

Costa Rica

Ensuring equal opportunities for students across socio-economic backgrounds

- Across most OECD countries, socio-economic status influences learning outcomes more than gender and immigrant status. In Costa Rica, the proportion of children from the bottom quartile of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) achieving at least PISA level 2 in reading in 2018 was 50% lower than that of children from the top ESCS quartile, a larger share than the OECD average of 29%.
- Large differences in educational attainment may lead to starker earnings inequality in many countries. In Costa Rica, 22% of 25-64 year-old adults with below upper secondary attainment earned at or below half the median earnings in 2019, below the OECD average of 27%.

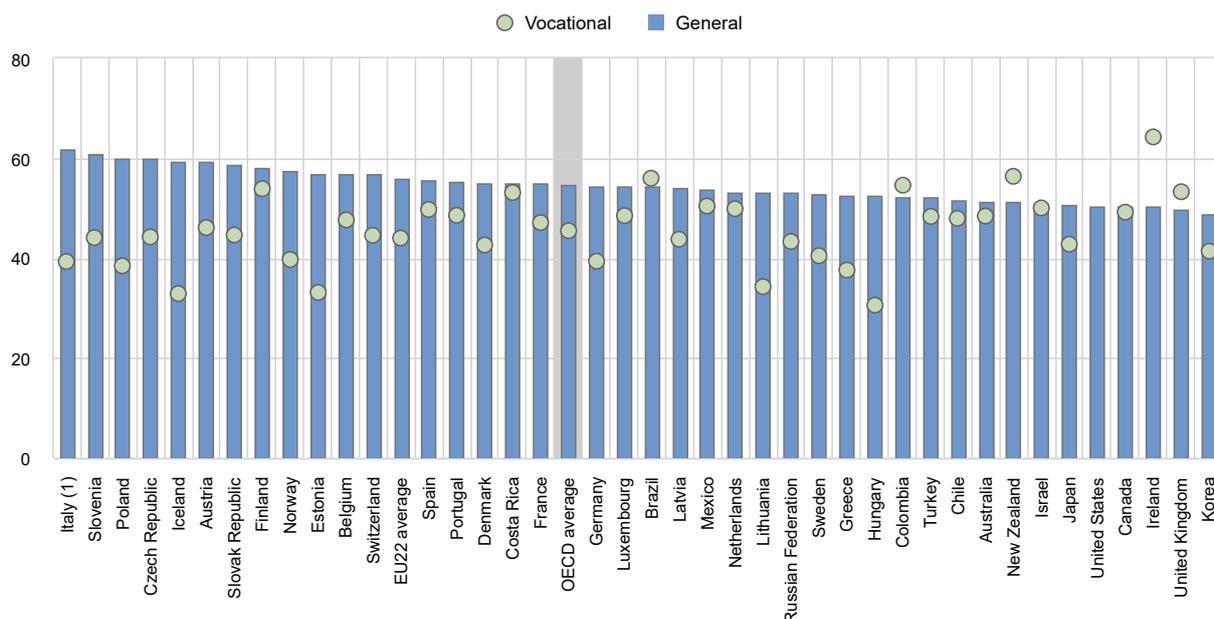
Gender inequalities in education and outcomes

- In Costa Rica, 2% of students in lower secondary and 1% in upper secondary initial education repeated a grade in 2019, compared to 1.9% and 3% respectively on average across OECD countries. Boys are more likely to repeat a grade at lower secondary initial education than girls. In Costa Rica, 61% of repeaters at lower secondary level were boys, the same as the OECD average. At upper secondary level, the share of boys repeating a grade in Costa Rica increases to 64%, compared to 57% on average across OECD countries.
- Men are more likely than women to pursue a vocational track at upper secondary level in most OECD countries. This is not the case in Costa Rica, where 47% of upper secondary vocational graduates in 2019 were men (compared to the OECD average of 55%). Women are generally more likely to graduate from upper secondary general programmes. This is also the case in Costa Rica, where women represent 55% of graduates from upper secondary general programmes, the same value as on average across OECD countries (Figure 1).
- Tertiary education has been expanding in the last decades, and, in 2020, 25-34 year-old women were more likely than men to achieve tertiary education in all OECD countries. In Costa Rica, 35% of 25-34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification in 2020 compared to 31% of their male peers, while on average across OECD countries the shares were 52% among young women and 39% among young men.
- Young women are less likely to be employed than young men, particularly those with lower levels of education. Only 36% of 25-34 year-old women with below upper secondary attainment were employed in 2020 compared to 76% of men in Costa Rica. This gender difference is larger than the average across OECD countries, where 43% of women and 69% of men with below upper secondary attainment are employed.
- In nearly all OECD countries and at all levels of educational attainment, 25-64 year-old women earn less than their male peers: their earnings correspond to 76%-78% of men's earnings on average across OECD countries. This proportion varies more across educational attainment levels

within countries than on average across OECD countries. Compared to other education levels, women with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education in Costa Rica have the lowest earnings relative to men with a similar education level, earning 83% as much, while those with tertiary education earn 95% as much.

Figure 1. Share of women among upper secondary graduates, by programme orientation (2019)

In per cent



1. Includes post-secondary non-tertiary level.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of women in general programmes.

Source: OECD (2021). Table B3.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterB.pdf).

Education and migration background

- On average across the OECD, foreign-born adults (25-64 year-olds) account for 22% of all adults with below upper secondary attainment, 14% of those attaining upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, and 18% of tertiary-educated adults. In Costa Rica as in most OECD countries, the share of foreign-born adults among all adults with a given level of educational attainment is the highest among adults with below upper secondary attainment (14%) in 2020.
- Foreign-born adults have more difficulty finding a job than their native-born peers as they face various challenges, such as discrepancies in credential recognition, skills, and language. Thus, foreign-born workers are likely to have a lower reservation wage (the lowest wage rate at which a worker would be willing to accept a particular type of job). As a result, the employment rate for foreign-born adults with low educational attainment is higher than the rate for their native-born peers in many countries. On average across OECD countries, among adults without upper secondary attainment, 57% of native-born adults are employed compared to 61% of foreign-born adults. In Costa Rica, the employment rate of foreign-born adults without upper secondary attainment was 63% in 2020, higher than that of their native-born peers (56%).

- The likelihood of being employed increases with the level of educational attainment, but foreign-born adults with tertiary attainment generally have lower employment prospects than their native-born peers. On average across OECD countries, 86% of native-born tertiary-educated adults are employed compared to 79% for foreign-born tertiary-educated adults. In Costa Rica, among tertiary-educated adults, 77% of native-born adults and 73% of foreign-born adults are employed.
- Foreign-born young adults (15-29 year-olds) are also more likely to be neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) than native-born young adults. On average across OECD countries, 18.8% of foreign-born and 13.7% of native-born adults are NEET. In Costa Rica, the difference is 11 percentage points (32.7% compared to 21.4%).
- In many OECD countries, foreign-born adults earn less than native-born adults. This pay gap may narrow with higher levels of educational attainment. On average across OECD countries, foreign-born adults with below secondary attainment working full-time earn 89% as much as their native-born peers, while this gap disappears among tertiary-educated adults. In Costa Rica, in 2019, among adults with below upper secondary attainment, the earnings of foreign-born full-time workers represented 92% that of their native-born peers, 82% among adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment, and 87% among those with a tertiary-education.

Cross-regional disparities in education

- Tertiary attainment may vary significantly within a country. In Costa Rica, the share of 25-64 year-old adults with tertiary education varies from 9% in the region of North Huetar to 27% in the region of Central, one of the lowest regional variations across OECD countries with available data.
- On average across OECD and partner countries with subnational data on labour-force status, there is more regional variation in employment rates among those with below upper secondary education (17 percentage points) than for those with tertiary education (8 percentage points). In Costa Rica, there is a difference of 11 percentage points in the employment rate of adults with below upper secondary education between different regions of the country compared to 15 percentage points for tertiary-educated adults.
- The proportion of young people who are NEET shows significant subnational as well as national variation across OECD and partner countries. In Costa Rica, the difference in the share of 18-24 year-old NEETs between regions with the highest and lowest value is 14 percentage points, compared to 11 percentage points on average across OECD countries.

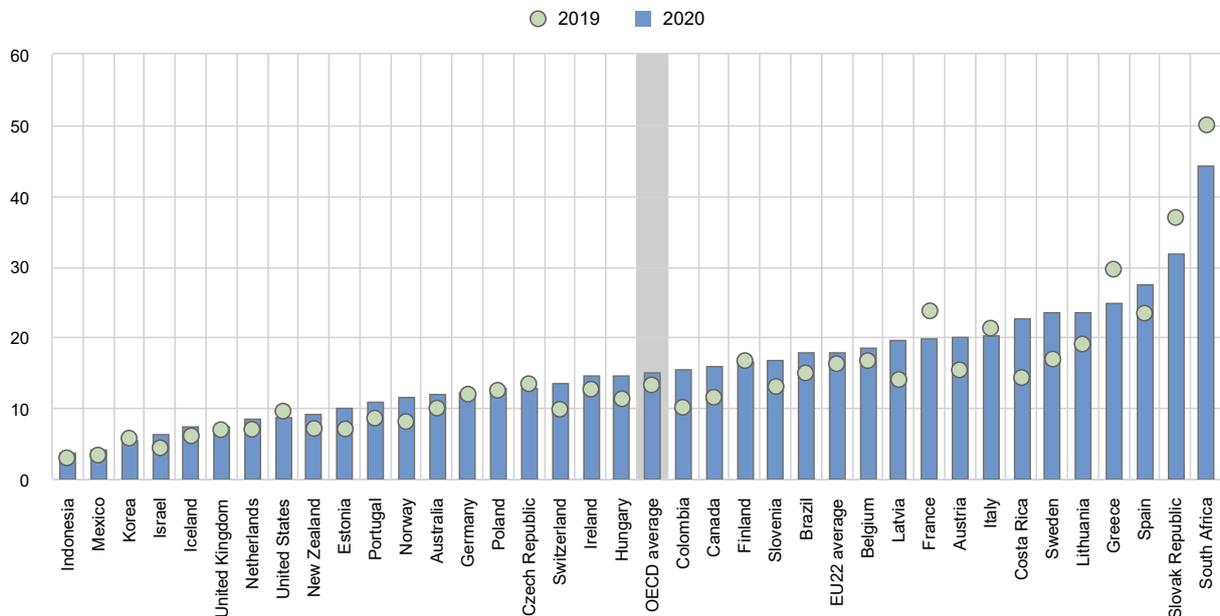
COVID-19: 18 months into the pandemic

- The spread of COVID-19 has continued to impede access to in-person education in many countries around the world in 2021. By mid-May 2021, 37 OECD and partner countries had experienced periods of full school closure since the start of 2020.
- The number of instructional days when schools were fully closed since the start of 2020 due to the pandemic (excluding school holidays, public holidays and weekends) varies significantly between countries and increases with the level of education. Costa Rica is an exception. In Costa Rica, pre-primary schools were fully closed for an average of 175 days between 1 January 2020 and 20 May 2021. Meanwhile primary schools closed for 175 days, lower secondary for 175 days and upper secondary general schools for 175 days. In comparison, respective closures were 55, 78, 92 and 101 days on average across the OECD.

- In many countries, schools did not fully close but remained open with reduced capacity. Schools at upper secondary (general) level in Costa Rica, for instance, experienced 67 days of partial opening between January 2020 and May 2021, all of which took place in 2021. This was higher than the total number of days of partial opening in the OECD on average (57 days), where there were 27 days of partially open instruction in 2020, and 30 days in 2021. When adding both the number of days where schools were fully and partially closed, learning in upper secondary general education was disrupted by 242 days in Costa Rica between January 2020 and May 2021.
- During periods of full school closure in 2020, 21 OECD and partner countries have opted to keep upper secondary general schools virtually open as a national level strategy. However, in 4 countries, including Costa Rica, each day of remote learning was not considered equivalent to a full day of in-person instruction. The way that online platforms have operated during school closures has varied between countries. In Costa Rica, a hybrid approach was adopted for all educational levels from pre-primary to tertiary, including a blend of both asynchronous and synchronous online learning.
- The impact of COVID-19 and school closures on educational equity has been a concern for many countries. 30 out of the 36 OECD and partner countries surveyed, including Costa Rica, declared that additional measures were taken to support the education of children who might face additional barriers to learning during the pandemic. 22 of these countries, including Costa Rica, stated that they had subsidised devices for students to help them access education. Measures to encourage disadvantaged or vulnerable students to return to school after closures were also implemented in 29 OECD and partner countries, including in Costa Rica.
- Countries have faced difficult decisions on how to best manage their resources to ensure that students can continue to access quality education in the safest possible conditions and to minimise disruption to learning. Before the pandemic, total public expenditure on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education in Costa Rica reached 4.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019, which was higher than the OECD average of 3.2%. About two-thirds of OECD and partner countries reported increases in the funding allocated to primary and secondary schools to help them cope with the crisis in 2020. Compared to the previous year, Costa Rica reported no change in the fiscal year education budget for primary and lower secondary general education in both 2020 and 2021.
- Countries' approach to prioritise teachers in vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 has varied. In total, 19 OECD and partner countries, excluding Costa Rica, have prioritised at least some teachers as part of the government's plans to vaccinate the population on a national level (as of 20 May 2021).
- The impact of the pandemic on the economy has raised concerns about the prospects of young adults, especially those leaving education earlier than others. In Costa Rica, the unemployment rate among 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary attainment was 22.7% in 2020, an increase of 8 percentage points from the previous year. In comparison, the average youth unemployment rate of 15.1% in 2020 across OECD countries represented an increase of 2 percentage points from 2019 (Figure 2).
- Despite the impact of the crisis on employment, the share of NEETs among 18-24 year-olds did not greatly increase in most OECD and partner countries during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, the share of 18-24 year-old NEETs in OECD countries rose from 14.4% in 2019 to 16.1% in 2020. In Costa Rica, the share of 18-24 year-old NEETs was 22.8% in 2019, which decreased to 20.7% in 2020.

Figure 2. Trends in unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary attainment (2019 and 2020)

In per cent



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Countries are ranked in ascending order of the unemployment rate of 25-34 year-olds with below upper secondary attainment in 2020.

Source: OECD (2021), Table A3.3. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterA.pdf).

Investing in education

- The provision of education influences the allocation of public resources to public educational institutions between levels of education. In 2019, Costa Rica spent USD 5 640 public funds per student at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, USD 4 461 lower than the OECD average of USD 10 101. At tertiary level Costa Rica invested USD 14 677 per student, slightly above the OECD average (USD 13 855).
- The share of public expenditure devoted to educational institutions over the national wealth is higher in Costa Rica than on average among OECD countries. In 2019, public expenditure in Costa Rica reached 6.2% of its GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 2.2 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Across levels of education, Costa Rica devoted a higher share of GDP than the OECD average at non-tertiary levels and a higher share at the tertiary level.

Working conditions of school teachers

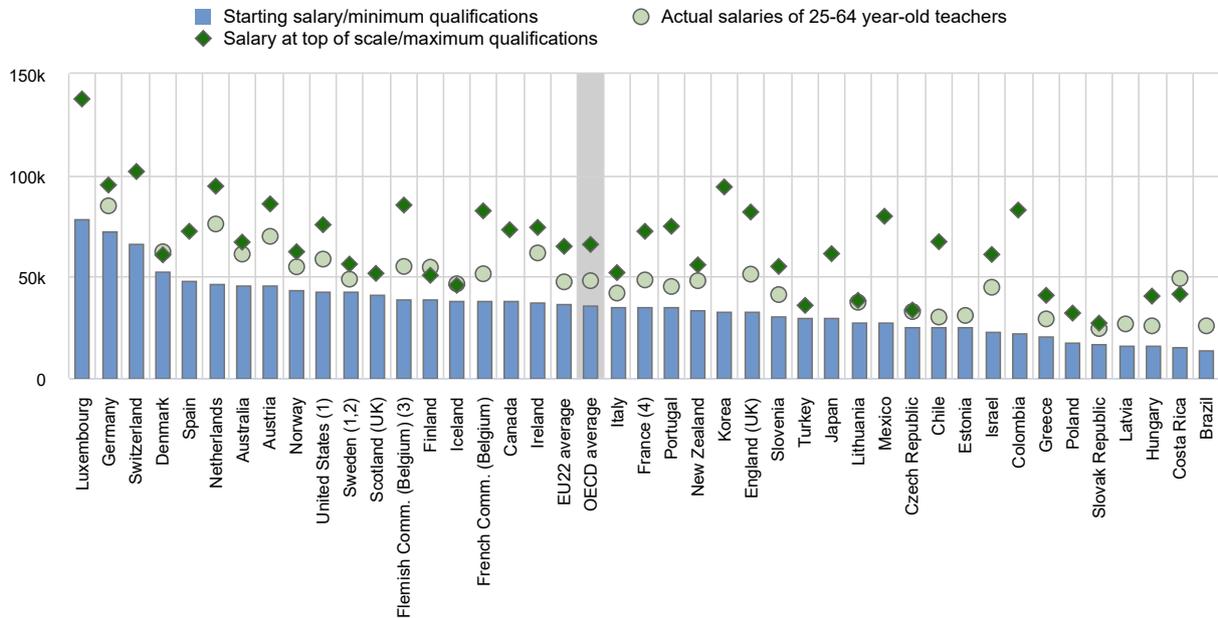
- The salaries of school staff, and in particular teachers and school heads, represent the largest single expenditure in formal education. Their salary levels also have an impact on the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In most OECD countries and economies, statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of

education they teach, and also with experience. On average, statutory salaries of teachers with maximum qualifications at the top of their salary scales (maximum salaries) were between 86% and 91% higher than those of teachers with the minimum qualifications at the start of their career (minimum salaries) at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general lower and upper secondary levels in 2020. In Costa Rica, maximum salaries were 168% to 171% higher than minimum salaries at each level of education (Figure 3). However, most teachers were paid between these minimum and maximum salaries.

- Teachers' actual salaries reflect their statutory salaries and additional work-related payments. Average actual salaries also depend on the characteristics of the teaching population such as their age, level of experience and qualification level. In Costa Rica, teachers' average actual salaries (after conversion to USD using PPPs for private consumption) amount to USD 39 003 at the pre-primary level (ISCED 02), USD 40 892 at the primary level, USD 49 182 at the general lower secondary level and USD 49 182 at the general upper secondary level. On average across OECD countries, teachers' average actual salaries were USD 40 707, USD 45 687, USD 47 988 and USD 51 749 at the pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level respectively (Figure 3).
- Teachers' average actual salaries remained lower than those of tertiary-educated workers in almost all countries, and at almost all levels of education. Teachers' average actual salaries at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general secondary levels of education were between 81% and 96% of the earnings of tertiary-educated workers on average across OECD countries and economies. In Costa Rica, the proportion ranged from 116% to 146% at pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels of education.
- However, there are significant differences between men and women in relative salaries of teachers due to the gender gap in earnings across the labour market (statutory salaries are equal for male and female teachers in public educational institutions). When average actual salaries of teachers are compared to salaries of tertiary educated workers, these relative salaries are usually higher for women, and lower for men. In Costa Rica, the proportion ranges from 124% to 148% for women (98% to 110% on average across OECD countries and economies), and from 124% to 145% for men (76% to 85% on average across OECD countries and economies) in primary and general secondary education.
- The average number of teaching hours per year required of a typical teacher in public educational institutions in OECD countries tends to decrease as the level of education increases: it ranged from 989 hours at pre-primary level (ISCED 02), to 791 hours at primary level, 723 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 685 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes) in 2020. In Costa Rica, teachers teach 800 hours per year at pre-primary level, 1 170 hours per year at primary level, 1 248 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 1 248 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes).
- In primary and secondary education, about 35% of teachers are at least 50 years old on average across OECD countries and may reach retirement age in the next decade, while the size of the school-age population is projected to increase in some countries, putting many governments under pressure to recruit and train new teachers. In 2019, 27% of primary teachers in Costa Rica were at least 50 years old, which was lower than the OECD average of 33%. On average across OECD countries, the proportion of teachers aged at least 50 years old increases with higher levels of education taught, to 36% in lower secondary education and 40% in upper secondary education. In Costa Rica, this proportion reaches 19% at both lower and upper secondary levels.

Figure 3. Lower secondary teachers' average actual salaries compared to the statutory starting and top of the scale salaries (2020)

Annual statutory salaries of teachers in public institutions, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs



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Note: Actual salaries include bonuses and allowances.

1. Actual base salaries.
2. Salaries at the top of the scale and the minimum qualifications, instead of the maximum qualifications.
3. Salaries at the top of the scale and the most prevalent qualifications, instead of the maximum qualifications.
4. Includes the average of fixed bonuses for overtime hours.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of starting salaries for lower secondary teachers with the minimum qualifications.

Source: OECD (2021), Table D3.3 and Education at a Glance Database, <http://stats.oecd.org>. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterD.pdf).

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More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2021 and to access the full set of Indicators, see:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, see Annex 3 (https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3.pdf).

For general information on the methodology, please refer to the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en>).

Updated data can be found on line at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the *StatLinks*  under the tables and charts in the publication.

Data on subnational regions for selected indicators are available in the *OECD Regional Statistics* (database) (OECD, 2021). When interpreting the results on subnational entities, readers should take into account that the population size of subnational entities can vary widely within countries. For example, regional variation in enrolment may be influenced by students attending school in a different region from their area of residence, particularly at higher levels of education. Also, regional disparities tend to be higher when more subnational entities are used in the analysis.

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The data on educational responses during COVID-19 were collected and processed by the OECD based on the Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, a collaborative effort conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the World Bank; and the OECD.

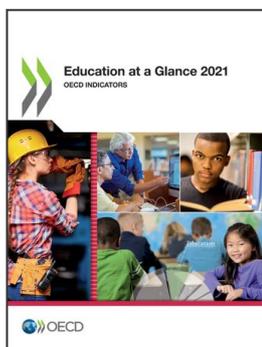
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