

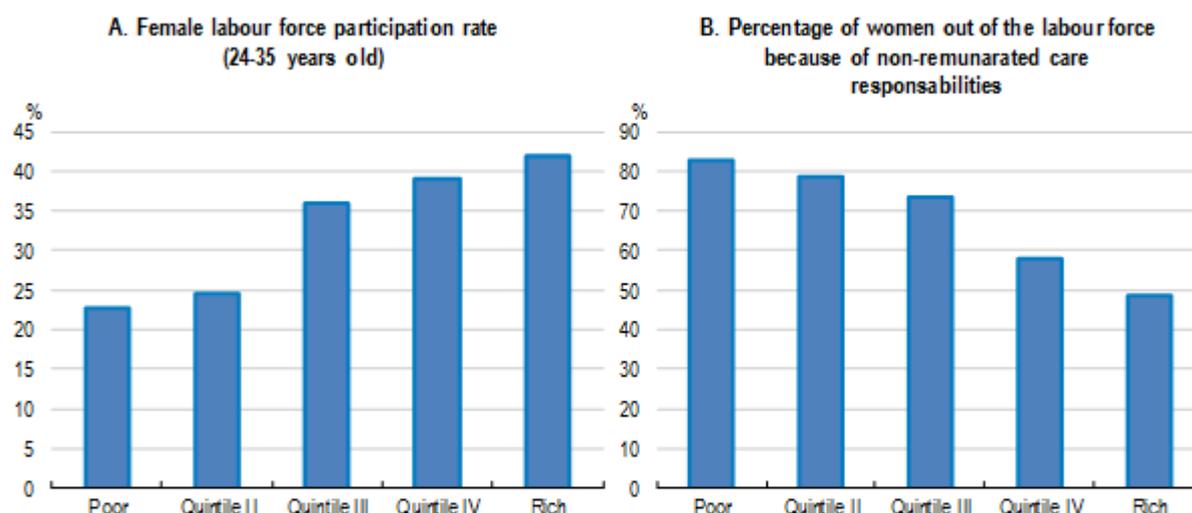
Mind the gaps: boost early childcare education and care in Costa Rica

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Costa Rican well-being indicators are comparable or even above the OECD average in several dimensions (OECD, 2016a). Nevertheless, gaps with OECD countries are large in two dimensions: labour market participation and education. This hampers both long-term growth prospects and equity. Boosting early childcare education and care would help to close both gaps (Gonzalez Pandiella, 2016).

Only slightly over half of the Costa Rican working-age women participate in the labour market. Gaps in participation start at very early ages and remain large thereafter. Women from low socioeconomic background face difficulties to continue in education and tend to drop out of the labour force. Only one out of four women in low income households in the 24-35 age bracket participate in the labour market (Figure 1, Panel A). This low participation is predominantly due to the non-remunerated care responsibilities they have to assume (Figure 1, Panel B). This highlights the need to increase the supply of publicly-funded childcare services, and to target them at women in low income households.

Figure 1. Care responsibilities hinder labour market participation of poor women
By income quintile



Note: Panel A: Female labour force participation rate is the share of women (24-35 years old) working or looking for a job relative to the total population of 24-35 years old. Panel B: Proportion of women (24-35 years old) out of the labour force because of household non-remunerated care responsibilities. Source: OECD calculations based on ENAHO (Encuesta Nacional de Hogares, National Households Survey).

Costa Rica shows a strong commitment to invest in education. But the average education attainments remain low. Less than half of the 25-29 cohort has completed secondary education, which is well below graduation rates observed in other Latin American countries such as Colombia, Peru and Panama. PISA scores are low in all disciplines, indicating that the quality of education is also comparatively low. Moreover, educational gaps depending on households' income are widening. These inequalities in education outcomes start early. At the end of primary education, the share of students coming from low income households lagging behind is high, and this is aggravated in lower secondary, when many drop out. Attendance to pre-primary education helps to decrease the likelihood of low performance in secondary education, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors (OECD, 2016b). Thus, boosting attendance to early childhood education and care, with an especial focus on children from low-income households, would also contribute to close educational inequalities and gaps in Costa Rica.

References:

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