

# Costa Rica

## The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

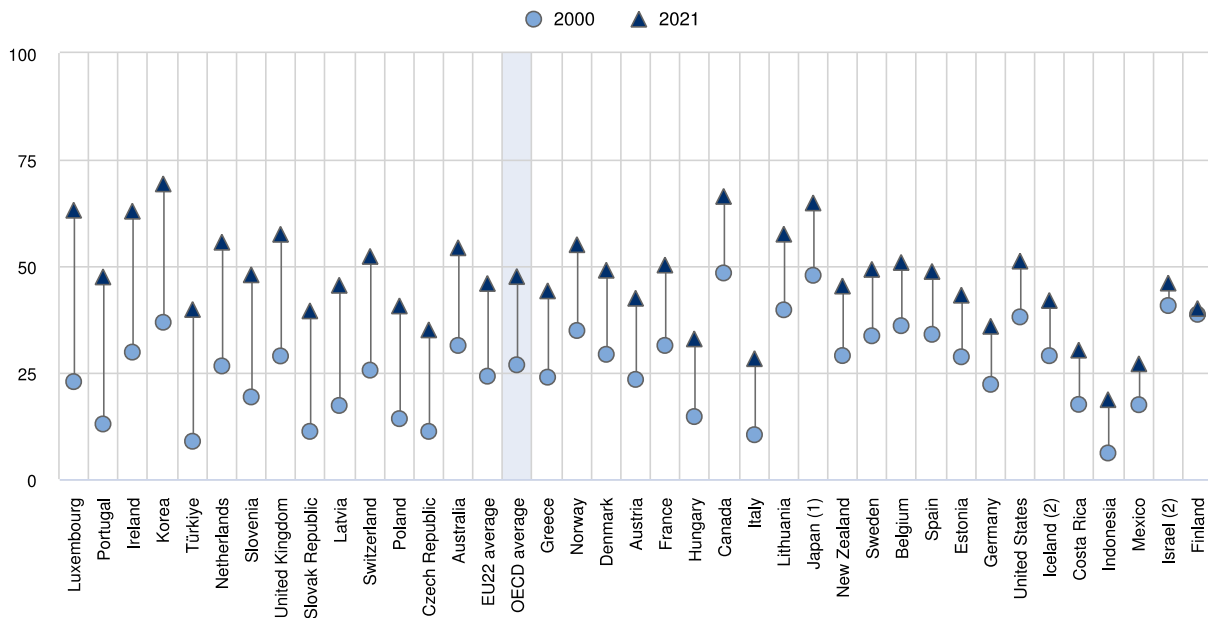
- Educational attainment has been increasing throughout the OECD, in particular at tertiary level. Between 2000 and 2021, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment increased on average by 21 percentage points. In Costa Rica, the share also increased albeit at a slower pace, by 13 percentage points (from 18% in 2000 to 30% in 2021) (Figure 1). Costa Rica is one of the 24 OECD countries where tertiary education is the most common highest level of attainment among 25-34 year-olds. Costa Rica remains one of the two OECD countries, where below upper secondary education is still more common than upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary or education as the highest level of attainment among 25-34 year-olds.
- Upper secondary attainment is often seen as a minimum qualification for successful labour market participation. Although the general increase in educational attainment has seen a parallel decline in the share of 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary attainment, 14% of young adults across the OECD still left school without an upper secondary qualification. In Costa Rica, the share is 45%, which is higher than the OECD average.
- Higher educational attainment is often associated with better employment prospects and Costa Rica is no exception. In 2021 the employment rate among 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education in Costa Rica was 18 percentage points higher than among those with below upper secondary attainment and 14 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. On average across OECD countries, the employment rate among 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary qualification was 26 percentage points higher than among those with below upper secondary attainment and 8 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. While the positive link between educational attainment and employment rates holds for both men and for women across the OECD, it is particularly strong for women. In Costa Rica, 39% of women with below upper secondary attainment were employed in 2021, compared to 74% of those with tertiary attainment. In contrast, the figures were 81% and 85% for men.
- Across the OECD, the labour market benefits of tertiary attainment have proved especially strong during economic crises. This was also the case during the COVID-19 pandemic in Costa Rica. Between 2019 and 2020, unemployment for 25-34 year-old workers with below upper secondary attainment increased by 8.4 percentage points, by 10.8 percentage points for workers with upper secondary attainment and by 8 percentage points for workers with tertiary attainment. In 2021, unemployment for workers with below upper secondary attainment fell by 2.5 percentage points, compared to 2020, by 4.1 percentage points for workers with upper secondary attainment and by 4.7 percentage points for workers with tertiary attainment.
- Educational attainment affects not just employment prospects, but also wage levels. On average across the OECD, 25-64 year-old workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment earn 29% more than workers with below upper secondary attainment, while those with tertiary attainment earn about twice as much. In Costa Rica, the earnings advantage of tertiary-

educated workers was even greater than the OECD average. In 2020, workers with upper secondary attainment earned 46% more than those with below upper secondary attainment and those with tertiary attainment earned more than three times as much.

- National averages provide only an incomplete picture of the situation in any given country. In most OECD countries, there are large differences in educational attainment across subnational regions. This is also the case in Costa Rica. In 2021, the difference between the region with the highest share of 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment (Central, at 26%) and that with the lowest share (North Huetar, at 12%) was 14 percentage points. These subnational variations do not only reflect differences in education opportunities. To a large degree, they are due to economic conditions and internal migration patterns.

**Figure 1. Trends in the share of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds (2000 and 2021)**

In per cent



1. Data for tertiary education include upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary programmes (less than 5% of adults are in this group).

2. Year of reference differs from 2000: 2002 for Israel and 2003 for Iceland.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the difference in the share of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds between 2000 and 2021.

**Source:** OECD (2022), 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/EAG2022\\_X3-A.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-A.pdf)).

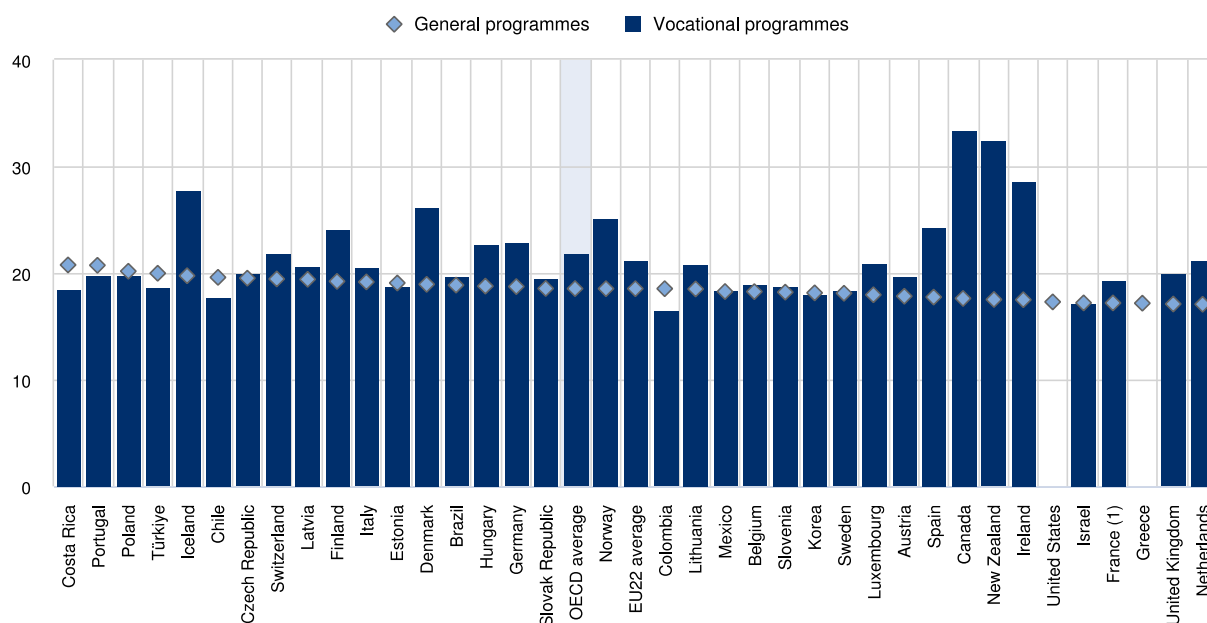
## Access to education, participation and progress

- Compulsory education begins at the age of 4 and ends at the age of 16 in Costa Rica. The range of ages for which at least 90% of the population are enrolled is shorter than the period of compulsory education and goes from the age of 4 to the age of 13. This differs from most other OECD countries, where more than 90% of the population are enrolled for longer than the period of compulsory education.

- The average age of graduation from general upper secondary programmes varies from 17 to 21 years across OECD countries and is 21 years in Costa Rica. Differences in the average age of graduation from vocational upper secondary education are much larger and vary from 16 to 34 years across the OECD. These differences largely depend on whether vocational upper secondary students usually enrol in these programmes towards the end of their compulsory education or in mid-career. In Costa Rica, the average age of graduation from vocational upper secondary education is 19 years, which is below the OECD average at 22 years (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Average age of first-time upper secondary graduates, by programme orientation (2020)

In years



1. Average age is based on all graduates instead of first-time graduates.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the average age of first-time upper secondary graduates in general programmes.

Source: OECD/Eurostat/UIS (2022), Tables B3.1 and B3.2. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-B.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-B.pdf)).

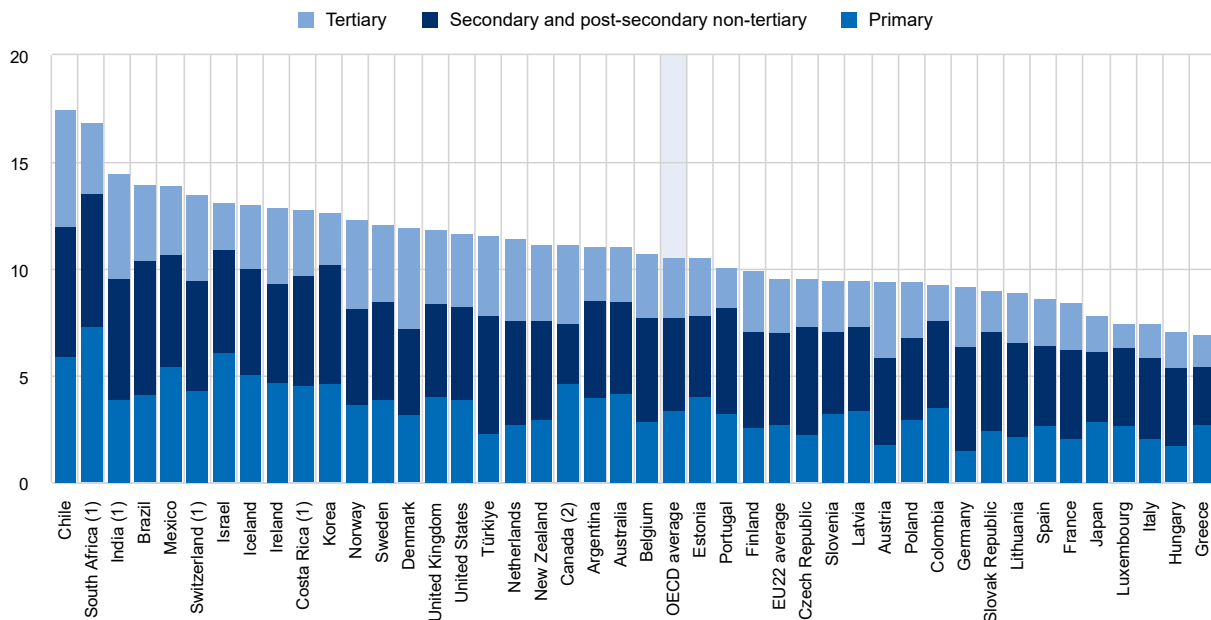
- In almost all OECD countries, women make up the majority of those graduating from general upper secondary education. In Costa Rica, the share is 54% (OECD average 55%). In contrast, men are overrepresented among graduates of vocational upper secondary programmes in most OECD countries, but not in Costa Rica where they make up 48% of all vocational upper secondary graduates, below the OECD average (55%).
- In Costa Rica, 44% of 18-24 year-olds are still in full- or part-time education or training at either upper secondary or tertiary level (significantly below the OECD average of 54%). A subset of these students (11% of 18-24 year-olds) combine their education or training with some form of employment in Costa Rica, compared to 17% on average across the OECD.
- One significant difference across countries' education systems is on whether or not vocational upper secondary programmes provide access to tertiary education. In 12 OECD countries and other participants, including Costa Rica, all vocational upper secondary graduates have direct access to tertiary education.

## Financial resources invested in education

- Public spending on primary to tertiary education was 12.8% of total government expenditure in Costa Rica (Figure 3), higher than the OECD average (10.6%). Also, relative to GDP, public spending on primary to tertiary education (5.9%) is higher than the OECD average (4.4%).

**Figure 3. Composition of total public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure (2019)**

Primary to tertiary education (including R&D), in per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2019. Refer to the source table for more details.

2. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure.

**Source:** OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2022), Table C4.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-C.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-C.pdf)).

## Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

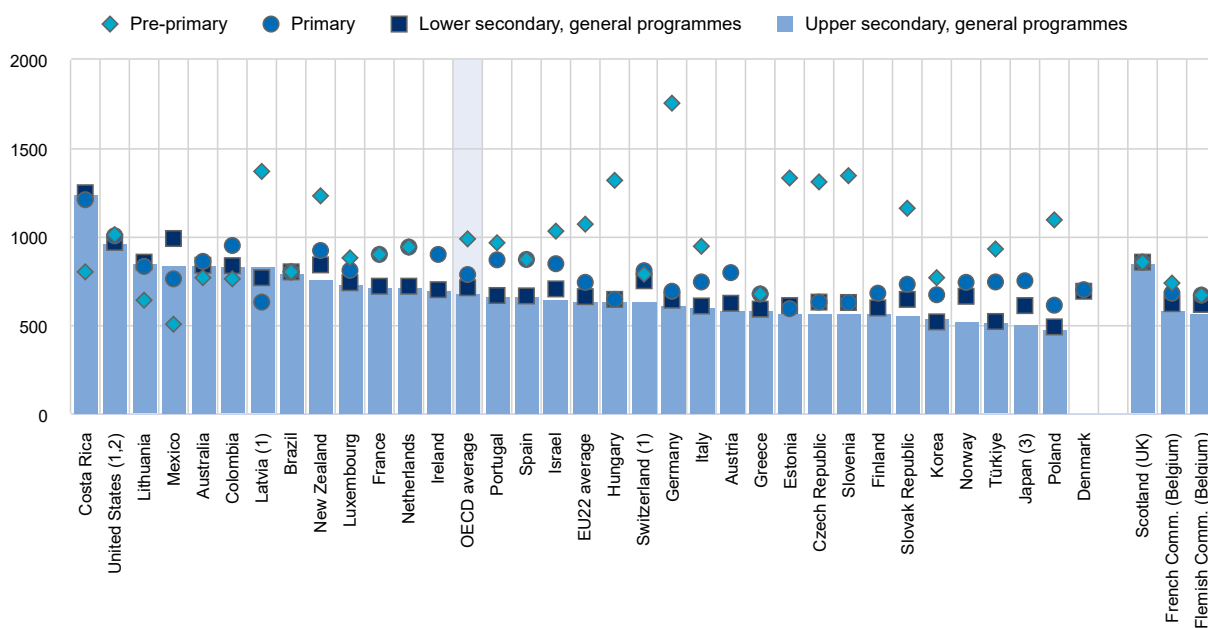
- The salaries of teachers and school heads are an important determinant of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, but they also represent the single largest expenditure item in formal education. In most OECD countries, the statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. Actual salaries also increase with the level of education. On average across OECD countries, actual salaries range from USD 41 941 at the pre-primary level to USD 53 682 at the upper secondary level. In Costa Rica, actual salaries average USD 38 633 at pre-primary level and USD 47 966 at upper secondary level.
- Between 2015 and 2021, on average across OECD countries, the statutory salaries of teachers at lower secondary level (general programmes) with 15 years of experience and the most prevalent

qualifications increased by 6% in real terms. In Costa Rica, real wages of teachers at lower secondary level declined by 35%.

- Teachers' average actual salaries remain lower than earnings of tertiary-educated workers in almost all OECD countries, and at almost all levels of education. However, Costa Rica is one of the few exceptions to this rule. Lower secondary (general programme) teachers in Costa Rica earn 47.4% more than other tertiary-educated workers. Likewise school head actual salaries in Costa Rica are much higher than the earnings of other tertiary educated workers. This is similar to most OECD countries, where school heads tend to earn well above the average earnings of tertiary educated workers.
- The average number of teaching hours per year required from a typical teacher in public educational institutions in OECD countries tends to decrease as the level of education increases.
- Based on official regulations or agreements, annual teaching hours in Costa Rica are 800 hours per year at pre-primary level, 1 209 hours at primary level, 1 248 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 1 248 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Teaching time of teachers, by level of education (2021)**

Net statutory teaching time in hours per year, in public institutions



1. Actual teaching time (in Latvia except for pre-primary level).

2. Reference year differs from 2021. Refer to the source table for details.

3. Average planned teaching time in each school at the beginning of the school year.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the number of teaching hours per year in general upper secondary education.

**Source:** OECD (2022), Table D4.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022\\_X3-D.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3-D.pdf)).

- The duration of initial teacher education for primary and lower secondary teachers ranges from 2.5 years to 6.5 years across OECD countries. In Costa Rica, initial teacher education typically lasts 3 years for prospective lower secondary teachers (general programmes). It is the same length for prospective primary teachers. As is the case in almost all OECD countries, a tertiary degree is

awarded to prospective teachers of all levels of education upon completion of their initial teacher training.

- Continuing professional development is compulsory for all teachers of general programmes in most countries with data, and Costa Rica is no exception. At secondary level, professional development activities are compulsory for all teachers.

## Focus on tertiary education

- Among 25-64 year-olds in Costa Rica, bachelor's degrees are the most common tertiary attainment at 15% of the population followed by short-cycle tertiary qualifications at 7% and master's degrees with 3%. This is similar to the OECD average, where bachelor's degrees are most common (19%), followed by master's degrees (14%) and short cycle tertiary qualifications (7%). As in all OECD countries and other participants, only a small fraction of the population holds a doctoral degree: the share is less than 1% in Costa Rica.
- On average, tertiary attainment generates a wide range of labour-market benefits, including high employment rates. Yet, there are significant differences depending on the field of study. In 2021, employment rates in Costa Rica were highest among tertiary-educated individuals who studied information and communication technologies with 92% and lowest among those who studied education at 78%. However, these differences need to be put into perspective. Even among 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment in the field with the lowest employment rate, this was 11.6 percentage points higher than among those with upper secondary attainment (all fields combined).
- Wages also differ according to the field of study. In Costa Rica, tertiary attainment in law generates the highest earnings. Full-time full-year workers aged 25-64 with a tertiary degree in this field earn on average more than twice as much as workers with upper secondary attainment (all fields combined). In contrast, tertiary attainment in business and administration leads to much lower wages. Workers with this educational background earn on average 84% more than the wage of workers with upper secondary attainment (all fields combined).
- In most OECD countries but not in Costa Rica, tertiary-educated adults have higher rates of participation in non-formal education and training than those with a lower level of educational attainment. In 2021, 2% of 25-64 year-olds with tertiary attainment in Costa Rica had participated in non-formal education and training in the four weeks prior to being surveyed, compared to 1% of their peers with below upper secondary attainment.
- Staff at tertiary level tend to start their careers relatively late due to the length of the education they need to qualify. In Costa Rica, only 5% of academic staff are aged under 30, below the OECD average (8%). In contrast, the share of academic staff aged 50 or over is 32%, which is below the OECD average by 8 percentage points.

## COVID-19: The second year of the pandemic

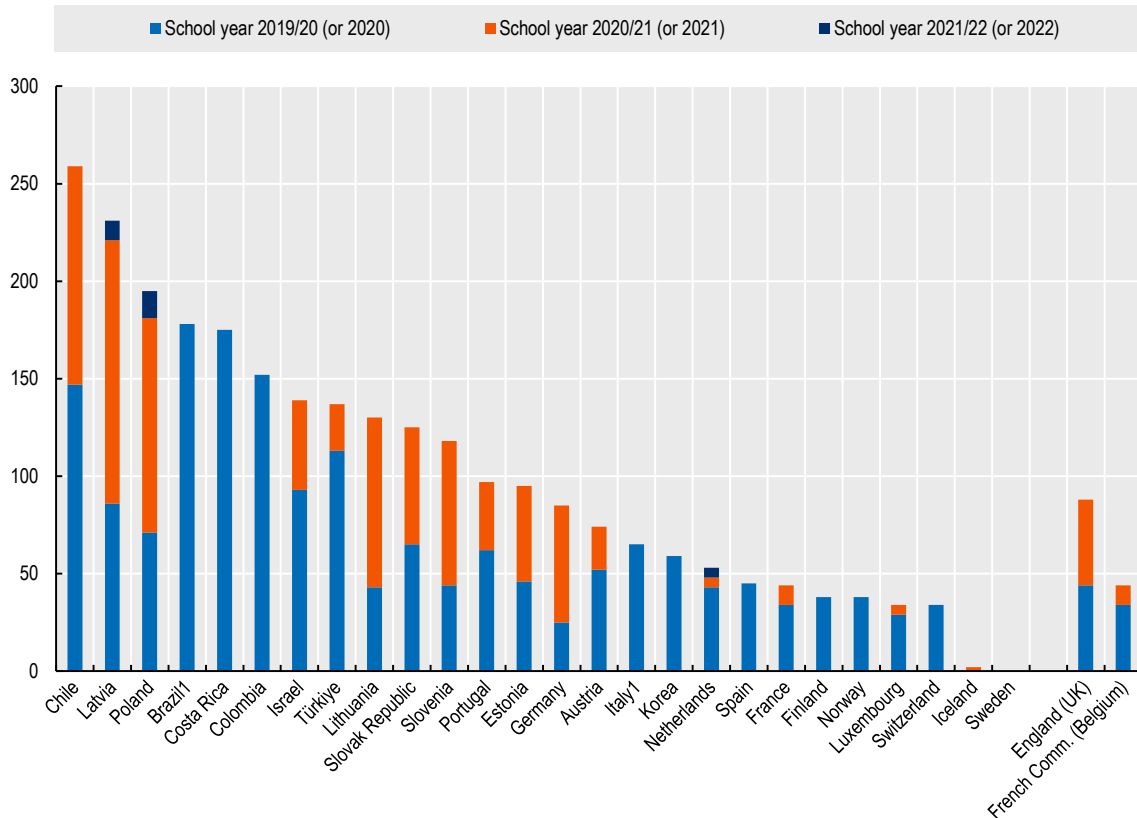
- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional schooling in 2020 and the first half of 2021, leading to school closures across all OECD countries. While most shut down their premises entirely in the wake of the pandemic in 2020, by 2021 the situation had improved and returned to normal in most countries in 2022. In Costa Rica, primary and secondary schools were entirely closed for 175 days in 2020 and stayed open in 2021 and 2022 (Figure 5). Partial closures reached 67 days in 2021.
- Teacher absences also affected the regular operation of schools during the pandemic, whether due to COVID-19 infections or because of precautionary quarantine. However, only approximately

half of countries collected information on teacher absenteeism. Costa Rica collected such data. It shows that teacher absenteeism remained constant between 2019/20 and 2021/22.

- Most countries conducted assessments of the impact of school closures on learning outcomes at various levels of education and along several dimensions. Costa Rica has conducted studies to evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the impact on primary, lower secondary, upper secondary general and vocational education. The assessments covered mathematics, reading and science. Like many other countries, Costa Rica also evaluated dimensions such as the effectiveness of distance-learning strategies during school closures, the relations between parents and students during lockdowns as well as the mental health and well-being of students and teachers.
- In school year 2022, national programmes to support students affected by the pandemic were implemented in Costa Rica at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary general and vocational level. At primary to upper secondary education, measures to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic included accelerated education or catch-up programmes for students who dropped out of school, community mobilisation campaigns to bring students back to school, cash transfers to increase enrolment among students from disadvantaged families, adjustments to subject curricula, early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out, referral systems for students in need of specialised services, additional school nutrition services, targeted instruction to students' level by grouping students according to proficiency rather than age, psychosocial and mental health support to students, automatic re-enrolment of students in school, increased instruction time through summer schools, extended school days or the school week or academic year, tutoring programmes or financial support for tutoring and additional water, sanitation and hygiene services. The government has already assessed the effectiveness of these programmes.
- The increased digitalisation of education has been a major consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic in many OECD countries. At lower secondary level, Costa Rica has responded to the pandemic with an enhanced provision of digitalised assessments/exams, digital tools at school, distance learning, hybrid learning, in-service digital training to teachers and digital training to students.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on adult learning in most OECD countries. In 2020, the share of adults who participated in a formal or non-formal education and training activity in the four weeks prior to being surveyed decreased by 2 percentage points on average across OECD countries compared with 2019. However, in 2021, participation in non-formal education and training returned to pre-pandemic levels in most countries. In Costa Rica, a different pattern emerged. From 2019 to 2020, the share of adults participating in a formal or non-formal education and training activity fell by 1 percentage point. From 2020 to 2021, it remained unchanged and has thus remained below pre-pandemic levels.
- Young adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) for prolonged periods are at risk of adverse economic and social outcomes in both the short and the long term. After decreasing during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the share of 18-24 year-olds who are NEET in Costa Rica rose in 2021. The share of NEET among young adults was 24% in 2021, above pre-COVID levels.

**Figure 5. School closures due to COVID-19 (2020, 2021 and the first quarter of 2022)**

Number of instruction days of full closure of lower secondary schools excluding school holidays, public holidays and weekends



**Note:** The data underlying this report were produced through the Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID 19, a collaborative effort conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank (WB), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Data for other levels of education are available at <https://www.oecd.org/education/Results-4th-wave-COVID-Survey-OECD-database.xlsx>.

1. Data for 2021 and 2022 are missing.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the total number of days lower secondary schools were fully closed during the school years 2019/20 (2020), 2020/21 (2021) and 2021/22 (2022).

**Source:** OECD/UIS/UNESCO/UNICEF/WB (2022).

## References

OECD (2022), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

OECD (2022), "Regional education", *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/213e806c-en>.




## More information

**For more information on Education at a Glance 2022 and to access the full set of Indicators, see:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-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/EAG2022\\_X3.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2022_X3.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, 2022). 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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<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>

The data on educational responses during COVID-19 were collected and processed by the OECD based on the Joint Survey on 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.

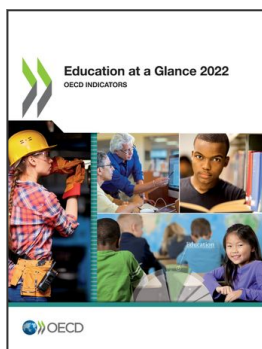
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**From:**  
**Education at a Glance 2022**  
OECD Indicators

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2022), "Costa Rica", in *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/6be2514f-en>

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