

Costa Rica should ensure that all children have access to quality education

03/08/2017 – Costa Rica's education system has made impressive progress in access in the past two decades, but it must evolve to ensure education remains an engine for the country's development, according to a new OECD report.

“If education is to remain an engine for economic and social development in the country, Costa Rica needs to accelerate progress to foster quality education for all” noted Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, at the launch of the *Education in Costa Rica* report headed by President Luis Guillermo Solís, Minister of Public Education, Sonia Marta Mora, and the Minister for Foreign Trade, Alexander Mora, in San José on August 3rd.

Education in Costa Rica has been crucial in building one of the most stable democracies, with a highly-skilled labour force and highest levels of well-being in Latin America. The stagnation of education outcomes in the last decade, together with widening inequality and slow growth however risks stalling the country's further development.

The education sector now faces the challenge of providing quality education for all. The expansion of access to education in recent decades has been impressive. However, Costa Rica's 15-year-olds performed on average two years below their peers in OECD countries in PISA 2015 and 33% of them lack core competencies in science, reading and mathematics. The gap between different social across socio-economic groups also remains large: only 7.5% of disadvantaged students access university compared to 54% of advantaged students. To improve education outcomes, the OECD report recommends:

- Giving higher priority in public spending and policy to early childhood education and care, considering the role it can play in the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, focusing on the most disadvantaged populations.
- Putting learning outcomes at the centre point of policy and practice in basic education. A shared understanding of “good teaching” should guide teacher policy from recruitment to professional development to consolidate a high-quality profession.
- Making upper secondary education more inclusive to reflect its new role as the final stage of schooling and career gateway for all Costa Ricans. Providing additional resources to vulnerable schools through the *Yo me apunto* is a promising initiative to tackle drop out.
- Reforming quality assurance, funding and governance in tertiary education is crucial to ensure that the sector supports and meets the development goals of Costa Rica. The accreditation of programmes in key fields will be an important first step to guarantee a minimum level of quality in private universities.

Costa Rica is admired worldwide for its strong commitment to education. At 7.6% of GDP, Costa Rica allocates a greater share of its national wealth to education than any other country. But those resources need to be invested strategically to ensure that this investment accelerates economic and social progress in the country.

For further information on *Review of National Policies for Education: Education in Costa Rica*, journalists should contact the OECD Media Office (+ 33 1 45 24 97 00).

Hyperlink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264277335-en>