



Campaign: My right to education travels with me

Ensuring access to education for forcibly displaced children

El Salvador has made substantial advances in providing access to basic education – coverage now reaches 95.6 percent of the target population¹. However these advances are being undermined by two key challenges confronting the education system and the country: poor learning outcomes and rising social violence in rural and urban communities, which has earned El Salvador the title of most dangerous place in the world to be a child².

El Salvador is regarded as the most dangerous place in the world to be a child. Despite growing access to basic education, children lag behind due to poor learning outcomes and rising social violence in both rural and urban communities.

Violence is mainly related to gangs and territorial control and usually they establish limitations to transit around their territory, making it difficult for people, especially adolescents to transit from one sector of the community to another for fear they might be killed. At times, the situation becomes even worse when some families or entire communities are threatened by the gangs to leave their community, resulting in a growing phenomenon of displaced families. Violence – either because it places children, at risk when transiting from their home to school or because they are forced to leave their communities is an important factor impacting attendance, dropout and access to education.

In fact, statistics from MoED show that every day 210 children dropped out of school in 2015³; this is more than double the number of children who dropped out in 2014. In addition, these numbers do not reflect the declining enrollment recorded in the system over the past three years; hence, the number of children who are not accessing the school system may be much higher either because they drop out or they never entered the education system.

¹ All data in this section are based on the information provided by DIGESTYC, 2014 and coincide with reports from different departments of the Ministry of Education.

² The highest rate of child and adolescent homicide victims at 27 per 100,000; a rate nearly 7 times greater than Iraq.

³ Calculated using the official report from the Ministry of Education on registration and dropout data for 2015.

Forced internal migration and displacement is increasing in El Salvador. According to a May 2015 Norwegian Refugee Council report, around 289,000 people have been displaced by the violence of criminal gangs and drug cartels in El Salvador, causing families and sometimes entire communities to relocate and schools to close.

While research and data directly linking violence and lack of education is scarce, it is widely believed that violence is directly impacting education, increasing school-based violence and leading to a surge in school desertion rates. Between 2009 and 2014, the school desertion rate increased by 120 percent⁴ and various media reports⁵ credit this phenomenon to violence inside and outside schools, especially but not limited to the violence from gangs. Basic and secondary education is reportedly affected the worst, which according to teachers is due to the greater impact gang activity has on students of this age.

Many factors prevent displaced children from accessing school in their destination communities, one of them is the lack of a transition strategy that officially transfers students from one school to another and provides them with educational as well as emotional support for proper integration. Another factor is that in many cases the schools at the destination communities are already functioning at top capacity in terms of the number of children they can accommodate. Finally, there is a key structural problem – there is a lack of regulations that explicitly address the educational needs of displaced children.

In sum, although the number of displaced children is growing, they are not being recognized as a population with specific needs. As a result, their right to education and to learn is being violated.

Save the Children proposal

We propose to work on three main factors preventing displaced children to access to education:

- Support the recognition and an informed discussion of this issue by decision-makers at the Ministry of Education as well as the media and general public by generating evidence.
- Ensure the regulatory system at the Ministry of Education recognizes displaced students as a specific population that needs support; and
- Support the development of appropriate education alternatives for displaced children.

Each factor will be addressed through specific objectives, which would require to conduct studies, lead social mobilization activities and provide technical and financial support to specific units of the MoEd to ensure all children and particularly displaced children have access to education. The three main objectives are:

Objective 1: Increase visibility of the educational situation of displaced children and adolescents

Performance Indicators

- Ministry of Education commits to systematically monitoring and reporting on access to education among displaced children and adolescents
- Research agenda for the three-year campaign is developed
- Research program for Year 1 is completed using participatory methodology to engage and empower affected communities and children

Objective 2: Update and align the policy, regulatory, monitoring and accountability frameworks so displaced children and adolescents are legally recognized as a group with distinct education needs

Performance Indicators

⁴ Calculation based on the registration and dropout statistics from the Ministry of Education

⁵: <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2015/08/26/mined-confirma-desercion-escolar-en-ahuachapan#sthash.s2cPHY1C.dpuf>

- The regulatory system is updated to recognize and make visible displaced children (pending the results of policy analysis to specify how many and which protocols will need to be updated)
- Monitoring system is in place to track the status of all children registered at the school system
- At least one main social mobilization activity is conducted at the national level, especially involving children

Objective 3: Develop a schema of sustainable, demand-led and child-centered alternative education services for displaced children and adolescents in collaboration with affected children, their families, and key institutional stakeholders

Performance Indicators

- Production of the schema of sustainable, demand-led and child-centered alternative education services for displaced children and adolescents is completed
- Methodology mechanism to promote child participation in the consultation process and development and validation of the schema of education services for displaced children is in place
- Social mobilization and communication activities at key moments to apply pressure are conducted

Advances so far...

Our campaign has made substantial advances especially on the recognition of the problem. Meetings and other lobbying activities were conducted with Directors at key departments within the Ministry of Education to finally get the Minister of Education on board. School dropout especially linked to violence has political connotations in the country and the Minister had been publicly and systematically denying the link between the two phenomenon and the increase in the dropout rate at the MoEd, but after a technical meeting the committee from Save the Children had with the Minister, he agreed not only to work on three areas proposed to ensure access to education for all displaced children, but also adopted the campaign so the it would be presented as an institutional effort from the Ministry of Education. Besides the Ministry of Education, the directors of the two other institutions targeted for this campaign (National Institute for Children and Adolescents and the National Council for Children and Adolescents) agreed to champion the campaign as they are also responsible to monitor and work for the rights of the children in El Salvador.

Important advances have been achieved in the generation of evidence around this problem, so far three small studies have been completed⁶ and one national study is being conducted. The findings were used in the advocacy with the key players and will be used to place the problem on the public agenda for both other decision makers but also the public and will be also presented in the official launch of the campaign lead by the Ministry of Education at the end of January 2017 when the school year is starting. Last but not least, a revision of the monitoring mechanism of the enrolled children in the school system has started.

For 2017, our main activities would be the modification of the legal framework so the displaced population is officially recognized especially in the legal framework of the MoEd, the revision and improvement of the monitoring system of students at the Statistic and Evaluation Department of the MoEd so they can provide reliable and timely information of the status of student enrolled in the system and the Information Education and Communication campaign to educate the public including children and affected families for the forcibly displacement phenomenon on the importance to ensure the access to education for all children.

Your strategic and generous support for 30,000USD would ensure we reach the results planned for 2017. Please see Annex 1 for more detailed areas of investment.

⁶ Enrollment and Dropout Statistic Analysis 2013 -2015, “Legal framework analysis on education and displacement populations” and “Rapid Assessment on displacement and access to education in rural communities”