

2011

# Education Overview



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## Costa Rica

### Education Overview

The Costa Rican workforce is recognized for its high educational standards and its outstanding productivity level. These capabilities are not only the result of recent efforts, but also the expected consequence of a historical commitment towards the attainment of higher economic growth and improvement of the standards of living, through an energetic and widespread educational policy at all levels of instruction.

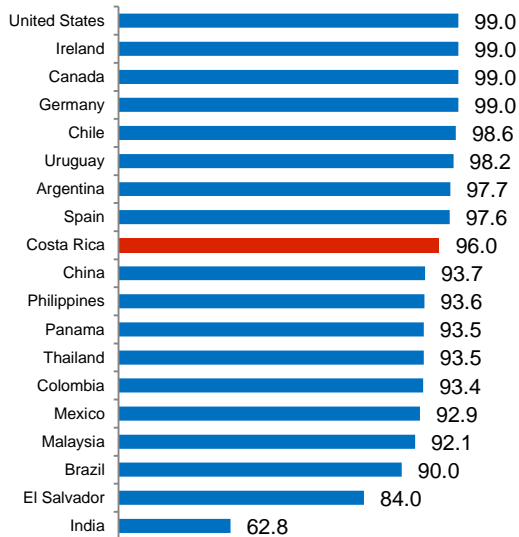
Education is free and mandatory since 1870. This has established the foundations for a continuous improvement of university education and technical training, which in turn have enhanced the business environment and attracted foreign companies to set up in Costa Rica.

In order to provide sufficient resources to finance the ambitious national objective of guaranteeing universal access to quality education, the government is constitutionally required to allocate at least 8% of the country's GDP from its annual budget to educational programs.

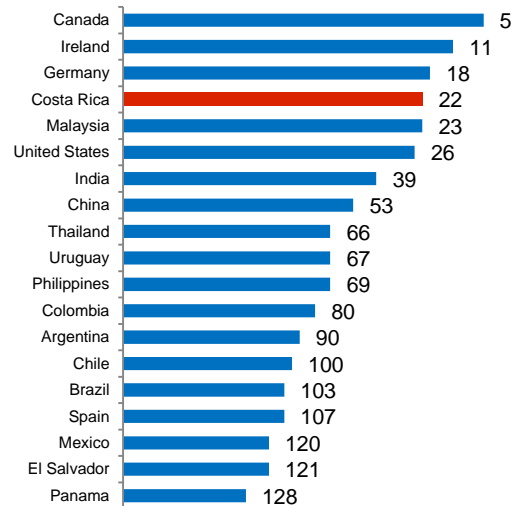
## Literacy

Costa Rica's literacy rate is one of the highest in Latin America and developing countries. According to the United Nations Human Development Report 2010, Costa Rica's literacy rate is 96.0%. It is the 5<sup>th</sup> in Latin America. Our educational system is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> worldwide, the highest in Latin America.

**Adult Literacy Rate**  
Rate (%)



**Quality of the Educational System**  
Rank



Sources: Human Development Report 2010; World Economic Forum: The Global Competitvness Report 2010-2011

The educational approach has gone beyond teaching of reading and writing. The Ministry of Education has set up programs to guarantee literacy in computer sciences at international standards and English as a second language. The Government is committed to providing additional resources to enhance the existing programs and create new ones specially designed for adults.

*English as a second language*

The National English Plan “Costa Rica Multilingual” is a response to the country's need to comply with the productive sector’s increasing demand for human capital with English language proficiency.

The most important actions of this program are:

- Review and implementation of programs and educational methodologies
- Teacher training and education
- Training programs at all levels for students and professionals
- Professional certifications

The National English Plan uses the Common European Framework (CEF) to establish its goals. The CEF determines clear categories grouped by skill level domain available to the person. The goals of the plan are:

Year	2012	2017
C1 Level	10 thousand people	25% of high school graduates
B2 Level	20 thousand people	50% of high school graduates
B1 Level	10 thousand people	25% of high school graduates

The C1 level graduate is a "competent user". The B2 level graduate understands the main ideas of complex texts and communicates with relative ease and spontaneity. The B1 level graduate comprehends the main ideas of information in standard language.

This plan is already generating strong results; according to *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* (INA) and *Consejo Nacional de Rectores* (CONARE), in the year 2010: 13,000 people graduated from *Conversational English Courses*, 20,000 people enrolled in conversational English courses in language academic institutes, besides 500 new English language professionals entered the market in 2010 to improve the population's skills.

## Elementary School

The high literacy rate that Costa Rica has attained over the years is primarily due to an elementary public school system, which is free and mandatory to all children between the ages of 6 and 13. According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011, Costa Rica's primary education enrollment rate is ranked first worldwide.

The main characteristics of elementary school are:

- Begins at kindergarten
- Has a total of 6 grades
- Students usually graduate at age 12
- More than 90% of institutions are public

There are according to the Ministry of Public Education, 2,809 preschools, and 4,077 elementary schools. Schools are allowed to change the curricula to satisfy the needs of a changing society, but are also monitored to ensure excellence and quality. As a result of this organizational axiom, Costa Rica has developed a diverse and sophisticated educational framework that adequately fulfills the needs of the private sector through enhancing the abilities and knowledge of the students. Amid the private schools, there are world-class institutions with a cultural emphasis on the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Israel, which further complements the range of cultural diversity of the school system.

As a result of the advances in elementary schooling, Costa Rican high school graduates are educated; enjoy a working knowledge of English, an increasing ability to use computers and a proven aptitude for developing new skills and tasks.

## High School Education

Secondary education is divided between academic and technical schools. In academic instruction there are 5 years of study (7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades), and students usually graduate at age 17, technical instruction in the other part, has 6 years (7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades), and students usually graduate at age 18 with a technical degree.

In the last year of study, students are required to pass tests on all subjects studied during those years (Bachelor's Tests), which are required to get the high school diploma needed for admission to Universities.

High school education is focused in achieving new competitive skills. For example, the teaching of English language and Computer Science was declared mandatory in all of the nation's public schools (1994-1998) (see also *Human Capital*).

### *Technical Education*

Technical High School begins in the fourth year of High School. Students take the regular academic program plus technical training.

There are 96 technical high schools located all throughout the country. In 2010, 69,423 students were enrolled in 52 different specialties in 3 main areas of expertise (services, industrial, and agriculture).

Some specialties are: Accounting, Architectural Drawing, Banking & Finance, Computer Programming, Electromechanics, Electronics, Graphic Design, Industrial Electronics,

Industrial Maintenance, Network Informatics, Precision Mechanics, and Software Development Informatics, among others.

### *Technical Training*

Encouraged by the growth of the high-tech industry, great deals of effort and resources have been devoted to the development of technical education.

The National Training Institute – INA (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje) is at the forefront of technical education, which promotes the vocational development of men and women in all areas of production, following the highest international standards in electronic, electric, mechanical, and process engineering.

The INA is an autonomous public institution created in 1965 that offers its services free of charge and is financed primarily by resources coming from an earmarked 1.5% payroll tax, resources from the private sector and the government budget. The Institute offers training all over the country. Due to the wide array of existing needs, INA offers courses for all productive sectors. Among the different areas of training are:

- Metal Construction, Body shop, Industrial Maintenance Mechanics, Precision Mechanics, Casting of Metal Alloys, Electricity, Electronics, Refrigeration, Telematics and Microelectronics. English courses Levels A1 (Basic skills) to C1 (fully bilingual)

During 2010, the INA invested in training 37,417 people in these programs.

There are also customized training programs for companies that need their employees to learn an innovative process or technology that is still non-existent in the country and essential to their productive process. A few examples of successful customized training programs are: Electronics Technician for Intel and Customer Service Agent for Stream (former Supra – Telecom).

In addition to INA and the public universities, several other institutions offer diverse technical courses such as: mechanics, business administration with diverse emphasis, audit, marketing, information technology, natural resources, production, secretarial courses, tourism, dental technician, English, and industrial training involving different areas of engineering.

## Higher Education

Costa Rica's investment in higher education is yielding substantial benefits. Universities produce not only highly trained individuals, who are very well appreciated by the multinational companies, but also entrepreneurs with the ability to develop their own companies, especially in high-tech areas.

Currently, Costa Rica has 59 universities, five of which are public and the rest are privately owned and managed. The Ministry of Education through the National Council of Higher Education (CONESUP) supervises all of them.

*Public Universities:* Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR), Universidad Nacional (UNA), Universidad Estatal a Distancia, Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (ITCR) and Universidad Técnica Nacional.

*Private Universities:* such as ULACIT, Universidad Creativa de Costa Rica, Universidad Fidelitas, Universidad Hispanoamericana, Universidad Internacional de las Américas, Universidad Latina, Universidad Veritas, UCIMED and UNIBE (the last two specialized in Medical and Life Sciences), among others. 67.8% of diplomas granted in 2009 were from private universities.

The University of Costa Rica leads annual enrollment at the higher education level. This university, founded in 1843 in the city of San Jose, has the most ample range of

degrees offered in the country, either by the number of careers it offers or the degree levels that can be opted for.

The UCR and the ITCR are the leaders in higher and specialized technical education in the country. Much of the emphasis put into specific areas of study, such as engineering and life sciences, has been stirred by the increasing demand of technologically intensive industries, which shows the interest of local authorities and the capability the higher education system to respond quickly and meet changing demand promptly.

Private universities are generally smaller than their public counterparts, either measured by the number of students or the variety of professional careers they offer. These institutions of higher education usually cater to the demand of working persons that wish to expand their capabilities while still holding their jobs.

In addition to local education, Costa Rican students have been successful in accessing internationally recognized foreign graduate degree programs, especially in the US. Recognizing this potential, Harvard University established a highly accredited extension program in Costa Rica called INCAE, which is ranked as the third best business school in Latin America, according to America Economia (2011). This institution has done pioneering investigations about the factors that determine Costa Rica's competitiveness and the best strategies to take advantage of them.