

1 Gender gaps in Costa Rica: An international and sub-national comparison

This chapter reviews the evidence on gender gaps in economic and educational outcomes in Costa Rica. It starts with an overview of gender gaps in educational and labour market outcomes across different dimensions (enrolment and out-of-school rates, skills outcomes, along with labour market participation, gender pay gaps and the interactions between motherhood and access to quality jobs). It then discusses the factors contributing to these gaps (the unbalanced distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, gender-based stereotypes, the role of legal barriers, the access to care facilities, infrastructural barriers, and gender-based violence). In addition to comparing Costa Rica with OECD and other LAC countries, the chapter addresses gender differences across socio-economic groups. This includes urban and rural differences, along with differences across educational attainments, age cohorts, and income.

Costa Rica will face population ageing in the coming decades, which places a heightened importance on reducing barriers that stand in the way of women's economic empowerment. The country combines one of the highest life expectancies in the LAC region with one of the lowest fertility rates. Adults in Costa Rica on average reach an age of 79 years compared to 73 years in the region as a whole. At the same time, the fertility rate stands at 1.56 children per woman, vis-à-vis 1.88 in the region. This means that the group of older people (aged 65 or over) is set to grow much faster than the younger generations in the next decades. In 2050, the share people aged 65 years or above is projected to more than double in the next three decades to reach almost 24% of the total population, while the share of youth is projected to shrink to 14%. This demographic development also means that the working age population is expected to slightly shrink (from 69% in 2020 to 63% in 2050). Amid mounting demographic pressures, the mobilisation of the female talent pool lies at the centre of the country's policy agenda to establish an inclusive and sustainable economy and society.

Costa Rica's gender gaps in educational and labour market outcomes have shrunk remarkably during the past decades. Nevertheless, in Costa Rica, just as elsewhere in the LAC region and all around the world, men and women do not share paid and unpaid work equally. Women continue to be less likely to be in paid work, and to work full-time hours. Instead, they typically spend more hours looking after children, elderly relatives, and relatives with disabilities, and performing other unpaid domestic and care tasks. Informal labour is particularly widespread for women who live in rural areas, where more than half of employed women work in the informal sector.

Across the OECD but also in Costa Rica, and the LAC region at large, the unequal sharing of working hours in paid and unpaid work, is explained by a broad set of interdependent factors. For example, despite important educational gains, women continue to make educational choices that often result in lower labour market earnings than men. These choices are influenced, in turn, by a complex set of attitudes and gender norms. Another important factor is the (un-)availability of childcare which is crucial for parents to engage in paid work. In addition, the intersectional character of the drivers is very important, given that gender inequalities vary widely across socio-economic groups – between younger and older generations, between urban and rural areas, between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, between migrant and native workers, and between couples and single parents.

Shedding light on the barriers to a more equal gender distribution of paid and unpaid work in Costa Rica is the main objective of Chapter 1. The chapter starts with a review of women's challenges seen from a demographic perspective and considering sub-national differences, particularly between rural and urban areas. It then presents gender gaps in educational and labour outcomes, along with a discussion of time-sharing and earning patterns. Finally, it looks at international indicators of well-being and gender gaps that capture the influence of attitudes and stereotypes related to gender.

Gender gaps in key economic outcomes

Education

There is an extensive body of research focussing on the importance of education for individuals and society. It suggests that individuals with higher levels of education typically have a higher probability of being employed, earning a higher income (OECD, 2019^[1]) and being healthier (Conti, Heckman and Urzua, 2010^[2]; Dávila-Cervantes and Agudelo-Botero, 2019^[3]). At societal level, investments in education lead to productivity growth and economic development generated by a higher-skilled labour force (Mincer, 1984^[4]; Mallick, Das and Pradhan, 2016^[5]; OECD, 2023^[6]).

In the case of women, these benefits are even greater, reflecting the double effect of education on women's earning opportunities: On top of increasing skills, productivity and income opportunities (Woodhall, 1973^[7]; Montenegro and Patrinos, 2014^[8]; OECD, 2023^[6]), education likely contributes to reduce the gap in earning

between men and women (Dougherty, 2005^[9]; OECD, 2024^[10]). Additional gains materialise from the decrease of child mortality and unwanted pregnancies. Importantly, inter-generational redistribution will likely improve since the increased education of mothers typically leads to an improvement in the health and educational outcomes of children, even after taking into account the father's education and household income (Schultz, 1993^[11]). Furthermore, by making women feel more empowered to speak out to affirm their needs, rights and aspirations, higher returns to education increase their bargaining power within the household (Heath and Jayachandran, 2017^[12]). Analysis finds that the private returns to female education exceed that of males by about 2 percentage points and that the gap has increased overtime (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018^[13]). This does not imply that actual earnings are higher for females, but that education is a good investment for women and girls, and a development priority.

The 2022 edition of the OECD flagship report *Education at a Glance* shows that on average across OECD countries, female workers aged between 35 and 44 years earn approximately one fifth less than their male counterparts, regardless of the level of education – whether tertiary, upper secondary or below, and post-secondary non-tertiary (OECD, 2022^[14]). Evidence for Costa Rica shows that tertiary-educated women working full-time earn approximately the same as their male peers. At lower levels of education and including part-time work, however, the gender gap in earnings is comparable to the OECD average.

International data highlight a positive relation between educational level and birth control, a pattern also visible for Costa Rica (Liu and Raftery, 2020^[15]). Among different education levels, lower secondary education is seen to have the strongest effect, not only in the comparison with primary education but also relative to additional education beyond the lower secondary level (typically around ages 14-16).

Box 1.1. The benefits of a more equitable division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women

Individuals working outside the home generally have a higher degree of economic independence from their partners and other family members than those who do not. Unpaid care and domestic work generally do not garner the same respect as other activities. In countries where women carry out a disproportionately large share of the unpaid work burden, they are also more frequently employed in part-time or vulnerable jobs, which are often poorly paid (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka, 2014^[16]). This is because a high burden to provide unpaid care and domestic work often implies that women cannot find an occupation corresponding to their qualification level on a part-time basis, thus decreasing their job quality and earnings (Connolly and Gregory, 2008^[17]).

By contrast, an equal division of unpaid work responsibilities can be beneficial to the entire family. Given that a more equal sharing of unpaid work reduces women's overall work hours – in particular regarding tasks that are considered less desirable, namely housework and care of the elderly – it can reduce stress levels (MacDonald, Phipps and Lethbridge, 2005^[18]). A study of British families suggests that couples in which men do more unpaid care and other housework are less likely to divorce (Sigle-Rushton, 2010^[19]). The negative effects of an unequal division of unpaid work on marital quality are particularly strong when couples disagree about how egalitarian a marriage should be (Ogolsky, Dennison and Monk, 2014^[20]). Men who spend more time with their children may have higher life satisfaction, and the children may have better mental and physical health and cognitive development. However, it is unclear whether these differences are driven by confounding factors that these studies do not account for (WHO, 2007^[21]).

Individuals' well-being may be boosted even more if overall unpaid work hours can be reduced. When an increasing share of the population can access stable utilities (such as running water and electricity) and labour-saving appliances (such as washing machines), and thus need fewer hours for housework, time-poverty diminishes, while choices and well-being increase. In countries with higher levels of

per-capita GDP, the number of hours that need to be devoted to unpaid work tend to decrease, benefitting women in particular (Ferrant and Thim, 2019^[22]).

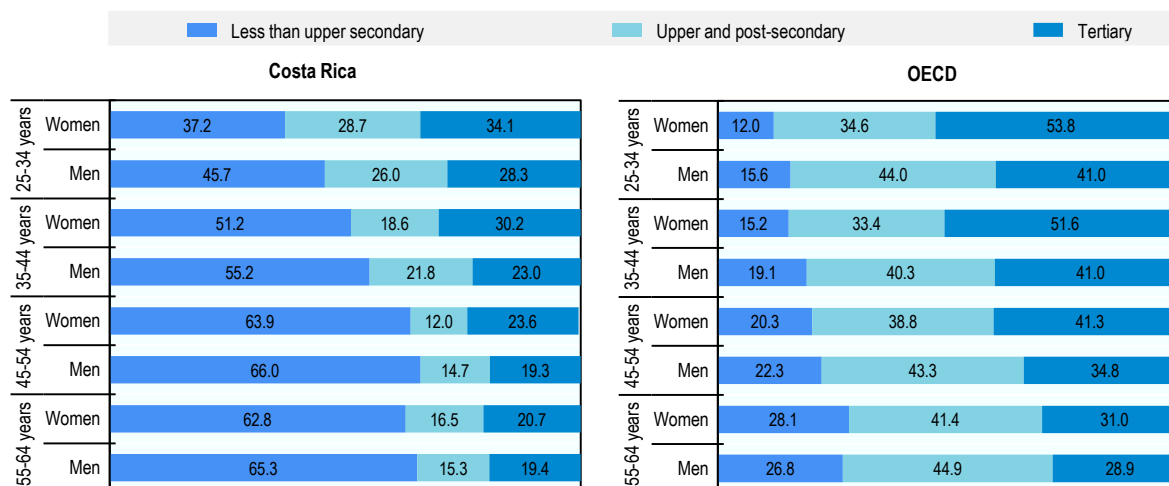
From this perspective, the increased labour force participation of women will be key to support economic growth in Costa Rica. Particularly, it could help mitigate the impact of a shrinking workforce in the face of forthcoming demographic pressures (Kochhar et al., 2017^[23]). The *Banco Central de Costa Rica* (Central Bank of Costa Rica) has estimated that unpaid domestic work accounts for 25% of the country's GDP, of which women contribute 71% (Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2019^[24]). However, the benefits of an increasing female labour force participation will go far beyond simply substituting unpaid by paid work. Economic analysis by (Cuberes and Teignier, 2016^[25]) has estimated the negative effects of existing gender gaps in the labour market on aggregate productivity and income per capita. They find an income loss per capita that is close to 22% in Costa Rica compared to a labour market scenario without gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship. This estimate is higher than for the OECD (an average loss of 15%), but also Chile (20%), Colombia (close to 18%) and Peru (14%). According to projections for the OECD, closing gender gaps in labour force participation and working hours would increase the potential GDP per capita growth by 0.23 percentage points per year, resulting in a 9.2% overall boost to GDP per capita relative to the baseline projection estimate for 2060 (OECD, 2023^[26]). Countries which have substantial gender gaps in labour force participation or working hours could see the strongest boost to annual economic growth. For example, Colombia, Costa Rica and Türkiye may see more than 0.40 percentage points of additional GDP growth per year – corresponding to an economic output between 17 and 20 percentage points larger than the baseline for 2060. Women's increased participation in the labour market would substitute lower- for higher-added value activities and increase the stock of human capital employed. Since young female university graduates now outnumber their male counterparts, using their human capital fully has become more urgent. Moreover, firm-level research finds small productivity gains from increasing gender equality in senior management (Kögel et al., 2023^[27]).

Costa Rica is one of the Latin American and Caribbean countries that has made the greatest improvements in the past decades towards implementing universal education and ensuring gender equality in the education system. Educational attainment has improved strongly from one cohort to the next, with particularly large gains among women. In 2022, 35% of men and 37% of women aged 55 to 64 years in Costa Rica had an upper secondary or tertiary degree (Figure 1.1). By comparison, the same share was significantly higher among the age group between 25 and 34 years in at 54% for men and 63% for women. Similarly, the share of high-school graduates (those having completed an upper and post-secondary education curriculum) was about 11 percentage points higher for men aged 25-34 compared to men aged 55 to 64. For women, the gap stood even higher at 12 percentage points of difference between the younger and older age groups. The share of tertiary graduates is also higher in younger compared to older cohorts. In 2022, 34% of women in Costa Rican between age 25 and 34 had tertiary education, compared to 21% of women in the age group 55-64.

Following a pattern common to other countries in the LAC region (OECD, 2021^[28]), young women have started to outperform young men in terms of educational attainment. Among 25-34 year-olds, the share of tertiary graduates is by 6 percentage points higher for women than men (34% compared to 28%). Despite these gains, there remains significant scope for increasing the share of tertiary graduates; on average in OECD countries, the share of women and men with tertiary education equal 54% and 41%, respectively, for the age group of 25-34 year-olds.

Figure 1.1. Women obtain more tertiary degrees than men

Percentage distribution of educational attainment by sex and age, 2022 or last year available



Note: For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD (2023^[6]), *OECD Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>.

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In Costa Rica enrolment rates in primary education for both girls and boys exceed 95%. Regardless of gender, enrolment rates decline strongly with student age in secondary education. Nevertheless, the enrolment rate for girls (58%) in upper secondary education remains 10 percentage points higher than for boys (Figure 1.2). Overall, Costa Rica's enrolment rates in upper secondary education are relatively low in international comparison, both compared to the OECD average and other LAC countries such as Chile or Peru.

Evidence suggests that multiple concurring forces shape the relation between age and school attendance. This mix includes economic factors directly related to poverty (not enough family or personal income for investing in education, the need to contribute to the family's subsistence needs, etc.), personal factors (having to perform household responsibilities, pregnancy, early marriage, sickness, etc.), and the perceived low quality of the education system, which can lead to a loss of interest in studying (Adelman and Szekely, 2017^[29]).

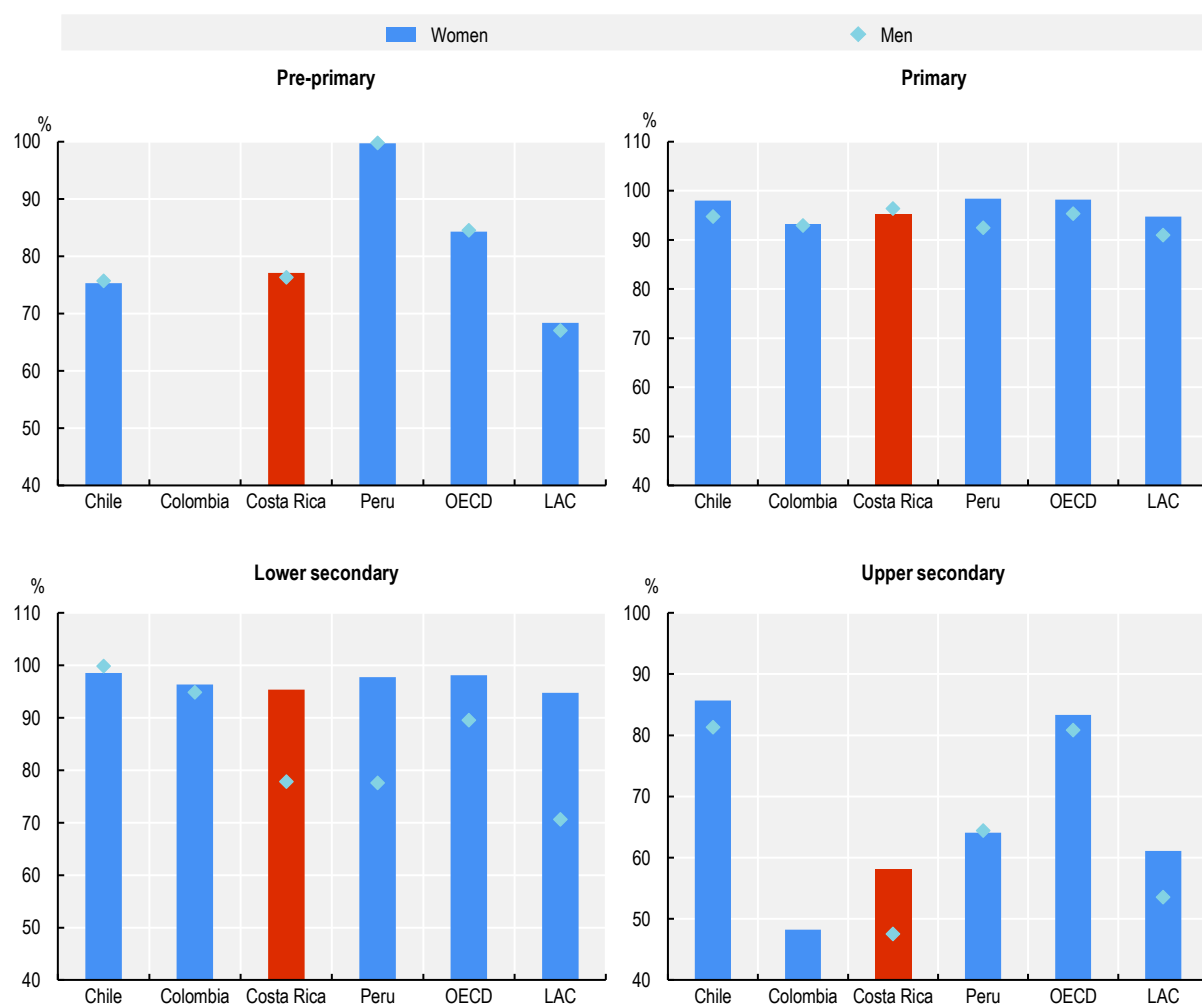
Research suggests that in Costa Rica, the primary (self-reported) causes of dropping out of secondary school correlate strongly with poverty and a lack of economic resources to continue attending school (Asenjo and Astica, 2013^[30]; Adelman and Szekely, 2017^[29]). There is evidence based on household survey data that dropping out decisions differ by gender, with boys most often citing economic reasons – having to engage in paid work – whereas girls are more likely to cite reasons related to unpaid care and domestic work. Although the share of boys declaring that lack of interest is the main cause for having left school is higher than that of girls, this category is highly relevant for both (Adelman and Szekely, 2017^[29]).

The disaggregation of the national figures reveals that socio-economic inequalities play an important role in explaining the decision to leave school (Adelman and Szekely, 2017^[29]; Asenjo and Astica, 2013^[30]; Garcia-Ramirez, Nikoloski and Mossialos, 2020^[31]). Specifically, being born in a rural community and belonging to an indigenous group correlate strongly with withdrawal from school, reflecting specific factors that affect the marginal benefits and costs of staying in school. These include supply gaps in learning infrastructure, often exacerbated by limited transport facilities, for example. They also include intangible forces that undermine trust in the education system and its capacity to be inclusive and racially neutral – this perception is shared by many families of African descent.

Declining rates of school enrolment with age also relate to teenage pregnancies. Data from the Survey of Adult Skills show that reading proficiency levels are correlated with delayed parenthood, as is educational attainment. Conversely, individuals with low reading skills are more likely to have started parenting earlier, and in LAC, this is particularly the case for women. Among young women with low reading skills at age 19, 6% are mothers in OECD countries, compared to 28% in the LAC region. Early motherhood is linked to lower educational attainment in LAC: 25% of girls aged 16-19 who are not enrolled in education are mothers, compared to only 3% of those who are enrolled (OECD, 2023^[32]). Adolescent fertility has decreased in Costa Rica during the past years, but the speed of decline has been slowed by the context of high socio-economic inequality (see Chapter 2).

Figure 1.2. Women are more frequently enrolled in upper secondary education than men, but far less than their peers in LAC and OECD countries

Net enrolment rates, 2018 or latest



Note: Data for Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru refer to 2018, otherwise 2017 except primary Peru (2015). The Latin American average (LAC) refers to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay where available. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

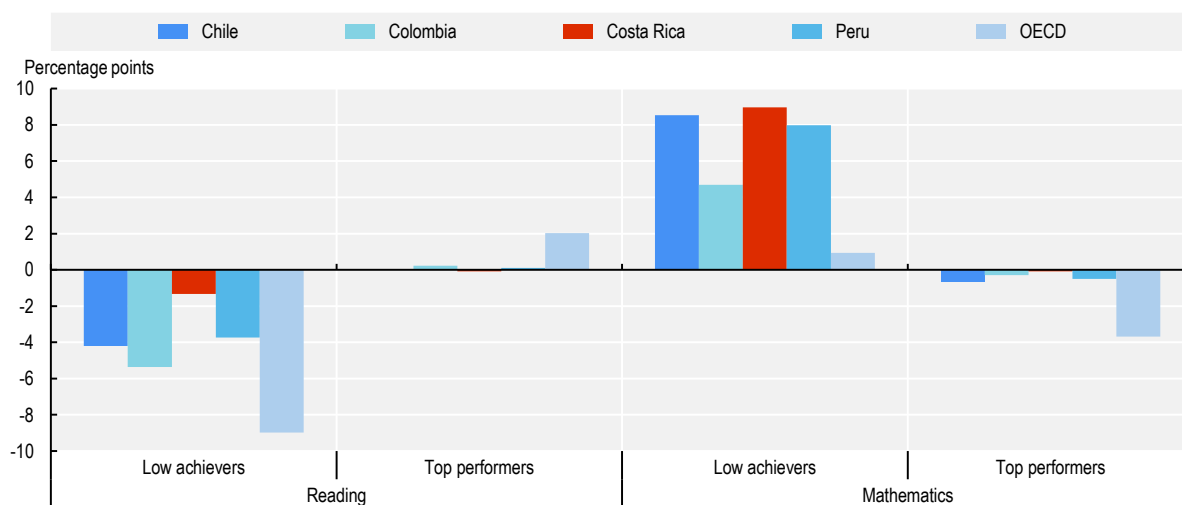
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, "Net enrolment rate", <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

The eighth Report on the State of Education (*Informe Estado de la Educación*) includes estimates of the probability to fall into poverty for the student populations excluded from secondary school and that, in the coming years, will be aged between 17 and 22 years, 23 to 28 years and 29 and 33 years, respectively. The results show that the estimated probability of falling into poverty is the highest for the excluded age group between 17 and 22 years, exceeding 25% (Consejo Nacional de Rectores, 2021^[33]).

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) allows for a gendered perspective on educational achievements of teenagers. On average across all participating countries and economies, PISA has consistently found that girls outperform boys in reading by a large margin and, to a lesser extent, that boys score slightly above girls in mathematics, but not in all countries. In Costa Rica, there are more boys than girls among "low achievers", in the subject of reading (Figure 1.3). Conversely, girls are more numerous among maths and science "low achievers". Figure 1.3 illustrates gender differences in performance in reading and mathematics, with negative values meaning a gender gap in favour of girls, and positive values meaning a gender gap in favour of boys. These results broadly align with the evidence of LAC and OECD countries, although in Costa Rica (as well as in Colombia) the gender gap in mathematics and science is much wider (OECD, 2023^[34]).


Figure 1.3. There are gender differences in the share of low, but not of top, performers in the PISA study in Costa Rica

Difference in the share of low achievers and top performers by subject (girls – boys), 2022



Note: For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: PISA 2022 Results (Volume I), Table I.B1.4.31 and Table I.B1.4.32.

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Gender disparities in achievement are a matter of considerable concern given their long-term consequences on the personal and professional future of girls and boys. For example, the under-representation of girls amongst top performers in science and mathematics may be linked to a persistent gender gap in careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, even if it cannot explain why few female top-performers choose STEM occupations. In Costa Rica, the available figures show that the share of male graduates in STEM subjects exceeds the corresponding share of female graduates by about 19 percentage points, which is lower than the average gap in OECD countries (25 percentage points). In comparison with regional countries, the extent of the gender gap in STEM

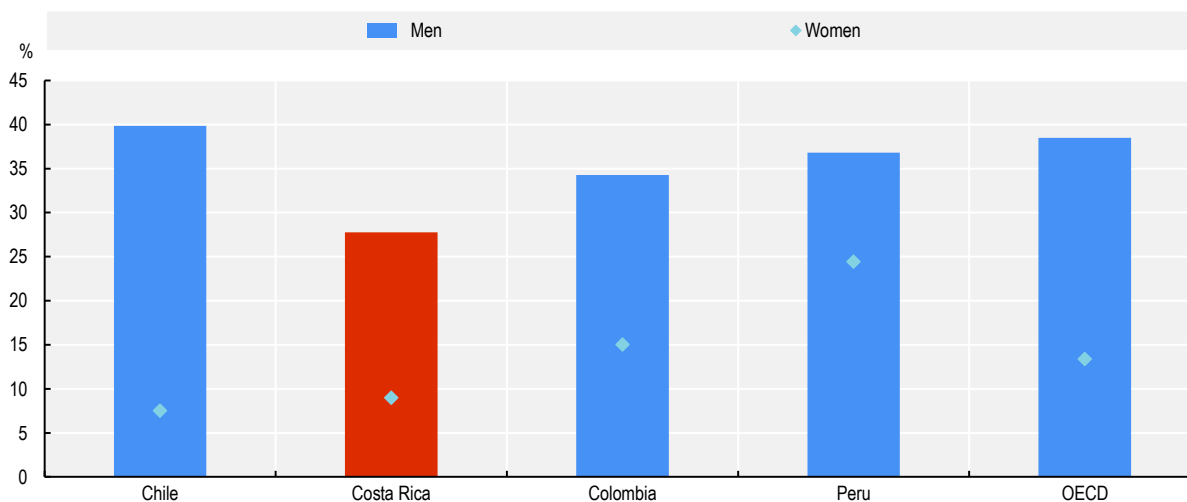
disciplines is significantly smaller than Chile and close to the level of Colombia, albeit larger than Peru, for example (Figure 1.4).

Gender gaps in STEM in Latin America and Caribbean countries are reflected the student population and teaching staff at universities. A study on enrolment rates in nine universities in 2018 revealed that only 28% of the total student population in engineering, manufacturing and construction, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) programmes are female (Osorio et al., 2020^[35]). These gender gaps are very similar across the countries analysed by the study (Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Chile). More women chose to study natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics, disciplines in which they comprised 52% of the total student population in these disciplines. The gender gap is also reflected in teaching staff. Female professors comprised 26% of the total number of professors in science programmes, and 41% of professors in engineering programmes at the Universities under study (Osorio et al., 2020^[35]).

Several factors explain performance differences between girls and boys in quantitative subjects, and the weak orientation of women towards STEM disciplines. Some refer to the influence of entrenched biases in attitudes and beliefs about the roles that men and women play in society, particularly given that, for a start, score differences in maths tests are negligible among small children (Kahn and Ginther, 2018^[36]; Hadjar et al., 2014^[37]; Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023^[38]). Reflecting biases in gender-related social perceptions, girls develop a belief that scientific careers are a prerogative of boys from an early age, which shifts their academic preferences towards the sphere of humanities (Nollenberger, Rodríguez-Planas and Sevilla, 2016^[39]). Chapter 2 discusses how gender-sensitive education can help to reduce the influence of gender stereotypes in education.

Figure 1.4. Women in Costa Rica are under-represented among STEM graduates

Share of graduates in STEM subjects (% graduates of same gender), 2021 or last year available



Note: All tertiary levels combined. STEM subjects include natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, information and communication technologies, engineering, manufacturing and construction. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD (2023^[6]), *OECD Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>, and for Peru (2017): UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

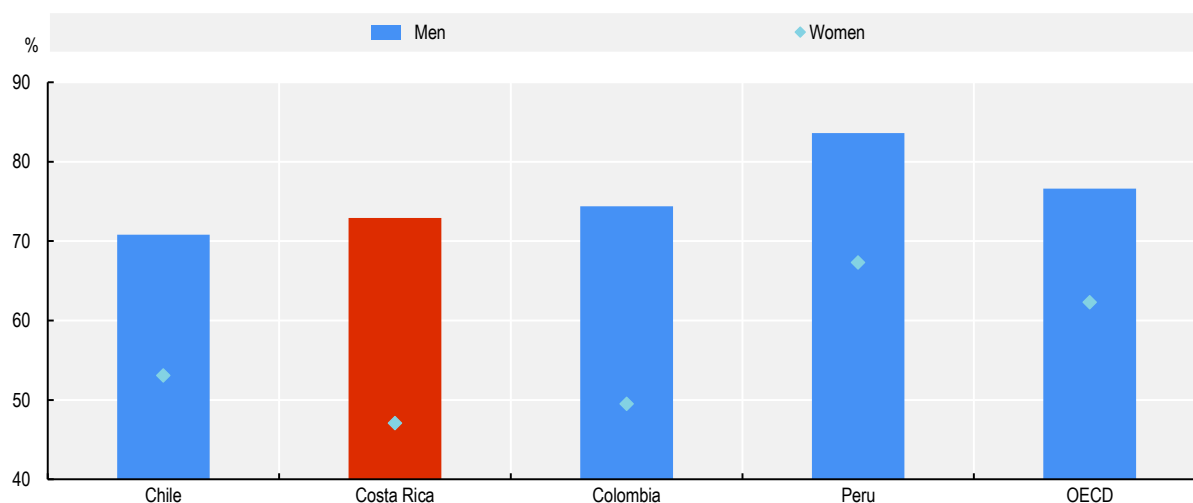
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Employment

Despite high educational attainment, Costa Rica performs relatively poorly in terms of employment opportunities for women: 47% of women of working age (15-64 years old) were employed in 2022, compared to 73% of men (Figure 1.5). The resulting employment gender gap of 26 percentage points is similar to that of Colombia, although higher than in Chile and Peru. It is also 14 percentage points above the OECD average.

Figure 1.5. The employment rate of women is significantly lower than that of men

Employment rate by gender (% 15-64 year-olds), 2022



Note: For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD Employment Database, www.oecd.org/employment/emp/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm, and ILOSTAT, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

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Recent data for second quarter of 2023, provided by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos* (INEC-Costa Rica, National Institute of Statistics and Census), point to a gender employment gap of a similar magnitude but against the background of lower employment rates for both men and women – around 64% and 38%, respectively (Table 1.1).

Confirming a pattern seen in many countries in the LAC region and around the world, the INEC figures also highlight considerable variations by socio-economic groups. Firstly, the gender gap in employment varies significantly across age groups. Between ages of 15 and 24 years, the gender gap in employment is less than 10 percentage points, compared to a gap of about 27 percentage points for the ages between 25 and 44 years. This suggests that in Costa Rica, as elsewhere, career prospects differ significantly between women who have children and those who do not (Kochhar et al., 2017^[23]). Secondly, the data indicate that in Costa Rica education plays a strong role in enhancing employment prospects, possibly helping to smooth the systemic disadvantages that women encounter in their careers once becoming mothers. On average, the employment rate of women with tertiary education is 63%, which compares to 24% for women with only a primary degree or less (34% for women with less than secondary education). In addition, women with a university degree have an employment rate 13 percentage points lower than men with the same level of education, a significantly less pronounced gap than observed at lower levels of education (39 and 24 percentage points at primary and secondary levels, respectively).

Table 1.1. Gender gaps in employment rates by socio-economic groups

Employment rates and gaps between men and women by age group, level of education, and geographical area

	2023					
	I Quarter			II Quarter		
	Men	Women	Men-Women	Men	Women	Men-Women
Total employment rate¹	63.1	38.2	24.9	63.9	38.4	25.6
Employment rates	Employment rate by Age Group					
15-24 years	33.2	23.4	9.8	31.7	25.2	6.5
25-44 years	85.5	59.1	26.6	86.9	59.8	27.1
45 years and above	57.9	28.3	29.5	59.0	27.2	31.7
	Employment rate by Level of Education					
Full primary or less	62.5	23.4	39.2	63.1	23.8	39.3
Less than secondary	57.5	35.5	22.0	58.1	33.7	24.4
Full secondary or university without title	62.1	40.9	21.2	63.2	43.1	20.1
University with title	75.9	64.9	11.0	76.5	63.2	13.3
	Employment rate by Geographical Area					
Urban	62.4	40.1	22.3	63.4	41.1	22.3
Rural	64.9	32.8	32.2	65.3	30.3	35.0
	Employment rate among workers with an informal job²					
Urban	38.8	39.1	-0.2	35.9	35.4	0.6
Rural	48.7	52.6	-3.9	48.6	52.0	-3.4

1. Employed population as a percentage share of the working age population.

2. As a percentage share of total employed population. Informal employment includes the following workers: i) Wage earners not registered with social security by their employers; ii) Unpaid care workers, iii) Self-employed and employers who are owner of unincorporated enterprises (not registered in the National Property Register and that do not keep formal accounts).

Source: *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (Costa Rica), "Sinopsis I-IIT2023 – Condición de actividad por sexo y zona".*

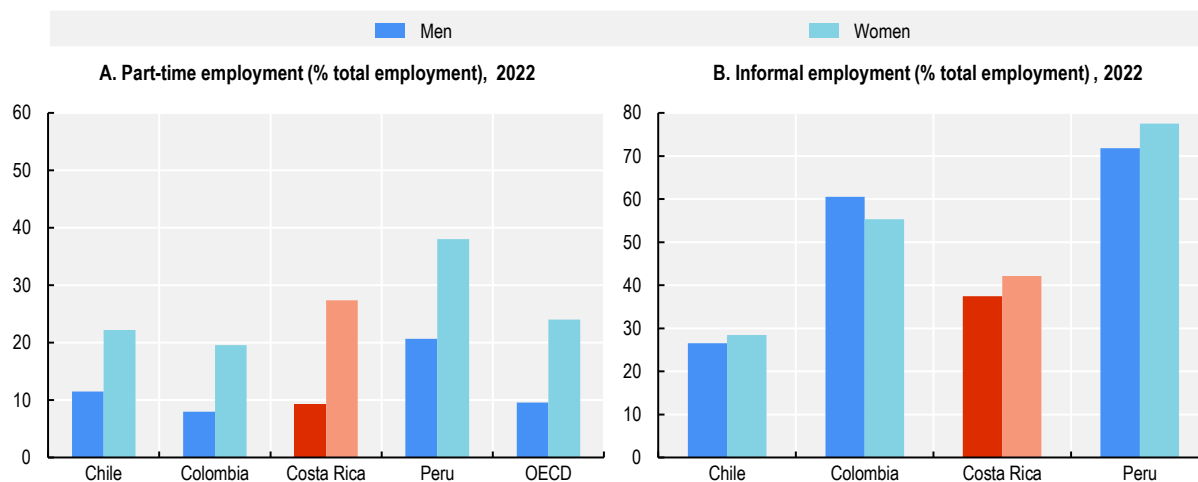
Patterns of (female) employment also have a strong regional connotation. As an illustration, in urban areas the employment rate of women exceeds that of women in rural areas by more than 10 percentage points (Table 1.1). Furthermore, in the rural areas the gender employment gap (35 percentage points) is significantly more pronounced than in the urban areas (22 percentage points). These differences likely reflect the considerable time that rural women spend on unpaid work responsibilities, for housekeeping, for example, and the caring of children and other family members. At the same time, when rural women work for pay, they are more likely employed in the informal sector. Indeed, of all employed women in rural areas, 52% work in the informal sector, which is higher than the same share among rural men (49%) and much higher than the corresponding share of employed women in urban areas (35%). Women from poor, rural areas may contribute to the family income by engaging in subsistence agriculture, home-based production, or unpaid domestic and care work, with little extra time to devote to paid work activities and less opportunities to find a regular job.

In order to place the precarious working conditions of rural women in Costa Rica in context, it is important to recall that in 2022 in rural areas the average level of household income was 39 percentage points lower than in urban areas (INEC, 2022_[40]). In terms of poverty incidence, the percentage of households in poverty equalled 28% in 2022 in rural areas (2 percentage points higher than in 2021), compared to 21% in urban areas (where no significant change was registered relative to the previous year).

Importantly, women, when they are employed, are more likely to be hired in low quality jobs. Part-time employment, for example, is more widespread among women than men (Figure 1.6). About three in ten

women who are employed in Costa Rica work part-time – compared to one in ten for men. The share for women is higher than observed in other countries in the region, notably Chile and Colombia, as well as the OECD average. Additionally, many Costa Rican women work informally. Such conditions make women particularly vulnerable and exposed to labour market risks, as in the case of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example.

Figure 1.6. A higher share of female employees in Costa Rica work part-time



Note: For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

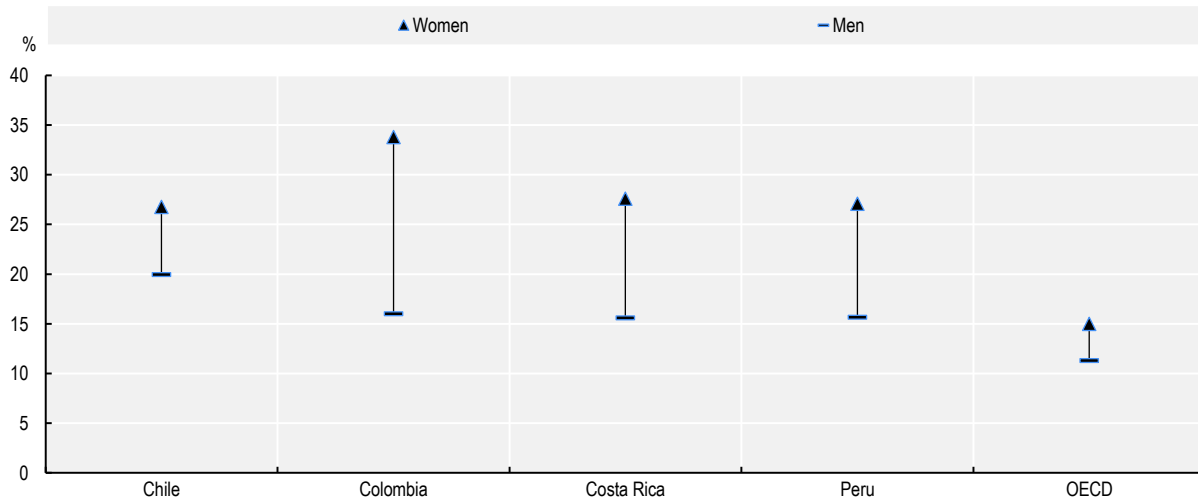
Source: Panel A: OECD Employment Database, www.oecd.org/employment/emp/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm, and Panel B: ILO Stat (SDG indicator 8.3.1 – Proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector (%), <https://ilostat.ilo.org>).

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A significant share of young women in Costa Rica, more so than young men, are at risk of neither being in paid employment nor in education or training. Figure 1.7 illustrates the share of youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) as a percentage of the youth population (age 15-29). At 28% the NEET rate for women in Costa Rica is higher than observed in other regional comparator countries (Chile, 27% and Peru, 27%, albeit lower than Colombia, 34%) and almost double the OECD average (15%). Young women are 1.7 times more likely to be NEETs than young men are, which is lower than Colombia (2.1 times more likely) and aligned with Peru, although higher than the OECD-wide average (1.3 times).


Figure 1.7. Women in Costa Rica are much more likely to be NEETs than men

Share of population unemployed or inactive (NEET) among 15-29 years, 2022 or last year available



Note: Data refer to 2022 except for Chile 2020 and Peru 2017.

Source: Data for Peru refer to Encuesta Nacional de Hogares (ENAH) otherwise OECD Database on Transition from school to work https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG_TRANS.

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NEET rates capture young people who are not in full-time or part-time education, formal and informal paid work. The concept does not cover individuals in non-formal education or very short educational activities, or those who provide unpaid work, for example, in the household, home-based production or subsistence agriculture. The gender gap of 12 percentage points for NEETs in Costa Rica is explained by a range of multiple factors (see section on drivers of gender gaps). An important aspect is the larger share of non-remunerated domestic and care work that women provide from a very early age. Already as teenagers (aged 12-17), girls provide on average 18 hours of unpaid work per week in Costa Rica, compared to 13 hours provided by boys, and this gap continues to increase significantly into adulthood (see section on unpaid work and Figure 1.12). The comparatively high rate of teenage pregnancies in Costa Rica (see Chapter 2) is another factor that likely contributes the share of female NEETs. Many NEETs in Costa Rica and elsewhere are likely to provide unpaid domestic and care work and contribute to the family and society in valuable ways. The high NEET rate in Costa Rica, especially among women, however, is a reason for concern given a higher risk of NEETs to become socially excluded, have incomes below the poverty line and lack the skills to improve their economic situation.

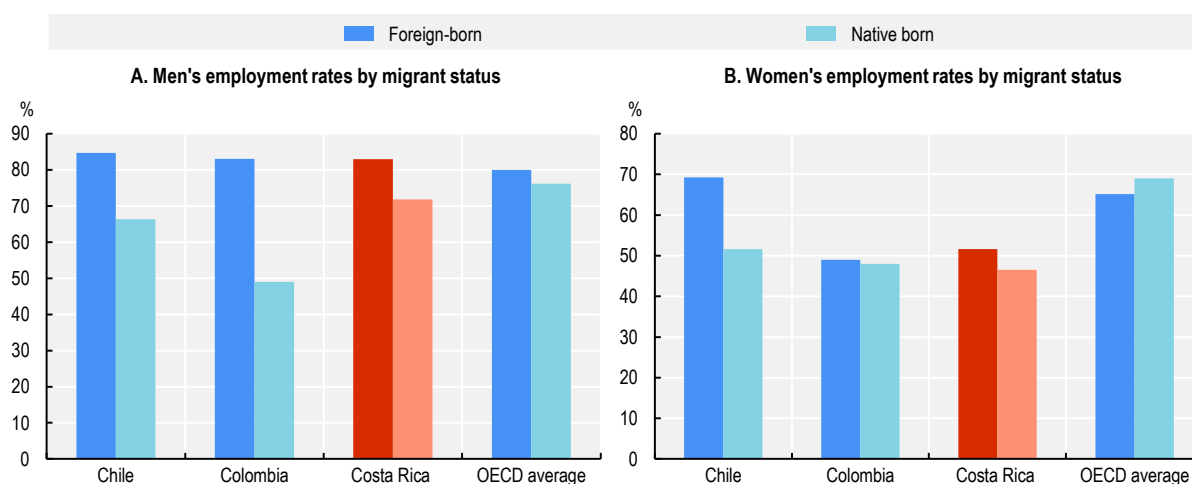
Indigenous women often face intersecting disadvantage due to gender, indigenous origins, and social and economic conditions. There are some 115 000 indigenous persons in Costa Rica (about 2.4% of the total population) belonging to eight indigenous groups Bribris, Cabécares, Malekus, Chorotegas, Huetares, Ngäbes, Bruncas and Térrabas (UNHR, 2021^[41]). Data from the *X Censo Nacional de Población y VI de Vivienda* show that these populations face distinct sources of social and economic exclusion (INEC, 2013^[42]). For example, in the areas characterised by a high incidence of residents with indigenous origins, the percentage share of the population declaring to be unable to meet at least one essential basic need (due to barriers of access to healthcare, education, and housing, for example) averages 70%, reaching peaks of 93%, 88% and 79% in the territories of Cabécares, Térrabas and Ngäbes, respectively (Varas, n.d.^[43]). These shares compare with a national average of 25%. In the eight territories where the indigenous population reside (INEC, 2013^[42]), the average employment rate of women (16.9%) is significantly lower than that of men (56.2%), on top of being lower than the employment rate of rural women more generally

(ONU Costa Rica, 2022^[44]). With respect to education, only 13% of indigenous women have a secondary school degree. Indigenous women also face particularly strong limitations of access to infrastructure (water, electricity, and transports), along with quality healthcare services.

Another dimension is immigrant status. Measured as a percentage share of the total population Costa Rica is the country with the highest proportion of migrants in the Latin America and Caribbean region (10.3%), followed by Chile (7.5%). This reflects large numbers of foreign-born individuals from neighbouring Nicaragua (67%), alongside smaller shares from Venezuela (5%) and Colombia (5%) (OECD, 2023^[45]). In 2021, foreign-born women outnumbered foreign-born men in Costa Rica, composing 52% of the total immigrant population (UNDP, OECD and IDB, 2023^[46]).

The aggregate employment rate of migrants in Costa Rica is higher than that of migrants in many OECD countries, and higher than that of the native-born population in Costa Rica. But there are large differences between men and women (Figure 1.8). In 2022, the employment rate of migrant men, 83%, was 3 percentage points higher than that of migrant men in the average of the OECD countries and 11 percentage points higher than that of native-born men in Costa Rica. In the same year, the employment rate of migrant women was 52%, which compared to 65% on average across OECD countries. At the same time, migrant women in Costa Rica are more likely to work than native-born women, who record an employment rate of 46%.

Figure 1.8. Migrant women in Costa Rica have very low employment rates, 2022 or last year available



Note: The OECD average is calculated as a simple average of all countries with available data for year 2022.

Source: OECD (2023^[45]), *OECD International Migration Outlook 2023*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b0f40584-en>.

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Migrant workers concentrate in sectors and occupations that generally native-born consider less attractive, either reflecting their low pay, and worse working conditions, or because natives are increasingly overqualified for such jobs. In Costa Rica, migrant women are by far most likely to be employed in domestic household activities, such as maids, caretakers, and babysitters, for example (Table 1.2). Taken together, these activities employ 32% of total migrant women, followed by trade and repair (16%), hotels and restaurants (15%) and the manufacturing industry (12%). By comparison, migrant men are more likely to be employed in the construction sector (27%) and agriculture and fisheries (19%). Taken together, more than 90% of foreign-born men and women in paid work are employed in low- and medium-skilled jobs, a share about 20 percentage points higher than among the native-born population (UNDP, OECD and IDB, 2023^[46]).

Table 1.2. Gender differences in employment characteristics between native and migrant workers

Second quarter of 2023, percentage shares of employment by industry, level of qualification, and formal/informal type

	Native born			Foreign born		
	Men	Women	Men-women	Men	Women	Men-women
	Sectors of activity					
Agriculture, livestock, and fisheries	13.9	2.8	11.2	18.9	3.8	15.1
Manufacturing industry	13.5	12.5	1.0	9.3	12.3	-2.9
Construction	8.6	0.3	8.3	27.1	0.4	26.7
Trade and repair	18.5	18.0	0.5	12.1	15.6	-3.5
Transport and storage	7.7	1.7	6.0	5.1	0.3	4.8
Hotels and restaurants	4.1	9.0	-4.9	3.1	14.7	-11.6
Financial intermediation and insurance	2.2	2.4	-0.2	1.6	1.0	0.6
Professional and administrative support activities	9.4	9.0	0.4	11.3	6.0	5.3
Public administration	4.1	5.1	-1.0	0.9	0.1	0.8
Education and health	6.6	17.9	-11.3	2.9	6.1	-3.2
Communication and other services	7.9	9.3	-1.4	6.2	7.7	-1.4
Households as employers	0.8	11.1	-10.3	1.3	32.0	-30.7
Other not specified	2.7	1.0	1.7	0.2	0.1	0.1
Total ¹	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0	
	Levels of qualification					
High	21.8	29.0	-7.1	7.6	8.4	-0.8
Medium	56.4	52.8	3.7	49.4	50.5	-1.1
Low	21.4	18.0	3.4	43.0	41.1	1.9
Not specified	0.3	0.2	0.1	-	-	-
Total ¹	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0	
	Formal and informal ²					
With a formal employment	62.3	62.7	-0.3	45.5	49.8	-4.3
With an informal employment	37.7	37.3	0.3	54.5	50.2	4.3
Total ¹	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0	

Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Informal employment includes the following workers: i) wage earners not registered with social security by their employers; ii) unpaid care workers, iii) self-employed and employers who are owner of unincorporated enterprises (not registered in the national property register and that do not keep formal accounts).

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (Costa Rica) (2023^[47]), Encuesta Continua de Empleo al segundo trimestre de 2023, indicadores generales del ii trimestre del 2023 de la condición de actividad según país de nacimiento.

In Costa Rica, as elsewhere in the world, one important factor that pushes many women to withdraw (at least temporarily) from the labour force is motherhood. Figures provided by the INEC for the second quarter of 2023 (*Sinopsis sobre las mujeres en edad de trabajar con hijos(as) en el hogar o fuera del hogar y mujeres sin hijos(as) según condición de actividad*) illustrate the medium-term effect of this so-called motherhood penalty showing that 45% of the women with children between 0 and 5 years were employed, less than observed for the group of women with children in the age between 6 and 14 years (53%).

Recent cross-country assessment of the links between motherhood and labour market outcomes in four Latin American countries – Chile, Mexico, Peru and Honduras – confirms that motherhood lowers women's labour supply, while at the same time shifting occupational choices towards more flexible jobs, such as part-time jobs, self-employment, and informal work arrangements (Berniell et al., 2021^[48]). The authors underline that, although these effects occur right after childbirth, they tend to persist in the medium and

longer term. Given that fathers' labour outcomes remain unaffected, these findings reveal that motherhood triggers a polarisation of labour markets, with higher quality jobs more likely to be a prerogative of men while women are more likely to work in low-quality occupations.

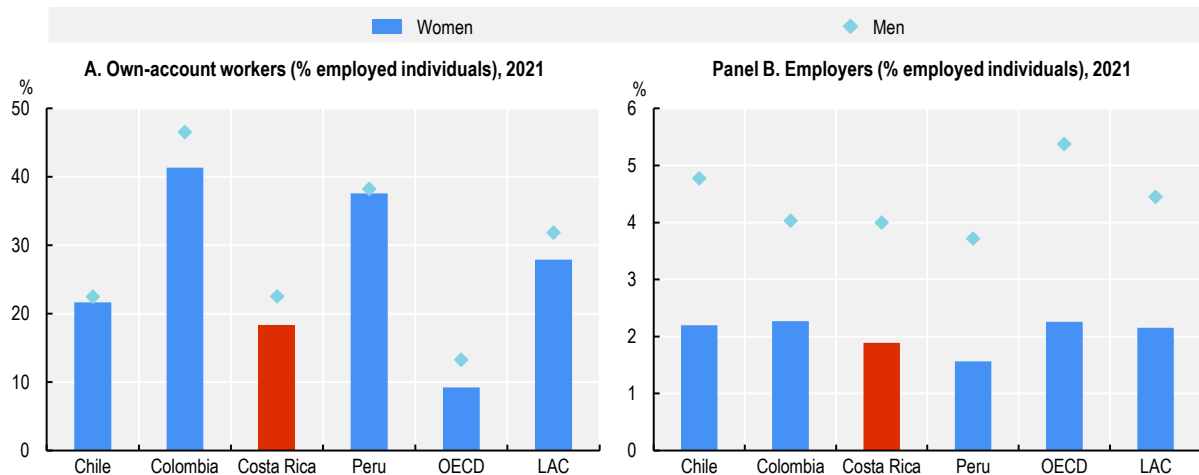
As illustrated by Table 1.1, the gender employment gap widens significantly with age in Costa Rica, ranging from 7 percentage points for the age group between 15 and 24 years to 27 and 32 percentage points for the age groups between 25 and 44 years and 45 years and above, respectively. In Costa Rica, the age of mothers at the time of their first child is close to 24 years, compared to almost 30 years on average in the OECD (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2019^[49]) (OECD, forthcoming). This suggests that undertaking more care responsibilities considerably reduces the ability of women to find their way in the labour market since these increased responsibilities often coincide with prime ages for accumulating and consolidating work experience.

The motherhood penalty likely leads to a deterioration of labour market conditions for women. Empirical investigation by (Berniell et al., 2021^[50]) focused on Chile has revealed that in order to find the flexibility that they need for family-work balance, many Chilean women opt in favour of an informal job. More specifically, the birth of the first child is accompanied with a strong increase in labour informality among working mothers (38%), while fathers' outcomes remain largely unaffected. The extent of the effect decreases with higher levels of education, implying a milder effect among highly educated women. INEC's figures (*Sinopsis sobre las mujeres en edad de trabajar con hijos(as) en el hogar o fuera del hogar y mujeres sin hijos(as) según condición de actividad*) suggest that a similar relation between motherhood and the quality of jobs could also be at work in Costa Rica: in the second quarter of 2023, 44.4% of the overall number of employed women with at least one child were employed in the informal sector, which compares to 23.8% for the group of women without children.

Mirroring the impact on employment rates, motherhood appears to negatively affect women's wages. A study shows that mothers in Latin America earn on average 13% less than women with no children. The gap widens to 21% when children are under the age of five and each additional child translates into a higher probability of experiencing a wage loss (Botello, H. A., & López Alba, A., 2014^[51]). Work for Costa Rica carried out by the United Nations – the *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL) – finds evidence of an increase of the gender wage gap with age, even if by relatively little (Torres and Zaclicever, 2022^[52]). According to the authors, the lower wages that women obtain are not explained by their level of skills or job characteristics of female workers, but reflect persistent gender discrimination, strong gender norms, and the unequal sharing of unpaid domestic and care work.

In Costa Rica, 99% of all enterprises are micro, small and medium-sized (MSMEs), of which 84% are micro-enterprises, 13% small enterprises and 3% medium-sized enterprises (OECD, 2021^[53]; OECD, 2023^[54]). In the second quarter of 2023, the self-employed represented 23% of the employed population (INEC, 2023^[55]). As in many countries around the world, the rate of own-account workers is lower for women than for men – although, at about 5 percentage points, the difference is not out of line with the average of LAC countries (Figure 1.9). Another feature is that a very small proportion of these MSMEs are headed by owners who employ people on a stable basis. Most owners work alone, with their partners or with people who help occasionally. In the comparison between men and women, the proportion of women micro-entrepreneurs who are also employers is smaller than the proportion of men employers.

Figure 1.9. A smaller share of female workers are employers



Note: The Latin American and Caribbean region average (LAC) refers to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay where available. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: ILO Stat Employment by sex and status in employment – ILO modelled estimates, November 2022.

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The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs includes an indicator of women’s economic progress, the Women’s Advancement Outcome, obtained after weighting various positions as business leaders, professionals, entrepreneurs, and labour force participants. According to the latest assessment, out of 65 countries Costa Rica scores 14th in the indicator Women’s Advancement Outcome, which places Costa Rica 2nd in Latin America, after Colombia (itself 2nd in the overall ranking) and ahead of Brazil (15th in the overall ranking), Uruguay (24th) and Ecuador (27th) (Mastercard, 2022^[56]).

However, the INEC finds that necessity remains an important driver of the decision to launch new businesses in Costa Rica (INEC, 2023^[57]). Specifically, it identifies three main reasons for starting a new business: i) *necessity*, which includes not finding work as an employee, not having another job, the need to support the family income, and achieving greater flexibility of time; ii) *opportunity*, particularly having found a market opportunity and the desire to settle a company independently; and iii) *tradition*, namely the continuation of a pre-existing family business and inheritance. As many as 47% of the businesses surveyed by the INEC declare to have started out of necessity, 38% to seize an opportunity and 15% to continue a family activity. When looking at the gender differentiation of these drivers, 57% of women indicate that they primarily launched their business out of necessity, significantly higher than the corresponding men’s share (42%). Conversely, the proportion of men indicating that family tradition/inheritance play an important role is higher than observed among women – 19% and 7%, respectively. This likely reflects the influence of cultural norms according to which sons are better placed to take over a family business than girls.

Interestingly, gaining more flexibility in the use of time does not stand out as a prominent factor influencing the decision to start a small business in Costa Rica. Unlike the outcomes of a recent survey among entrepreneurs in the member countries of the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru) this driver is the least frequently mentioned by women in Costa Rica (2.5% of all answers). By contrast, the answer “more flexible hours” received the highest score among women in the countries of the Pacific Alliance. Conversely, the answer “I developed a product or service”, highlighting the importance of an opportunity-driven entrepreneurial activity, gathered most male responses and the fewest responses by women. Additionally, the survey results show that women’s businesses are over-represented in sectors

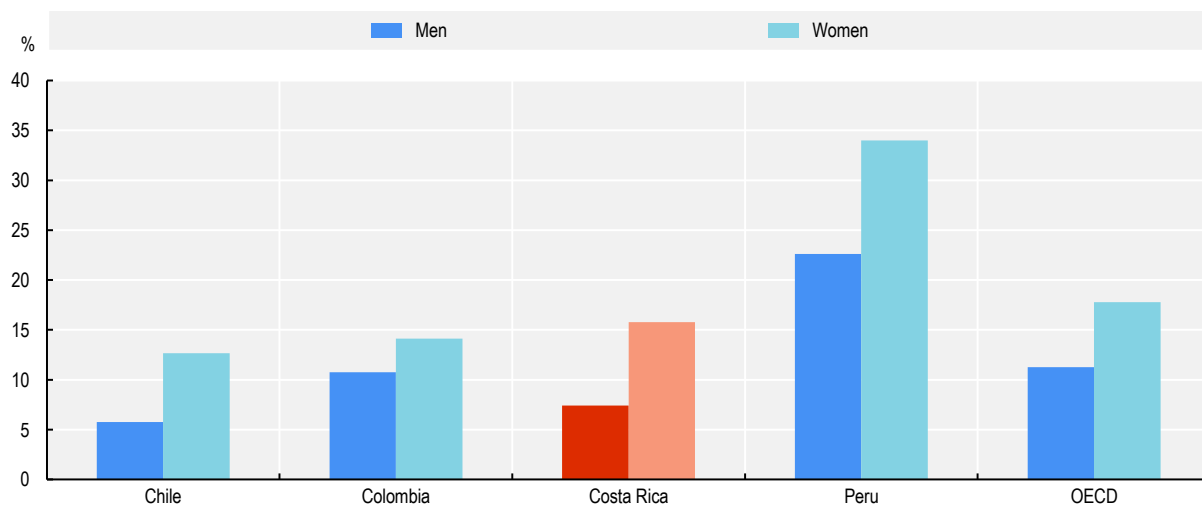
such as domestic services (69%) and under-represented in sectors such as financial services (12%) (OEAP, 2018^[58]). Women's businesses grow more slowly in terms of assets than men's and tend to concentrate in the least profitable sectors.

As employees, women in Costa Rica are overrepresented in activities generally associated with relatively low labour earnings. Data by the INEC (*Sinopsis sobre la población ocupada, brecha y diferencial del ingreso bruto medio según características del empleo por sexo y jornada de trabajo*) show that in the second quarter of 2023, four branches combined accounted for 57% of total employed women and 29% of employed men, respectively: i) trade and repair; ii) hotels and restaurants; iii) education and healthcare; and iv) households as employers. Labour market segregation by gender is persistent, i.e. observable both horizontally (across areas of activity in which women appear to be over-represented) and vertically (in terms of occupational position and lack of access to managerial positions). In the second quarter of 2023, the occupational group encompassing directors, managers, professionals, scientists, and intellectuals accounted about 275 000 individuals, with the split between men and women being 53% and 47%.

The above patterns are reflected in the gender distribution of earnings, which shows that in Costa Rica, women working full time are around 2 times more likely than men to earn less than two-thirds of the median wage (Figure 1.10). The INEC produces monthly estimates of the gross (monetary and non-monetary, i.e. in-kind) income of self-employed and wage earners. The definition focusses on employed individuals whose known incomes is greater than zero, thus neglecting unpaid workers. On this account, INEC's estimates show that in the second quarter of 2023, women made on average 91.1% of what men earned. Across skill levels, this figure varied between 91.5% for high-skilled workers, 76.0% for middle-skilled workers and 79.3% low-skilled workers (*Sinopsis sobre la población ocupada, brecha y diferencial del ingreso bruto medio según características del empleo por sexo y jornada de trabajo*).

Figure 1.10. In Costa Rica, as elsewhere, women are more likely to be low paid

Share of full-time workers earning less than two-thirds of the median wage, 2022 or latest year available



Note: Data refer to 2021 for Chile, 2018 for Peru, 2021 for the OECD average otherwise 2022. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD LFS, Decile ratios of gross earnings, Incidence of low pay, and calculations based on INE (2019), Encuesta Nacional de Hogares 2018.

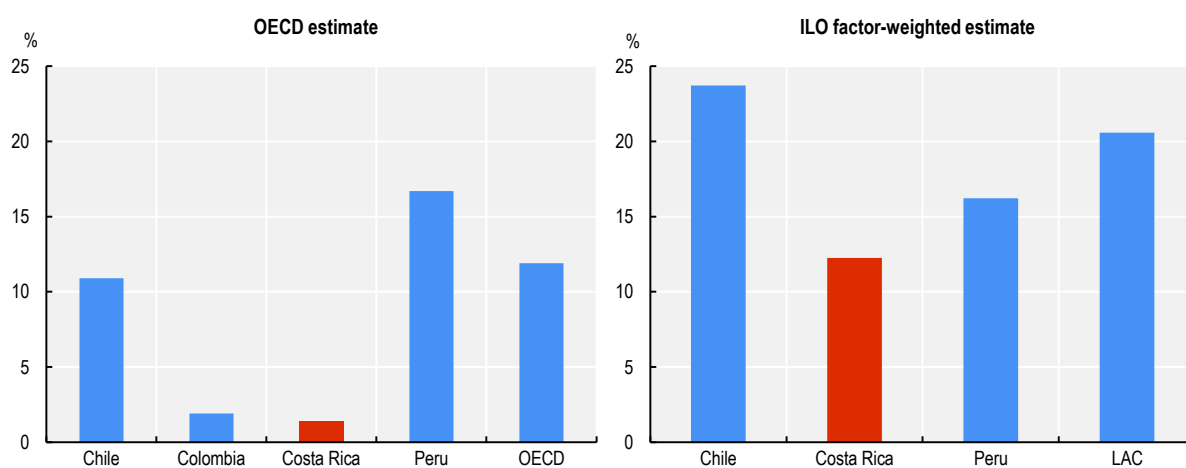
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Using figures of the median monthly wages of men and women working full time, women in Costa Rica earn 1.4% less than men, which is somewhat similar to Colombia (about 2.0%), and lower than other countries in the LAC region: Chile (10.9%) and Peru (16.7%) (Figure 1.11). It is also lower than that of the OECD average (12%).

More granular data from INEC's survey of companies (*Encuesta Nacional a Empresas*) show that gaps are observable at all levels of responsibilities, including managerial ones. At the same time, analysis of average monthly wages reveals that the wage gap between women and men is less pronounced among the population working 40 or more hours per week than among the population working less than 40 hours per week (INEC, 2022^[59]).

Figure 1.11. Using the OECD definition, the gender pay gap in Costa Rica is rather low

Gender pay gap, 2022 or latest year available



Note: The OECD pay gap is equal to the difference in the median monthly wages of male and female full-time employees. The ILO factor-adjusted pay gap is based on hourly wages and includes both part- and full-time dependent workers. It is equal to a population-size weighted sum of the gender pay gap for different subgroups defined by four education and age groups each, full- and part-time work status and private versus public sector employment. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD, "Gender wage gap", Employment Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54751>; own calculations based on the INE (2019), Encuesta Nacional de Hogares; and ILO (2018), Global Wage Report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps. Data refer to 2021 for Chile, 2018 for Peru, 2021 for the OECD average otherwise 2022.

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Drivers of gender gaps in outcomes

If the gender gap in economic outcomes was explained by worker's levels of education, work experience and skills required to fulfil specific tasks and responsibilities, the closing of gaps in educational outcomes between men and women should have led to a decrease in gender inequality in Costa Rica. However, as in other countries, human capital characteristics are not sufficient to explain persistent gender gaps. The gap in labour force participation and wages between men and women remain large in Costa Rica, which relates to structural and deeply embedded factors that are linked to social institutions in general, to the unequal sharing of unpaid work, traditional gender roles, norms, and laws, gender-based violence and access to infrastructure (Bertrand, 2020^[60]; Ciminelli and Schwellnus, 2021^[61]). The disadvantages women face are intersectional in nature. In other words, they interact with risk factors such as being young, living in a rural area, coming from a poor household, or belonging to an indigenous population group.

Drivers of gender gaps in outcomes trace back to the traditional gender-related assignment of roles, whereby women do most of the unpaid domestic work, alongside caring for children and other family members. The influence of cultural factors, gender norms, perceptions and attitudes and their interplay in influencing preferences and actual behaviours may still be strong. In addition, laws and institutions play a role in reinforcing these interactions, such as inequalities of access to the property and uses of land, for example. Finally, access to infrastructure also matters, with the availability of quality care facilities and the supporting physical infrastructure representing one example. The remainder of this section provides an overview of these factors, which complement the role that human capital plays in shaping economic outcomes across gender.

Recent analysis of Costa Rica by the United Nations – the *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL) – has distinguished between two drivers of the gender wage gap, direct causes of wage differentiation attributable to observable labour market factors (such as the individual characteristics of the workers, or jobs) and indirect causes ascribable to discrimination (Torres and Zalcicever, 2022^[52]). The authors find that in the period between 2001 and 2009 the direct and indirect sources of the wage gap have operated in opposite directions with the latter ultimately prevailing on the former.

Unpaid work

As discussed above, one key reason for the lower labour force participation and higher part-time employment rate of women is the higher number of hours that they spend on unpaid care and domestic work. International figures suggest that women in Costa Rica spend 40 hours per week performing these tasks, compared to 17 hours spent by men. In other words, women spend- 23 more hours more than men on unpaid care and domestic work. Compared to the gender gap in unpaid work in other countries in the region, Costa Rica is aligned to Chile, slightly above Colombia (22 hours), and below Peru (24 hours), but significantly above the average of OECD countries (15 hours) (Figure 1.12, Panel A). At the same time, in Costa Rica men devote 15 more hours to paid work activities per week than women do (same difference as in Chile), which is lower than in Colombia (23 more hours) and higher than the OECD average (12 hours). Problems start early, as international data showing that teenage girls do more unpaid work and teenage boys more paid work (Figure 1.12, Panel B). On average, girls in Costa Rica spend, 5 hours per week more on unpaid work than boys, time that is most likely dedicated to domestic and care work.

As noted above, parenthood can further magnify pre-existing gaps in the distribution between paid and unpaid work. The ENUT reveals that Costa Rican women in the age group between 12 and 19 years spend on average 15 hours and 58 minutes per week on unpaid work activities. For women in the age group between 18 and 29 years this time increases to 33 hours and 13 minutes per week (INEC, 2023^[62]). In Costa Rica, the age of mothers at the time of their first child has increased slowly over time, and is now close to 24 years, compared to almost 30 years on average in the OECD (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2019^[49]; OECD, 2024^[63]).

Figure 1.12. Women and girls in Costa Rica carry out more hours of unpaid work than men and boys



Note: Panel A: Data for LAC countries refer to population aged 15+. Given that the survey instruments of the time use surveys are not identical across countries, more attention should be paid to intra- than to cross-country comparisons. The reference year is 2021 for Colombia, 2017 for Costa Rica, 2015 for Chile, 2010 for Peru and around 2014 for the non-weighted OECD cross-country average. The OECD average refers to the entire population aged 15-64 and is calculated by multiplying daily time use values by seven. Panel B: The Colombian average for teenagers refers to 10-17 year-olds. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: Panel A: OECD Time Use Dataset (February 2023) and ECLAC CEPALSTAT Gender Statistical System (Working Time by type of work); Panel B: ECLAC (2018), Los cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe.

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In Costa Rica, 40% of families with at least one child under 15 years register one partner who works full-time and the other who does not work for pay (Table 1.3, Panel A). This is more than 10 percentage points higher than the OECD average (26%), which, conversely, registers higher shares of couples with both partners working full-time, or one partner working full-time and the other part-time. It is noteworthy that Costa Rica displays a very low share of both working partners (19%), not only in the comparison with the OECD average (47%) but also the other countries in the region.

More than a third (34%) of single parents do not work in Costa Rica (Table 1.3, Panel B), significantly more than the OECD average, as well as the regional comparator countries, Chile, Colombia and Peru. The latest figures show that in 2023 out of a total of 1 526 337 mothers in Costa Rica, 44% were head of households and 74% were living in urban areas (INEC, 2023^[64]). In terms of poverty distribution, 17% of all mothers live in poverty and almost 8% in extreme poverty.

The unequal sharing of unpaid work in families, small shares of families where both partners work full-time, and the comparatively high share of single parents who are not working may have different reasons. It can be practical and temporary choice, for example, if a mother is still breast-feeding or has children who cannot benefit from childcare services outside the family circle. However, it often reflects cultural attitudes, according to which care, and housework duties are “women’s prerogatives”. Financial considerations often compound the influence of these factors even further, with men earning more than women on average.

Table 1.3. In over a third of families with children in Costa Rica, one partner does not work

A. Distribution (%) of employment patterns in couples with at least one child aged 0-14, 2021 or most recent year					
	Both partners work full-time	One partner works full-time, one partner part-time	One partner works full-time, one partner not working	Both partners are not working	One partner works part-time, one partner is not working
Chile	39.0	9.6	44.5	3.0	3.9
Colombia	31.8	15.4	46.6	2.6	3.6
Costa Rica	18.9	7.9	40.4	1.8	30.9
Peru	35.2	32.0	22.8	1.2	8.7
OECD average	46.5	15.9	25.9	3.9	7.8

B. Distribution (%) of single parents with at least one child aged 0-14 by employment status, 2021 or most recent year				
	Working full-time	Working part-time	Working – no information on hours	Not working
Chile	57.2	13.5	0.1	29.3
Colombia	58.8	15.4		25.8
Costa Rica	44.6	21.5		33.9
Peru	64.7	24.8		10.5
OECD average	57.1	14.1	1.1	27.6

Note: Data for Chile refer to 2017 and for Peru to 2018. For Chile, the distinction between part-time and full-time work is based on actual hours worked in the main job during the survey reference week, rather than usual weekly working hours. For Peru, working hours were imputed when responses were missing. For Colombia and Costa Rica data refer to the employment status of the two parents in “two parent households” or “couple families” with at least one child aged 0-14, rather than to couples themselves. For Costa Rica data cover households where at least one child (aged 0-14) shares a relationship with the reported “head of household” only. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: OECD, “LMF2.2 Patterns of employment and the distribution of working hours for couples with children” and “LMF2.3 Patterns of employment and the distribution of working hours for single parents”, OECD Family Database, www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm, accessed on February 2023; and own estimations based on the INE (2019), Encuesta Nacional de Hogares.

As discussed in Box 1.1, Costa Rica combines one of the highest life expectancies in the LAC region with one of the lowest fertility rates, implying that the group of older people is set to grow at a much faster speed than the youth population. Long-term care needs will continue to grow in the coming decades, driven by population ageing and the prevalence of chronic diseases. Around 280 000 people in Costa Rica – corresponding to 8% of the adult population – experience difficulties in carrying out basic activities of daily living (IDB, 2020^[65]).

In Costa Rica, the task of providing long term support care for people with care dependence falls mainly on unpaid relatives, mainly women. The most vulnerable households are those composed by only elderly people, and those with two or more members in need. Family caregivers spend on average seven hours a week to support care-dependent people, and women spend twice as many hours as men (IDB, 2020^[65]). The growing participation of women in the labour market will reduce the time that they can devote to these activities. In addition, the decline in fertility and the fragmentation of housing into smaller residential entities – driven mainly by the growth of single-parent households in urban centres – will increasingly limit the capacity of the family to provide unpaid support services. These contrasting patterns suggest that expanding the coverage and quality of paid care services will be at the forefront of the policy agenda.

The IMF has pointed out that the explanations of the relatively low labour force participation of women in Costa Rica have to be weighted with economic considerations, particularly the status as a middle-income country (Kochhar et al., 2017^[23]). In low-income countries, defined in terms of GDP per capita, many women work out of necessity, mainly in subsistence agriculture or home-based production. As income rises, activity shifts from agriculture to industry, which opens new employment opportunities in more

productive activities with better paid jobs. However, these new jobs tend to be located further away from the home, implying that it becomes more difficult for women to balance a job in the labour market with family responsibilities for home production and caring of the children. A similar explanation is given by Claudia Goldin (1994^[66]), who finds evidence of a U-shaped curve for women's employment participation. As countries develop, economic activity shifts from agriculture to industry. Women's income becomes less crucial to secure the livelihood of the household, while manual jobs are linked to social stigma. This triggers a reallocation of women's time to unpaid domestic and care work and lowers their labour force participation. As women's levels of education increase and countries further develop towards a larger share of service activities, however, more women (re-)enter the labour market, with their potential income from paid work surpassing the value of the unpaid work they provide in the household. If this historical pattern holds for Costa Rica, given the impressive gains in educational attainment of younger women, the country is likely to witness future increases in female employment.

Perceptions and attitudes

Perceptions and attitudes that reflect stereotypes and biases about gender influence female employment in multiple ways. Women who believe that their role is in the home will likely feel less inclined to seek outside employment (Christiansen et al., 2016^[67]). This supply effect often appears compounded by the attitude of partners if they not only hold the same view but also believe that it is their right to impose it on the spouse. Restrictive masculinities, such as that "real" men should be the breadwinner and earn more than the woman, can contribute to the exclusion of women from paid employment in general, and better quality positions that are higher paid (OECD, 2021^[68]). In addition, attitudes about gender roles in the labour market can influence the demand for female jobs: employers who believe that certain jobs should go to men as a priority, will less likely hire women, or pay them the same wage. In countries where more men than women believe that scarce jobs should go to men first, the gender pay gap tends to be larger (Fortin, 2005^[69]). On the other hand, if women's employment expands it will likely generate positive feedback effects on gender attitudes, improving them over time (Seguino, 2007^[70]).

The *Cuarta Encuesta Nacional de Percepción de los Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres en Costa Rica* (ENPEDEMU, Fourth National Survey on the Perception of Women Human Rights in Costa Rica) by the *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (National Institute of Women) provides detailed insights on gendered roles and stereotypes in Costa Rica (INAMU, 2022^[71]). Regarding the limitations that women face when participating in politics, 83% of the total surveyed population (84% among women and 81% among men) consider that machismo hinders the participation of women in political parties and government bodies. This opinion is more frequent among people in the age bracket between 18 and 24 years (87%) and with a higher level of education (88%).

Most interviewed individuals, with virtually no difference between women (79%) and men (80%), agree with the statement that women and men have equal labour rights. However, support to the statement that women in Costa Rica face greater difficulties in obtaining a job compared to men is significantly stronger among women (74%) than men (66%). In addition, 62% of women and 52% of men agree that companies in Costa Rica prefer to hire men. People of relatively young age (between 25 and 39 years) and holding a higher education degree tend to be more likely to share these perceptions.

The fact that 50% of women, as opposed to 43% of men, disagree with the statement that the right to equal pay is respected in Costa Rica reveals that perceptions around the issue of wage equality are polarised. A similar polarisation is generated by the statement according to which "the wage of the women is a support to the family economy": 51% of women and 45% of men agree with this belief. At the same time, the statement "women should work only part-time so that they can take care of their children and others" is supported by 55% of women and 48% of men.

A majority of respondents (84% of women and 82% of men) agreed that women and men in Costa Rica are given the same opportunities to finish their studies. However, the percentage falls to 69% when the

question is refined to address opportunities of access to a university career, with women perceiving more obstacles than men in completing a higher education programme. Among respondent women, the two main obstacles to completing their studies are lack of economic resources (58%) and early pregnancy and motherhood (57%).

Institutions and laws

Analysis across developing and emerging economies finds that equality under the law, the respect of the right of equal inheritance and the right for women to be head of household are associated with a decline in the gender gap in labour force participation of around 4.6 percentage points (Gonzales et al., 2015^[72]). The OECD report on *Public Governance in Costa Rica* includes an overview of legal and institutional arrangements for advancing gender equality in the country, using the benchmarks of the OECD 2015 *Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life* (OECD, 2021^[73]). The report praises Costa Rica for its well-developed legal and policy framework to promote gender equality, in line with general OECD practice. Since 1984, Costa Rica is a signatory to the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW). In addition, the *Ley de Promoción de la Igualdad Social de la Mujer* (Law for the Promotion of Social Equality for Women) establishes the obligation of the State to promote and guarantee equal rights for men and women in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields. It also mandates all public institutions to ensure that women are not discriminated against and that they have equal rights irrespective of their marital status. The state is tasked with promoting the creation and development of programmes and services to facilitate full participation of women in the economic, social, and cultural fields.

Costa Rica's whole-of-government policy framework for gender equality is reflected in the *Política Nacional para la Igualdad y Equidad de Género* (PIEG, National Policy on Equity and Gender Equality). The 2018-30 PIEG identifies four strategic policy axes, namely the promotion of: i) a culture of equal rights; ii) the equal distribution of time; iii) the equal distribution of wealth and iv) the equal distribution of power. For each area the PIEG gives indications on the management and governance model to follow, emphasising the importance of regional and local objectives, but also recommending the implementation of a result-oriented approach, so that the public can follow progress.

In line with OECD best practice, Costa Rica has a central institution in charge of the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (INAMU, National Women's Institute). For more than 30 years, with different names and specific characteristics, INAMU has acted as the main public body responsible for the promotion and protection of women's human rights. INAMU is an autonomous body headed by an Executive President with ministerial status (without portfolio), who participates in cabinet meetings. Its location within the government alongside its mandate and functions are in line with the general OECD practice (OECD, 2021^[73]). INAMU plays a leading role on the formulation of the national policy on gender equality; the protection of women's rights that are enshrined in declarations, conventions, and international treaties and in Costa Rican laws; and the co-ordination of sector-based actions for the national policy on gender equality. It has a mandate to prepare legislative proposals and to support the legislative process on issues related to women's rights, as well as to monitor the implementation of the PIEG.

Recently, the INEC and INAMU joined forces to design gender indicators and develop surveys to update the existing database. However, the OECD Public Governance report highlighted that gender-disaggregated data and the capacity of public institutions for its collection and integration into the policy process remain uneven. There appears to be room to further improve the administrative registration systems to help disaggregate the information collected by gender to strengthen the capacity to make policy projections (multi-annual budgets, and social forecasts).

Recent international surveys allow to compare Costa Rica with other countries on their achievements to improve the regulatory framework against gender discrimination. The OECD's Social Institutions and

Gender Index (OECD, 2023^[74]), which measures formal and informal laws, social norms and practices, rates the level of gender discrimination in Costa Rica as very low (Table 1.4). The World Bank Women, Business and the Law index scores Costa Rica 92 out of 100, higher than the LAC average but below the OECD average (Table 1.5). Women in Costa Rica have the same legal rights to “mobility” as men have, meaning, for example, the right to choose where to live and the right to apply for a passport. Concerning the workplace, a woman can get a job in the same way as a man and the law explicitly prohibits discrimination in employment based on gender. Furthermore, the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value is enshrined in the law. Other areas where rights are the same include “assets” and “pension”, implying, for example, that men and women have equal ownership rights to immovable property, while the age at which men and women can retire with a full pension is the same (65 years). However, there is room for improvements in the areas of entrepreneurship and parenthood since Costa Rica does not receive a full score in these areas. For example, the Business and Law index reveals that in Costa Rica the law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender. On parenthood, the World Bank was unable to locate applicable provisions mandating the right to a paid parental leave.

Table 1.4. The 2023 OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index suggests gender discrimination in Costa Rica is very low

	SIGI		Discrimination in the family		Restricted physical integrity		Restricted access to productive and financial resources		Restricted civil liberties	
	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.	Score	Cat.
Colombia	23.5	Low	21.9	Very low	28.6	Low	33.7	Medium	7.9	Very Low
Peru	18.6	Very Low	36.7	Medium	21.3	Low	8.6	Very low	4.5	Very Low
Costa Rica	10.9	Very Low	4.7	Very Low	20.8	Low	13.8	Very Low	7.1	Very Low
Chile	27.2	Low	8.5	Very Low	22.7	Low	60.6	Very High	7.1	Very Low
LAC	21		22		26		23		16	
OECD	15.3		13.6		18.5		12.7		15.1	

Note: The Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and OECD averages are unweighted means. The Latin American and the Caribbean average of the SIGI is based on Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala, Jamaica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. The discrimination in the family indicator is in addition based on Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Argentina, Panama and Venezuela (the latter three also for the productive and financial resources and civil liberties dimensions). For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/. Source: OECD (2023), “Social Institutions and Gender Index (Edition 2023)”, OECD International Development Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/33beb96e-en>.

Table 1.5. Costa Rica’s score on the 2023 Women, Business and the Law index is above the LAC average but lower than the OECD average

	WBL INDEX	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension
Chile	80	100	75	75	80	100	75	60	75
Colombia	84	100	100	50	100	100	75	100	50
Costa Rica	92	100	100	100	100	60	75	100	100
Peru	95	100	100	100	80	80	100	100	100
LAC	81	92	80	73	91	49	83	98	82
OECD	95	100	98	90	97	95	96	99	88

Note: The LAC and OECD averages are unweighted. For the index, 35 questions are scored across the eight indicators based on laws and regulations that were in force at the time of the development of the index. Overall scores were calculated by taking the average of each indicator, with 100 representing the highest possible score. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/. Source: World Bank (2023^[75]), Women, Business and the Law, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>.

Access to infrastructure

Opportunities of access to the physical and social infrastructure required for a functioning community can also shape differences in economic outcomes between men and women. Considerations about the quality of local transports, of services and facilities for childcare, elderly care, and the care of people with disabilities, of electricity and running water networks, influence, in turn, the capacity of household members to organise the use of their time – the hours they need to spend on commuting, looking after children, cooking, and cleaning, vis-a-vis the hours that they can devote to paid work. Meanwhile, how safe people feel when using the public service infrastructure affects the perception about the range of activities that they can pursue. If girls and women must cross poorly lit areas to get to school or to work, or if sexual harassment is common on public transport, they will avoid going out when it is dark or taking the bus. Insecurity limits the range of economic and leisure options open to women.

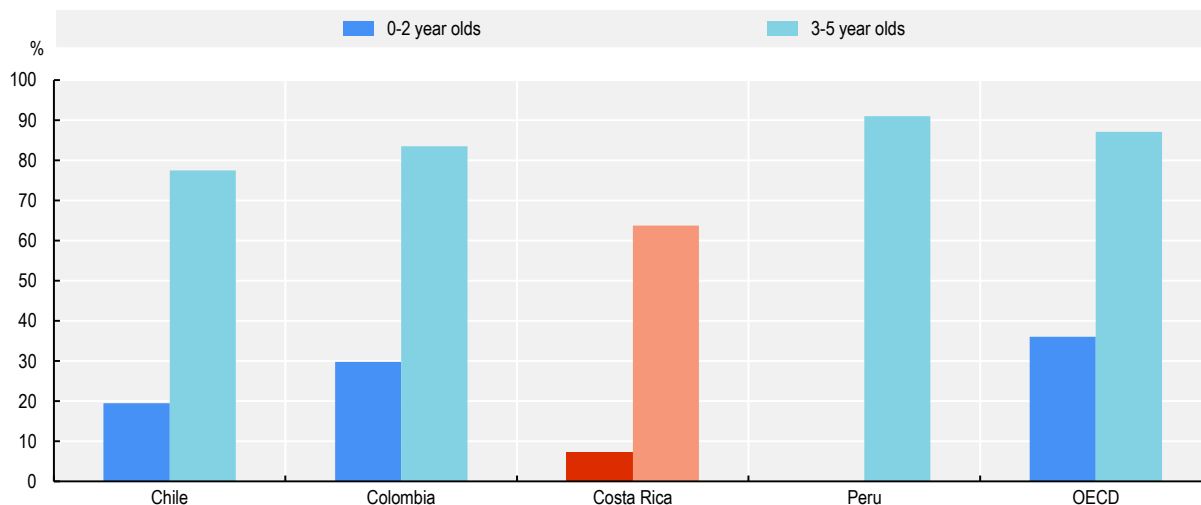
Sanitation conditions, including the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage disposal influence the amount of work required for maintaining a household in good condition and hours available for other activities. In addition, the access to electricity and labour-saving technologies – e.g. appliances, such as a washing machine –, massively reduce the physical and time effort needed to wash clothes, clean the home and cook. In Costa Rica, as of 2020, virtually all households had access to electricity, according to World Bank figures, with no difference between rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, access to electricity does not necessarily translate into widespread ownership of labour-saving appliances, especially by low-income households.

Although infrastructure plays an important role in facilitating women's participation in labour markets and public life more generally, coverage typically varies across geographic areas. Various types of higher quality infrastructure are generally available within the urban areas where well-off households live. Even if a certain infrastructure is not available in a particular area, wealthier people will likely be able to find alternatives. For example, high-income women can rely on private transport means, and instead of sending their children to a public day care centre, they will hire a nanny or pay for a private day care centre. These considerations point to the importance of the measures to offset inequalities of access and of strategic foresight, including on the matter of land uses. For example, if the investment plans of a municipality do not pay due attention to care needs, it will be difficult to increase services and the supporting infrastructure in a way capable of matching demand conditions.

Access to affordable and quality formal or informal childcare is a key factor in supporting the participation of women in the labour market (Mateo Díaz and Rodríguez-Chamussy, 2016^[76]). In addition, it is important that school times are compatible with work times. Costa Rica stands out in the international context as a country with very low access of children to early childhood education and care (ECEC), particularly from disadvantaged households (OECD, 2023^[77]). In Costa Rica, less than one in ten children under the age of three attends ECEC, while about six in ten pre-school children aged three to five years enrol in ECEC (Figure 1.13). These rates are lower than in other LAC countries and the OECD average.

Figure 1.13. One in three 3-5 years old are not in early childhood education

Percentage of children enrolled in early childhood education and care services or in primary education, by age group, 2020 or latest year available



Note: Data for Peru are not available for 0-2 year-olds. For more information, please refer to the OECD Database on Gender gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean under www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/gender/.

Source: For more information, see OECD, “Formal care and education for very young children – PF3.2 Enrolment in childcare and pre-school”, OECD Family Database, www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm and MINEDU (2019), “Tasa neta de asistencia, educación inicial (% de población con edades 3-5)”, Estadística de la Calidad Educativa.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/folswm>

Access to social protection such as unemployment insurance, sick leave, or pensions is worse for women than for men, as women are less likely to be in paid work, and if they are, work less hours and earn less compared to their male counterparts. Inequalities on the labour market between men and women translate into a gender pension gap towards the end of individual’s lives and put women more at risk of poverty in old age – in Costa Rica and elsewhere (OECD, 2021^[78]). Employed mothers are more likely than women without children to work in the informal sectors, where social protections such as maternity leave or unemployment insurance may not be enforced, and as a result, leave women more exposed to poverty and social exclusion.

Long and onerous commutes negatively affect the economic opportunities and well-being of both men and women. However, women and men do not necessarily have the same transport needs. Across many countries, men tend to spend more time commuting to and from work. Women, instead, frequently make short or multi-stop trips – for example, to drop children at school before work and to stop by the market on the way home from work. They are more likely to walk and to take public transport and less likely to drive (Duchene, 2011^[79]; Lecompte and Juan Pablo, 2017^[80]). Recent analysis by the Ministry of Transport finds that in Costa Rica different roles traditionally associated to gender result in differentiated patterns of use, access and transportation needs for men and women (MiTransporte, 2021^[81]). For example, out of the total number of people possessing a driving licence in the country 30% are women and close to 70% are men. Reflecting this split, the demand for public transport is higher among women than it is among men, with more women using this form of transport, regardless to whether they travel for work reasons, family reasons, leisure, or other reasons. Of all commuting women in Costa Rica, 77% use public transport, compared to 64% of men. Even where transport options are available, women may be reluctant to take them if they are afraid of being a victim of robbery, sexual harassment or being otherwise attacked (see

Chapter 2). OECD data (2023^[74]) suggests that 57% of women do not feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live, compared to 40% of men (see also Chapter 2).

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls represents a global issue, endemic to all regions of the world. Worldwide, nearly one-third of women experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2021^[82]). GBV exists in many different forms and may be experienced within family and intimate relationships, in public spaces, workplaces, and online (OECD, 2021^[83]). Acts of GBV can affect all aspects of survivors/victims' lives through physical and mental well-being consequences, including shame, and social stigma. Victims/survivors may experience negative social and economic impacts and are at a heightened risk of poverty and social exclusion, for example, they may face a loss of wages, or legal costs. GBV can affect their participation in education, employment civic life, or politics (OECD, 2023^[84]). Negative effects typically extend beyond the survivors/victims, directly impacting on their children, families, and overall society. Studies show that GBV has significant economic costs in terms of expenditures on service provision (such as shelters, emergency rooms, counselling services and increased healthcare costs), lost income for women and their families, decreased productivity in the workforce, and negative impact on future human capital formation. Although the economic effects of GBV are difficult to measure with precision, studies focused on intimate partner violence estimate that this form of violence alone can cost countries between 1-2% of their annual gross domestic product (OECD, 2021^[83]).

In Costa Rica the *Observatorio de violencia de género contra las mujeres y acceso a la justicia* (Observatory on gender-based violence against women and access to justice) is the entity tasked by the judiciary with tracking the prevention and punishment of the acts of violence against women. As part of this mission, the Observatory monitors the implementation of the 2005 *Ley de Penalización de la Violencia Contra las Mujeres* (LPVCM, Law on the Criminalization of Violence against Women) by collecting different types of complaints, disaggregated at the regional level. Between 2017 and 2022 about 123 715 complaints were filed in the Adult Criminal Prosecutors' Offices for offences in violation of the LPVCM. In 2022, a total of 23 163 complaints were filed, corresponding to an increase of almost 12% relative to the previous year (INEC, 2023^[85]). Due to underreporting, the real figure is likely to be even higher (see also Chapter 2). The most reported complaints were abuses (39% of total cases), violation of a precautionary measure of protection (26%), offences against dignity (20%), threats (10%) and property damage (1%).

From a geographical perspective, the two most inhabited districts of San José and Alajuela accounted for 52% of all cases. This concentration probably reflects the fact that access to the justice system is more evenly distributed in these districts. Conversely, in districts where access to the law is more unequal and dispersed, rates of under-reporting of gender-based violence tend to be higher. A recent World Bank study provides evidence from Peru's women's justice centres (WJCs), which are specialised institutions that provide police, medical, and legal services to reduce gender-based violence (Sviatschi and Trako, 2021^[86]). One main finding is that by increasing the likelihood of prosecution, better access to justice encourages a higher number of reporting cases of GBV. Countries that are most active in preventing and prosecuting violence against women often report high incidence rates, as underreporting decreases. The study also finds evidence of positive inter-generational transmission effects: children in primary school living from potentially abusive households located near a WJC are significantly more likely to attend school and pass a grade and less likely to drop out. Work by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has highlighted that although gender-based violence is present in both the urban and rural areas, the specific connotations differ, notably there are fewer collective resources for seeking support in the latter than the former where services are more present (Allison Quintanilla Hernández and Rebeca Arguedas-Ramírez, 2020^[87]).

The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated the prevalence of GBV worldwide (OECD, 2023^[84]). During periods of confinement and social distancing, women experienced higher risks of gender-based and

domestic violence. Social and economic stressors caused by the inability to leave the home, the loss of social interactions, all-day presence of children after school closures, job loss, and health stress, translated into higher risks of violence. At the same time, the restrictions on individuals' freedom of movement increased abusers' control over women and girls during mandatory lockdowns. Victims of intimate partner violence faced more difficulty attempting to leave their households or to call emergency hotlines with their abusers present. In Costa Rica, during the period between January and March 2020 there were 14 513 complaints of physical violence, representing an increase of 14% over the same period a year earlier. In 2021, there were 19 cases of femicide in Costa Rica, or 0.7 per 100.000 women, an improvement from 2020 (when the rate was 1.1) but no progress from 2019 (CEPAL, 2022^[88]; Poder Judicial, 2023^[89]).

The pandemic also revealed important challenges for disadvantaged women. For example, UN Women expressed concerns that reports and calls to the hotline did not increase among migrant, asylum-seeker and cross-border inhabitant women, due to lack of economic resources, poor connection, long distance, and transportation difficulties (UN Women, 2020^[90]). In addition, the pandemic brought to public attention the fact that rapidly increasing reliance on digital technology during confinement can also have implications for GBV. While some women were able to increase their connections to the outside world through technology, others experienced further control and alienation because their partners limited their access to mobile phones and computers.

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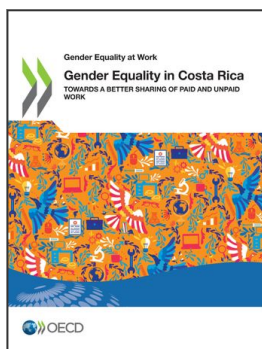
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