

3.3 Regulatory and Institutional Framework of the VPET System

3.3.1 Central Elements of VPET Legislation

The regulatory and institutional framework for the VPET system consists of multiple interconnected laws and regulations:

- *Ley General de Educación* – General Education Law
- *Ley de Educación Superior* – Higher Education Law
- *Ley de Carrera Docente* – Law on the Teaching Career
- *Ley de Formación General* – General Training Law

- *Ley de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico* – guidelines for the development of science and technology by defining fundamental institutional and operational instruments
- *Ley General de Juventud y Reglamento* – the legal framework for implementing public policies, programmes, strategies, and plans for youth development
- *Plan El Salvador Educado* – the CONED and MINED outline of six educational challenges for El Salvador’s education system

In January 2006, the Education Sector Plan 2005–2021 introduced the vocational training model MEG-ATEC (*Modelo Educativo Gradual de Aprendizaje Técnico y Tecnológico*). As indicated in the previous sections, the model is intended to promote the training of skilled workers at the upper secondary and postsecondary levels (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023).

The education law introduced in 1996 shortened general secondary education in El Salvador from three to two years as of the 1997/98 school year. This reduced the length of schooling in the general education path from 12 to 11 years. The duration of the vocational secondary school did not change, remaining at three years (Government of El Salvador, 1996a).

3.3.2 Key Actors

a) Vocational Education and Training

As the governing authority of the VET system in El Salvador, MINED is responsible for supervising the country’s education system and setting the system’s national education policy and quality criteria (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023).

The National Directorate of Secondary Education (lower and upper secondary education; *Dirección Nacional de Educación Media [III ciclo y media]*) manages the curricular development of El Salvador’s secondary education. This organisation is also responsible for training teaching and management personnel according to the framework given in MINED’s national plan for education. The directorate also promotes research and innovation and ensures the quality of education in the third cycle of basic education and secondary education (VET and general education) within the national education system (DNEM, 2023).

Regarding the nonformal sector, INSAFORP was established in 1993 under Decree N° 554. INSAFORP is an institution under public law with economic and administrative autonomy and is responsible for governing and coordinating vocational education and training in El Salvador. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (*Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social*) governs INSAFORP (Government of El Salvador, 1993b).

Representation and advisory bodies

The National Education Council (*Consejo Nacional de Educación*; CONED) is a national advisory body in El Salvador. CONED aims to facilitate sustainable agreements across governing bodies to ensure convergence towards a universal, comprehensible, and high-quality education system (CONED, 2018). To this end, in 2016 CONED and MINED published the *Plan El Salvador Educado*, which summarises the commitments of the country’s different sectors on educational issues. CONED also aims to establish strategic orientation for educational policies (CONED, 2016).

Education and training providers

Education is provided in either private or public institutions. Official public institutes providing secondary education (TVET and general) are called *institutos nacionales*, while private institutions are called *colegios* or *liceos* (REDEM, 2023).

3.4 Educational Finance of the VPET System

3.4.1 Educational finance of the VET system

Educational finance of the VET

Generally, the share of total public expenditure spent on education is low in El Salvador compared to other Latin American and Caribbean countries (Hanni, 2019). Between 2014 and 2019, MINED spent 9.2% of its total budget on secondary education (which includes general and TVET). To put this into perspective, MINED spent 51.9% of its budget on basic education (Candray J. C., 2018).

Despite the importance of formally training professionals for firms, little systematic information exists on how much firms invest in VET. Periodic economic censuses also provide little to no information. At the firm level, some data can be obtained from corporate social responsibility or sustainability reports, but this information is solely limited to the number of employees trained (Hanni, 2019).

INSAFORP is financed through employer contributions and supports students by covering 100% of their training costs. Hence, each employer contributes 1% of its total payroll to INSAFORP. 93% of those contributions are from employers in the private sector. Importantly, INSAFORP does not receive budgetary allocations from the national budget (INSAFORP, 2023a).

Educational finance of the PET

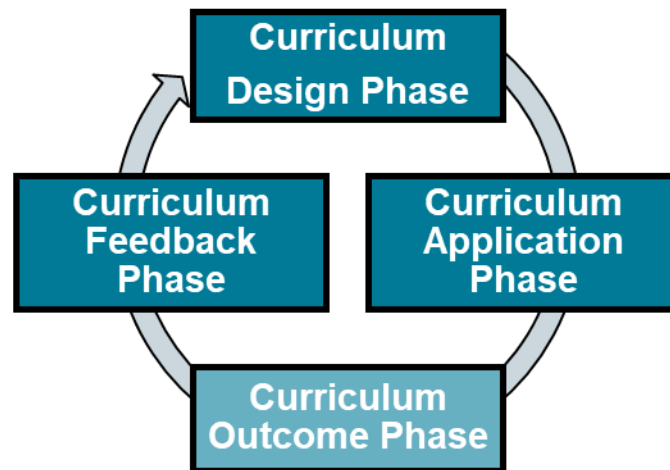
As mentioned in previous sections, professional education is offered in technological institutes or specialised institutions. Thus, PET is partly self-financed, and annual costs vary across programmes. In 2020 El Salvador's government contributed 69% of technical institutions' total financial resources. This number was 64% for specialised institutions and 85% for universities (MINED, 2020b).

3.5 Curriculum Development

The curriculum is a central element for the functioning of a VPET system because it defines the framework and the quality standards for the education system. The development of a curriculum can be segmented into a three-step process with a curriculum design, a curriculum application, and a curriculum feedback phase. This theoretical concept is called the curriculum value chain and is depicted in Figure 8 (for more details, see Renold et al. 2015; Rageth & Renold, 2019).

In the curriculum design phase, the relevant actors decide upon VET curriculum content and qualification standards. Therefore, Section 3.5.1 discusses the degree of stakeholder participation in curriculum design in El Salvador. The curriculum application phase revolves around the implementation of the curriculum. Because learning environments differ substantially across countries, especially with respect to the prevalence of workplace learning, Section 3.5.2 focuses on those learning environments. Specifically, it addresses where learning takes place and whether the curriculum dictates both school and workplace learning or only one of the two. Finally, curriculum outcomes are collected and analysed in the curriculum feedback phase. Section 3.5.3 focuses on this curriculum feedback phase. This evaluation process is important because it may render a more refined curriculum design than was previously possible.

Figure 10: Curriculum Value Chain



Source: Renold et al. (2015) and Rageth & Renold (2019).

3.5.1 Curriculum Design Phase

The design phase is crucial for the entire curriculum process. To ensure that the skills taught in VPET programmes correspond to the needs of the labour market, company experts should be involved in defining the qualification standards and learning content of the curricula.

Education is an eminent right for every Salvadoran. The government of El Salvador is responsible for providing a functioning and high-quality education system for its citizens, since education is perceived as a fundamental pillar of a society (MINED, 1997). This entails the development of curricula which correspond to the society's needs. Essentially, the curriculum design phase is threefold. First, MINED is responsible for defining the educational policy, teaching, and learning content which are specified in curricular documents. Second, the School Curriculum Project (*Proyecto Curricular de Centro* [PCC]) selects curricular components based on predefined criteria and the needs of education centres. Lastly, in the third level, the development of these curricular components is finalised, which involves teachers tailoring their lessons to the specific needs of their students (i.e. curricular adaptation). To this end, two channels are used as guidance: the collaborative decisions teachers make in the PCC and the didactic proposals of the study programmes and additional support documents (MINED, 2008).

The curriculum is oriented towards the development of the following:

- general, humanistic, and scientific knowledge of a formative and preparatory nature for continuation at the higher level;
- technical–professional knowledge that prepares students for working and taking responsibility in occupational areas and fields;
- social skills necessary to develop as a citizen who is aware of their duties and rights in a society, with the basic skills to participate in research, education, and creation of material and cultural goods.

The curriculum is developed using various actors who might contribute to its quality and persistent development. Thus, MINED includes all governing bodies of each educational level, teachers, and specialised professionals in the curriculum design phase (MINED, 1997).

3.5.2 Curriculum Application Phase

The way in which a curriculum is implemented, especially with respect to learning environments, is crucial to achieving the intended learning outcome.

In El Salvador, formal training is offered in national institutions (*institutos nacionales*). Importantly, training centres often have distinct training offers. During the first two years of their study, students generally spend a fraction of their 44 hours of training in their respective technical programmes. The remaining

hours are spent in the basic programme covering subjects such as mathematics or social studies. The last year of the TVET training focuses exclusively on the technical part (MINED & USAID, 2020).

The School Management Council (*El Consejo Directivo Escolar [CDE]*) plans, organises, manages, executes, and supervises the resources allocated to improve the services of education centres, ensuring the curriculum's application in each institution. The council includes educators, parents, and students in decision-making about the administration of educational services (MINED, 2008).

3.5.3 Curriculum Feedback Phase

The curriculum feedback phase addresses questions of whether and how educational outcomes are analysed. Based on this process, the curriculum can be reworked and improved.

The AVANZO is the final exam of upper secondary and thus also TVET. This exam evaluates students' levels of learning achievement in mathematics, social studies, language and literature, and natural sciences. The AVANZO grade is combined with the results obtained by the student throughout the school year. MINED issues the baccalaureate diploma if the student achieves a minimum grade of 6 out of 10, weighting 75% of the final school year result in each of the four subjects in which students are assessed, with 25% of the AVANZO score (DNEM, 2023).

The assessment of technical competences is of a competency-based nature, since each student's marks is compared with the specified levels of achievement needed (MINED, 2021).

The evaluation team is composed of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, and the guidance teachers representing each of the baccalaureate's years of study (MINED, 2008).

3.6 Supplying Personnel for the VPET System (Teacher Education)

The current Salvadoran teacher training system stems from the 1995 education reform introduced in Subsection 3.3.1. This educational reform included a change in the university teacher training system, which had been responsible for training teachers since the closure of the Alberto Masferrer Teacher Training College in 1980. The government worked for more than 10 years on reforming teacher training in El Salvador (Candray J. C., 2019).

The reform allocated the responsibility of teacher education to MINED, which embodied the development of the curricula and requirements for the degree. MINED also monitors the universities that offer the courses and establishes criteria for the admission, continuation, and graduation of students aspiring to a teaching career and permission to teach in the education system. The regulations are supported by the *Ley de Carrera Docente* and the *Ley General de Educación*, which were established in 1996 (Candray J. C., 2019).

MINED introduced an education plan for El Salvador, which highlighted the poor quality of teaching. The report indicates the need to develop a strategy to overcome the poor quality of education. To this end, MINED proposed the establishment of the National Teacher Training Institute (INFOD) as a suborganisation of MINED. This specialised body is responsible for boosting and ensuring the quality of teacher training. Consequently, the then president of El Salvador announced the creation of INFOD (MINED, 2023b).

According to the law that established the National Training Teacher Institute (*Ley de Creación del Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente*), the purpose of INFOD is to ensure the initial and continuing education of teachers in different fields. Thus, the institute also has the responsibility of supplying teachers for the VPET system. Moreover, INFOD must ensure the quality of the teachers supplied. INFOD's approach must be compliant with MINED's policies. INFOD is composed of MINED members and higher education representatives, some of whom are authorised to train teachers (MINED, 2023b).

To be eligible to teach in secondary education, teachers must complete a *profesorado* degree. The degree has a minimum duration of three years (Government of El Salvador, 2014).

4. Major Reforms in the Past and Challenges for the Future

4.1 Major Reforms

El Salvador's education system underwent major structural reform in the past years. As indicated in Chapter 3, the legal framework of the education system was remodelled and further developed in the 1990s. The General Education Law served as the legal foundation of El Salvador's education system. This law determines the responsibilities of governmental entities and describes the education system in general. The law shortened the duration of general secondary education from three to two years (Government of El Salvador, 1996a).

The Law on Teacher Career (*Ley de Carrera Docente*) regulates the training of teachers. The subsequently introduced Law on Higher Education (*Ley de Educación Superior*) aims to regulate higher education as well as the public and private institutions that offer higher education. The latter law simultaneously introduced the Directorate for Higher Education (*Dirección de Educación Superior*) and classified higher education schools (universities, technical institutes and specialised institutes) (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023).

Moreover, the Vocational Training Act of 1993 (*Ley de Formación Profesional*) suggested the creation of the Salvadoran Institute for Vocational Training (INSAFORP). INSAFORP has been thoroughly introduced in the previous chapters. INSAFORP remains a crucial component of El Salvador's TVET system. INSAFORP governs the rules and provisions regarding the implementation of public and private vocational training programmes, delivers support for providers of vocational training services, and conducts research on overall training demand (Government of El Salvador, 1993a).

In 1995 the government established the *Plan Decenal de Educación*. This plan attempted to develop strategies to improve the quality of education across all levels, enhance the effectiveness of the education system, expand educational services, and create new forms of educational services. However, the main objective of the educational reform plan was to ensure quality. Thus far, the 1990s reforms have primarily focused on the reconstruction of schools. The educational plan of 1995 proposed curricular changes, comprehensive care programmes and teacher education and training (MINED, 2017).

The subsequent *Plan Nacional de Educación 2021*, introduced in 2005, had four main objectives, one of which was to strengthen the professional education in El Salvador. Consequently, specialised professional training should begin after the ninth grade of basic education and no later. Training should be based upon young people's interests and the requirements of El Salvador's economic development. Professional training is predicted to contribute to household income, technological adaptation, and innovation and to ensure the international competitiveness of El Salvador's economy (Government of El Salvador, 2005). To this end, MINED implemented the gradual educational model of technical and technological learning (*el modelo educativo gradual de aprendizaje técnico y tecnológico* [MEGATEC]) programme. MEGATEC is a series of curricular reforms aimed at technical and technological education at the secondary and postsecondary level. The reform is oriented towards quality education and curricular flexibility, which is needed to adapt to the demands of the private sector and the economic and social development of the country. The five MEGATEC centres offer PET programmes and are distributed across the country. The centres' locations enable the creation of networks with secondary technical education providers. MINED also introduced curricular revisions to ensure compatibility between secondary and postsecondary education (ITCA, 2023).

The *Plan El Salvador Educado*, which was published in 2016 by CONED and MINED, focuses on improving learning quality across levels by ensuring a certain quality of teaching across schools. The plan describes teachers as the backbone of the education system and catalysts for learning. Additionally, the plan aims to ensure access to education for every Salvadoran. The plan also aims to improve PET in El Salvador by linking it to labour market demand (CONED, 2016).

4.2 Major Challenges

The current education system does not provide technical and vocational guidance to El Salvador's youth. Moreover, the skills demanded in the labour market do not align with the skills provided by the education system. These deficiencies translate to devaluation of the educational certification (CONED, 2016). Thus, the government of El Salvador must connect the education system to labour markets demands. This action might increase the demand for higher and technical education and enable its graduates more social mobility (MINED, 2020a).

Furthermore, the quality of El Salvador's school infrastructure is questionable. The immediate renovation of school infrastructure and the construction of quality educational environments, especially in schools that have been neglected for many years, is one of the government's main priorities. Additionally, approximately 2,000 schools were built without the Ministry of Education's approval (MINED, 2020a).

Moreover, teaching quality has deteriorated over the past years, which has been addressed in the previous two education sector plans published by El Salvador's government and MINED. The poor quality is reflected in low PAES scores. The government of El Salvador is taking measures to counteract the trend (MINED, 2017).

Violence, migration, and natural disasters cause families to move, which is the main reason for students dropping out of school. Educating families is essential to guaranteeing a cultural transformation which ensures a nonviolent future for the education system and El Salvador in general (CONED, 2016). Currently, the government of El Salvador is aggressively combatting gangs in El Salvador and has arrested thousands of gang members in a short period of time (MINED, 2020a).

Additionally, most Salvadoran students are not well equipped for the future of teaching. El Salvador is keen to further digitalise education; however, according to a recent survey conducted by MINED, most students do not have the necessary technological resources. For example, 95.9% of the surveyed rural households do not have access to internet. Furthermore, some schools lack an internet connection. More specifically, only 43% of schools have some form of internet connection. Thus, the government of El Salvador needs to further invest in its infrastructure (MINED, 2020a).

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Publisher: Chair of Education Systems CES
Layout: ETH Zürich
Photos: Photo by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash

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