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Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education

Costa Rica

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes

Compiled by:
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COSTA RICA

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes

A. GENERAL INFORMATION, STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Starting age of compulsory education (if applicable):

Under Article 78 of the Constitution of Costa Rica, amended in 1997, preschool and general basic education are compulsory, free and funded by the State. Preschool education consists of two cycles: the transition cycle, for children aged five to six, which comes before the first grade of primary/basic education; and the infant-nursery cycle, for children under five.

1. ISCED 0 PROGRAMMES (USUALLY, PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION)

(ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education)

1.1. National definition of ISCED 0 programmes (pre-primary):

Preschool education

N.B.:

For purely didactic reasons, the child population is divided into groups organized by age as follows:

- Babies I: birth to 12 months;
- Nursery (*maternal*) II: one year to three years six months;
- Interactive I: three years six months to four years six months;
- Interactive II: four years six months to five years six months.

The education system today provides for the last cycle, the Interactive II age group, for children aged four years six months to five years six months.

1.2. Normative age group(s) covered by ISCED 0 programmes:

See above.

1.3. ISCED 0 programmes: statistics and indicators (*source: Ministry of Education, Statistics Department*)

1.3.1. Enrolment:

	Percentage	Year
Gross enrolment ratio	67.1	2005
Net enrolment ratio	66.9	2005
Percentage of children entering primary education with previous preschool experience	89.4	2005

1.3.2. Enrolment ratio by age group, 2002/03 (percentage, also including the first years of primary education when applicable):

Less than 3 years of age	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6	Age 7
0.0	3.1	32.4	77.8	85.1	96.9
			0.0 (*)	58.4 (**)	95.8 (**)

(*) Enrolled in primary education. (**) Primary education enrolment ratio.

1.3.3. Teachers:

Teaching staff (total)	Of whom female (%)	Percentage of trained teachers (all)	Percentage of trained teachers (males)	Percentage of trained teachers (females)
6,255	95.3	88.2

(...) Not available.

1.3.4. Funding:

	Percentage
Public current expenditure per pupil as percentage of the Gross National Product per capita	16.4 (2004)

Source: UIS.

1.3.5. Main source(s) of financing:

There are no data available regarding household expenditure on preschool education. However, it should be noted that all costs are financed by the Government, under the national budget. In preschool education and in education in general in Costa Rica, externally funded expenditures are minimal and infrequent.

2. OTHER ECCE PROGRAMMES (Generally preceding ISCED 0 programmes)

2.1. National definition of other ECCE programmes:

Infant-nursery cycle. In addition:

- Childhood Care Programme. Education and Nutrition Centre, Child Nutrition and Integrated Care Centre (CEN-CINAI, Ministry of Health);
- Growth and Development workshops, Costa Rican Social Security Institute;
- Shelters for at-risk population. National Child Welfare Agency (PANI);
- Community homes for at-risk population groups, provided by the Integrated Provision Council (CAI), services funded by the family with financial support from the Joint Social Aid Institute (IMAS).

2.2. Normative age group(s) covered by other ECCE programmes:

Children aged zero to three.

2.3. Estimated number of children covered by other ECCE programmes:

Data not available

B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING ECCE PROGRAMMES (INCLUDING ISCED 0)

3.1. Legislation concerning ECCE:

On 4 August 1997, Law No. 7676 was passed amending Article 78 of the Constitution of Costa Rica, making preschool education compulsory, free and State-funded.

3.2. Official body/bodies in charge of supervision or coordination:

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the education system and the Preschool Education Department of the Ministry's Curricular Development Division deals with the technical and curricular aspects of preschool education.

3.3. Other entities involved in the provision (e.g. municipalities, local governments) and main types of providers (e.g. public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.):

The main bodies involved are the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health's Nutrition and Child Development Centres, IMAS community homes and private kindergartens and child centres.

3.4. Type of personnel involved (teachers, assistants, other staff):

Ministry of Education programmes are staffed by professional primary teachers and Nutrition and Child Development Centres mainly by technical staff and assistants. Community homes are often staffed by mothers with basic academic training.

3.5. Type of staff training (requirements):

A university qualification (diploma, bachelor's or master's degree) from a public or private university is required to enter the teaching profession at the level of preschool education. These studies last for two years for a diploma, four years for a bachelor's degree (*bachillerato*) and five to six years for a master's degree (*licenciatura*).

3.6. Recent national policies and reforms:

The most recent reform in preschool education was that made to Article 78 of the Constitution, making preschool education compulsory. As a result of that reform, in 2000, children aged four to five began to receive preschool education in the infant-nursery cycle (interactive age group II). Innovative forms of coverage (such as mixed-level and mobile preschool groups) were devised in order to broaden coverage, especially in rural and sparsely populated areas.

It is a national priority to provide universal preschool education and the following targets have been established up to 2015:

- universal coverage in the transition cycle (children aged five and six) by 2006. and by school 2005, coverage of 93% had been achieved at this level.
- compulsory education in interactive age group II of the infant-nursery cycle (children aged four and five) began in 2000 and had reached 42.4% in 2005. The target is 50% by 2006 and 75% by 2015. The coverage target for children under age four is 19% by 2007.
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3.7. Efforts targeted at vulnerable or disadvantaged children:

Data not available

3.8. Special projects/programmes aiming at expanding or improving ECCE:

Programa de la Mano (“Hand-in-hand Programme”) (2000-2003). This was an inter-agency coordination strategy involving public and private bodies and NGOs, aimed at family and community education associated with provision for children under age six.

Until June 2003, the main counterpart of the UNICEF office in this matter was *Programa de la Mano*, which operated a strategy of inter-agency and intersectoral coordination among different social institutions working directly or indirectly with the preschool population. *Programa de la Mano* operated with public funding and with technical and financial support from UNICEF. As well as working with the public institutions involved, the programme started up a number of strategic partnerships with the private sector, in order to promote joint measures to benefit early childhood.

The current Administration transferred one component of the programme (parenting) to the Costa Rican Social Security Institute, and the other components of the programme were shut down.

Importantly, the process of approving a national policy for childhood and adolescence, which promotes care and development in early childhood, has continued.

Programa Ventanas en el Mundo Infantil (“Windows to Children’s World Programme”). This is an educational strategy that engages the family and the community in a significant and participatory manner. It comes within the framework of educational innovations that break with traditional, rigid schemes and clear the way for open, flexible and dynamic strategies involving the family: it is an approach that has an undeniable influence on the development and education of children under six. This is undertaken as part of the challenge of strengthening linkages with the family and the community, under the slogan “education is the responsibility of all”.

3.9. Information concerning the curriculum (if applicable) or the contents of ECCE programmes

3.9.1. Objectives and aims:

Generally speaking, the main purpose of preschool education is the integrated development of children aged zero to six. The objectives of preschool education are thus established pursuant to the Basic Education Act (1957), Article 12:

- a) To protect children’s health and stimulate harmonious and physical development.
- b) To encourage the formation of good habits;
- c) To stimulate and guide children’s experiences.
- d) To cultivate an aesthetic awareness.
- e) To develop attitudes of companionship and cooperation;
- d) To help children to express their world;
- f) To stimulate development of the capacity for observation.

3.9.2. Learning areas and teaching-learning methods:

The study programme for the infant-nursery cycle (2000) has four aims that govern educational tasks. These are that children:

- gradually adapt to their sociocultural environment, according to its rules, values, customs and traditions and consistently with their level of development;

- build up their personal autonomy and identity based on different interactions with the world around them;
- gradually broaden and deepen their experience and knowledge, by interacting with world around them at their own developmental level;
- develop and diversify their forms of communication, expression and representation of reality by interacting with the sociocultural context.

The study programme for the transition cycle (1996) encompasses five thematic blocks:

- Who am I in my interactions with myself, with others and with the world around me?
- I explore, enjoy and communicate using my body and movement;
- I communicate with myself and with others, using different types of language;
- I discover, investigate and enjoy the natural, physical and sociocultural world around me;
- I relate to objects and people through mathematical games.

The curriculum for preschool education has a humanist, comprehensive, integrated, open, flexible, meaningful, participatory and culturally relevant approach, with an interactionist and constructivist epistemological stance aimed at establishing a solid foundation for the processes generated at subsequent levels of development. Hence the role of the teacher is essential in the organization of time, space, materials and planning, including the family and community component.

The mission of preschool educators is to assume classroom leadership in order to enhance human development in an integrated manner, through play, by providing opportunities that encourage the practice of habits, communication, proper interactions between girls, boys and adults, the expression of emotions and corporality and the construction of knowledge.

3.9.3. Average number of hours per week and average amount of weeks per year:

A five-day week of 20 hours 40 minutes per week, giving a total of about 630 hours per year.

3.10. Any other relevant and pertinent information

In 1996, the preschool-age population covered was equivalent to 75% of the population of statutory age (gross enrolment ratio). The majority of the teachers working at this level held bachelor's or master's degrees in preschool education. There was an average of 28.2 pupils per section and 21 pupils per teacher. In 2005, initial enrolment at the preschool level amounted to 115,201 children.

C. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON ECCE (TO BE COLLECTED IF POSSIBLE IN COLLABORATION WITH UNICEF OFFICES)

4.1. Parenting programmes are usually addressed to parents and families of children less than six years of age. Please give information on any parental education programme in your country in the table below:

Type of programme	Yes or No (note for each programme)	Please estimate the number of beneficiaries (if possible)
Parenting education through early learning centres and child care centres	Yes	No data
As component of health and nutrition programmes, such as information about child development included in health and nutrition visits.	Yes	35,780 (2005) in CEN-CINAI programme.
Parent groups that meet to discuss issues of their young children, including health, nutritional status, and development		No
As component of adolescent, livelihood or literacy programmes		No
Media broadcast, such as <i>Sesame Street</i> , with media for and with children	Yes	No data
Other (please specify)		
Daily care programmes for working mothers living in poverty.	Yes	5,600

Are any of these programmes targeted specifically toward the vulnerable, poor, disadvantaged or excluded? If so, which ones? (Please provide/attach any additional and relevant information if available)

Yes, "Community Homes" provides daily care for the children of mothers who are poor. The programme caters to 5,600 children per year. CEN-CINAI provides children's meals, nutrition and development services, mainly for children living in poverty.

4.2. Is there a national-level system for monitoring children's development or school readiness prior to entering primary school?

Yes, the national health system has a child health section that monitors growth and development in early childhood.

4.3. Is there a policy on early childhood (ECCE, ECD, etc.) that has been accepted? If not, is there one under development?

Costa Rica pursues policies of universal health and education provision, which has led to a gradual increase in the coverage of preschool education and an improvement in early childhood growth and development.

The country has a 10-year national agenda for childhood and adolescence for 2000-2010. This Agenda is put into operation in the form of a yearly plan of action, which is monitored by the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence.

Currently (2005) national policies on childhood and adolescence are being prepared with a view to adapting to the “comprehensive protection doctrine”.

[Data reviewed and supplementary information provided by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, January 2006.]