



Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators is the authoritative source for information on the state of education around the world. It provides data on the structure, finances and performance of education systems in OECD and partner countries.

South Africa

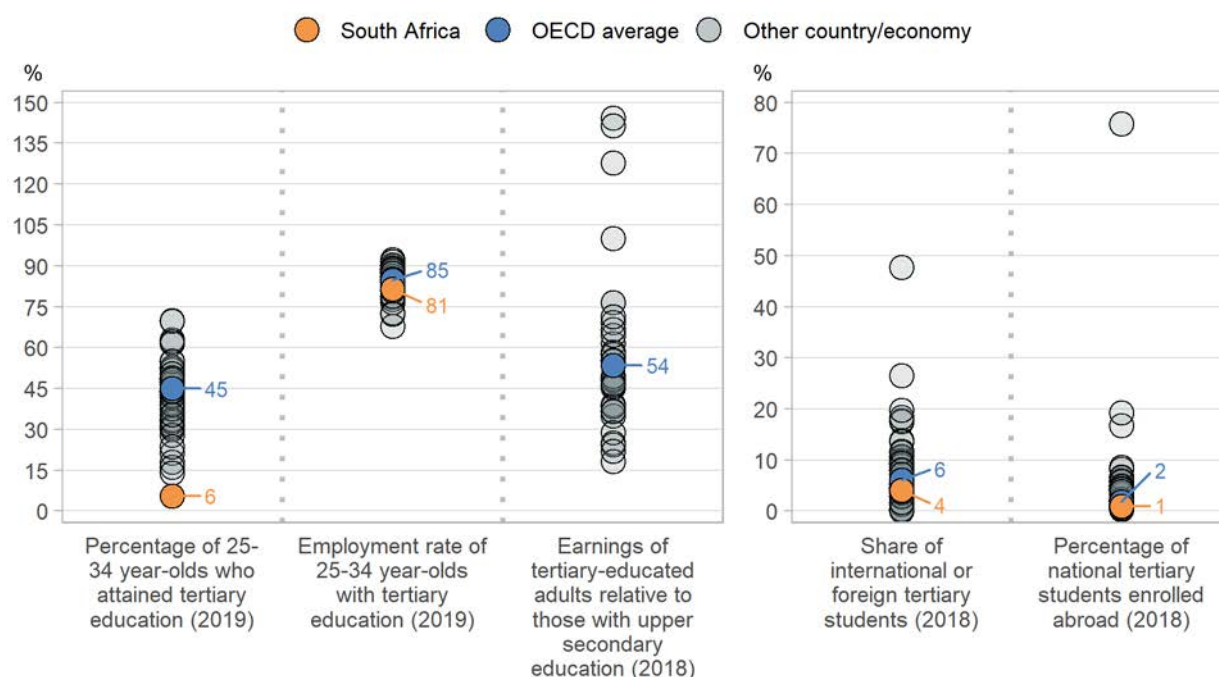
Participation and outcomes of vocational education and training

- Vocational education and training (VET) programmes attract a diverse range of students, including those seeking qualifications and technical skills to enter the labour market, adults wishing to increase their employability by developing their skills further, and students who may seek entry into higher education later on.
- The share of upper secondary vocational students tends to increase with age. In South Africa, the share of upper secondary students enrolled in VET is 2% among 15-19 year-olds (OECD average: 37%), and 27% among 20-24 year-olds (OECD average: 62%).

The rising demand for tertiary education

- The expansion of tertiary education is a worldwide trend. Between 2009 and 2019, the share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree increased in all OECD and partner countries. In South Africa, the share increased by 2 percentage points during this period, lower than the average increase across OECD countries (9 percentage points). In 2019, 6% of 25-34 year-olds had a tertiary degree in South Africa compared to 45% on average across OECD countries (Figure 1).
- From the gender perspective, younger women are more likely than younger men to achieve tertiary education in all OECD countries. In South Africa, 6% of 25-34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification compared to 5% of their male peers, while on average across OECD countries the shares are 51% of younger women and 39% of younger men.
- International student mobility has been expanding quite consistently in the past twenty years. In 2018, 5.6 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study, more than twice the number in 2005. In South Africa, the share of foreign or international students remained stable at 4% between 2014 and 2017. Meanwhile 1% of South African tertiary students are enrolled abroad compared to 2% in total across OECD countries (Figure 1). English-speaking countries are the most attractive student destinations overall in the OECD area, with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States receiving more than 40% of all internationally mobile students in OECD and partner countries. Among students leaving South Africa to study, the most popular destination country is the United States.

Figure 1. Snapshot of tertiary education



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

Source: OECD (2020), indicator A1, A3, A4 and B6. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

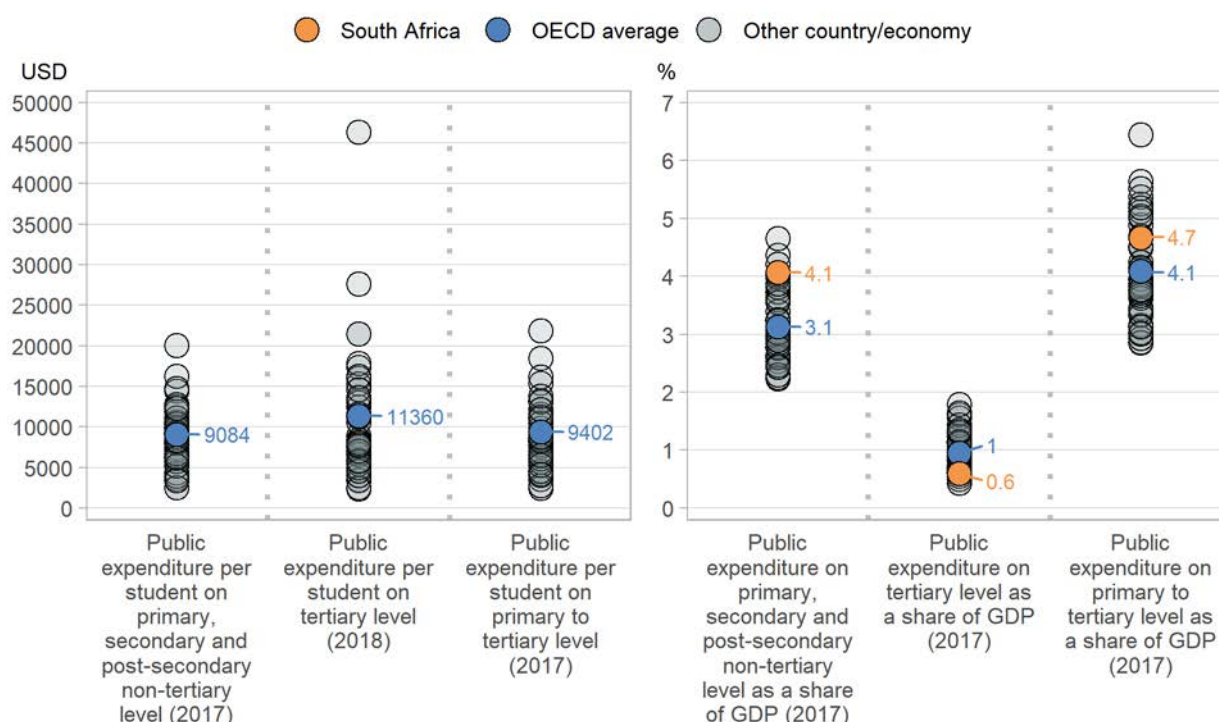
Starting strong

- Public provision of early childhood education and care is an important factor in ensuring broad access to affordable ECEC. On average across OECD countries, more than one in two of the children in early childhood educational development services (ISCED 01) are enrolled in private institutions. Enrolment in private institutions is usually less common for 3-5 year-olds, who are usually enrolled in pre-primary education (ISCED 02), than for younger children. In South Africa, 6% of children attending pre-primary education are enrolled in private institutions, compared to one in three children on average across OECD countries.

Investing in education

- The share of public expenditure devoted to educational institutions over the national wealth is higher in South Africa than on average among OECD countries. In 2017, the government of South Africa spent 4.7% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 0.6 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Across levels of education, South Africa devoted an above average share of GDP than the OECD average at non-tertiary level and a below average share at tertiary level (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Snapshot of the financial resources invested in educational institutions



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Expenditure in national currencies is converted into equivalent USD by dividing the national currency figure by the purchasing power parity (PPP) index for GDP. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

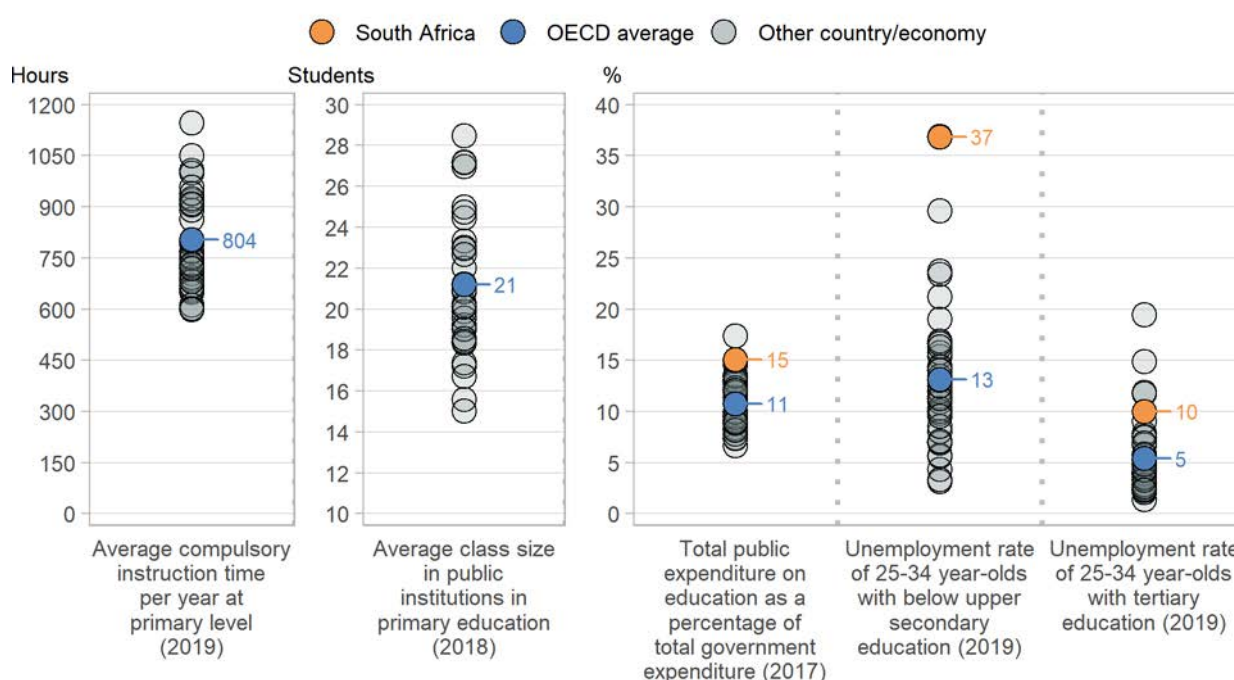
Source: OECD (2020), indicator C1 and C2. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

The impact of COVID-19 on education

- The global 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves around the world. In a first effort to contain the virus, many countries have imposed a lockdown and schools and/or universities have closed for several months across all OECD and partner countries. In South Africa, the closures were nationwide from 18 March 2020 and schools started progressively reopening on 8 June 2020. By the end of June, South Africa had experienced 15 weeks of effective school closures in some form, compared to 14 weeks on average across OECD countries (UNESCO, 2020). However, the actual impact in some countries may have been less severe as some of these periods included scheduled school breaks.
- While there is uncertainty about the likely overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education expenditure, governments will face difficult decisions on the allocation of resources, as government funds are injected into the economy and the health sector. In 2017, public spending on primary to tertiary education as a share of government expenditure in South Africa was 15%, higher than the OECD average of 11% (Figure 3).
- The crisis may have a severe impact on the internationalisation of higher education as the delivery of online course material and travel restrictions may raise questions among international students' perception on the value of obtaining their degree from an institution abroad. South Africa, with a lower share of foreign students than in total across the OECD, may be less strongly affected than other countries.

- Unemployment may increase, as the economy struggles to cope with the reduced activity that resulted from the lockdown. Those with lower educational attainment are the most vulnerable, as they are the most unlikely to benefit from remote working. In 2019, before the pandemic hit, 37% of young adults with below upper secondary education in South Africa were unemployed compared to 10% of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds (Figure 3). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the unemployment of young adults without an upper secondary education increased by 3.1 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 in South Africa compared to 0.3 percentage points among those with tertiary education.

Figure 3. Snapshot of indicators relevant to the impact of COVID-19 on education



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

Source: OECD (2020), indicator A3, D1, D2, and C4. See Education at a Glance Database <http://stats.oecd.org/> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

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More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2020 and to access the full set of Indicators, visit www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, visit Annex 3 of the publication (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

For general information on methodology, please refer to the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en>).

Updated data can be found on line at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the **StatLinks**  under the tables and charts in the publication.

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<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>

The calculation on the number of weeks of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic is based on data from UNESCO (UNESCO, 2020). For general information on the methodology considered for the data, please refer to the [methodological note](#).

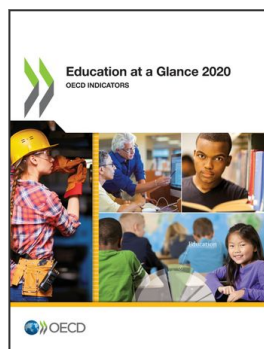
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On 15 May 2020, the OECD Council invited Costa Rica to become a Member. While Costa Rica is included in the OECD averages reported in this note, at the time of its preparation, Costa Rica was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of the instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

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