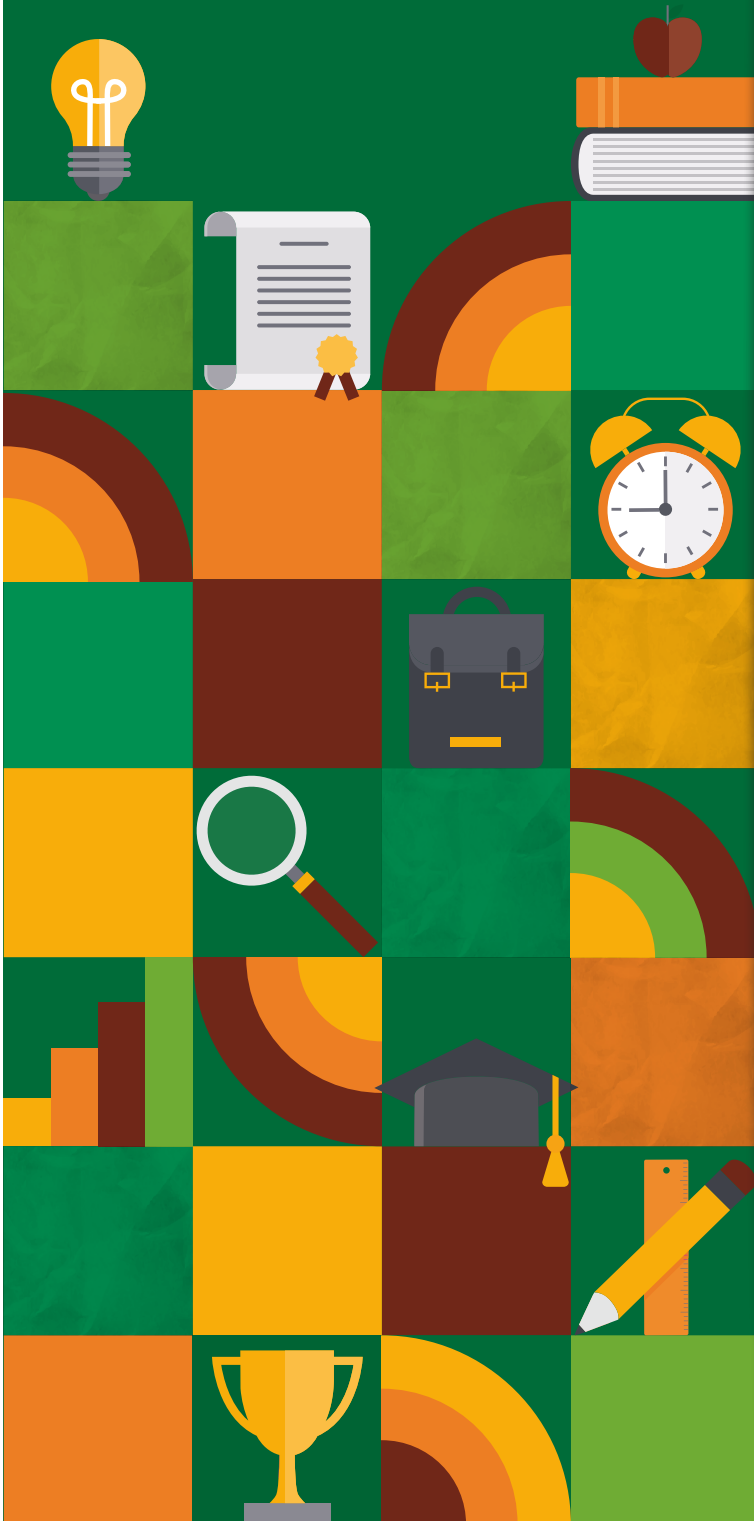


MARCH 2025

FACT SHEET



GENDER PARITY IN POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ACCESS, COMPLETION, AND LABOUR MARKET STATUS



BACKGROUND

Education serves as a cornerstone for social transformation and economic development, playing a critical role in fostering equality, reducing poverty, and building a skilled workforce that is capable of addressing societal challenges. In South Africa, the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system is pivotal in driving these objectives and ensuring equitable access to opportunities for all citizens. Achieving gender parity within this system is not only a marker of progress but also a necessity for inclusive and sustainable growth. Globally, gender equality in education has been recognised as a catalyst for accomplishing broader social and economic goals.

Despite notable progress, gender disparities persist in many countries, including South Africa. These disparities are particularly evident in access to and completion of education and training, as well as in subsequent labour market outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of targeted interventions, data-driven policies, and sustained efforts to dismantle structural inequalities.



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PURPOSE

This Fact Sheet provides an analysis of access to education, completion of study, and labour market outcomes in South Africa's PSET institutions through a gendered lens. It employs the Gender Parity Index (GPI) as a primary measure to assess the relative access of males and females to educational opportunities. The GPI is a widely used international metric that enables comparisons of gender equity in education and training across countries. Such comparisons serve as a barometer of equity and transformation, reflecting the proportional representation of historically and currently disadvantaged groups within all levels of the education and training system.

By focusing on GPI trends in South Africa, this Fact Sheet highlights the progress made, the challenges persisting, and the opportunities available for advancing gender equity in the education and training sector and in the labour market. It aims to inform policymakers, educationalists, and stakeholders of the key issues that must be addressed to achieve a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.



TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is a measure of access to education. It usually shows enrolment relative to the total population in a core age group, even if those enrolled do not all fall within that age group. That is, the GER for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) shows enrolment as a percentage of the 20–24 age group in the population in a given year, although university students may be younger than 20 or older than 24. The GER for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and private colleges is based on the 16–20 age group, while the GER Community Education and Training (CET) colleges is based on the 15–35 age group.

GENDER PARITY INDEX

Generally, the GPI is used as a measure of gender equity for participation in education. It is represented by the ratio of the female GER to the male GER. A GPI value of 1 indicates parity between males and females, a value less than 1 indicates disparity in favour of males, and a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favour of females (UNESCO, 2009).¹

However, it is possible to calculate the GPI for indicators other than enrolment by using a similar ratio. This Fact Sheet therefore also explores the GPI for completion of study, employment, unemployment and labour force participation.

1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009). Education Indicators Technical Guidelines. Available at: https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-indicators-technical-guidelines-en_0.pdf



OVERVIEW OF GENDER PARITY AT PSET INSTITUTIONS

Table 1 reveals significant gender disparities in enrolment and completion across PSET institutions—CET colleges, TVET colleges, and HEIs. Enrolment data indicates a predominance of female students, with a GPI of 2.52 for CET colleges, 1.90 for TVET colleges, and 1.59 for HEIs. While these figures reflect progress in improving access for females, they highlight the underrepresentation of males, particularly at CET colleges, where male enrolment is critically low.

Completion rates, however, paint a nuanced picture. At HEIs, a GPI of 1.11 shows that females complete their studies at slightly higher rates than males, aligning with the enrolment trends. At TVET colleges, the completion GPI drops to 0.97, favouring males. Conversely, CET colleges show a completion GPI of 1.42, indicating a continued predominance of females, although the gap is narrow compared to enrolment.

These disparities suggest systemic issues that require targeted interventions, such as promoting male participation at CET and TVET colleges and addressing barriers to the completion of their studies. Ensuring proportional representation and supporting both genders equitably will be critical for creating a balanced, inclusive PSET system that contributes to broader societal and economic development.

TABLE 1: Gender Parity Index for enrolment and completion by institution type, 2022

INSTITUTION	GPI: ENROLMENT	GPI: COMPLETION
CET colleges	2.52	1.42
TVET colleges	1.90	0.97
HEIs (public and private)	1.59	1.11

Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training 2022; Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023

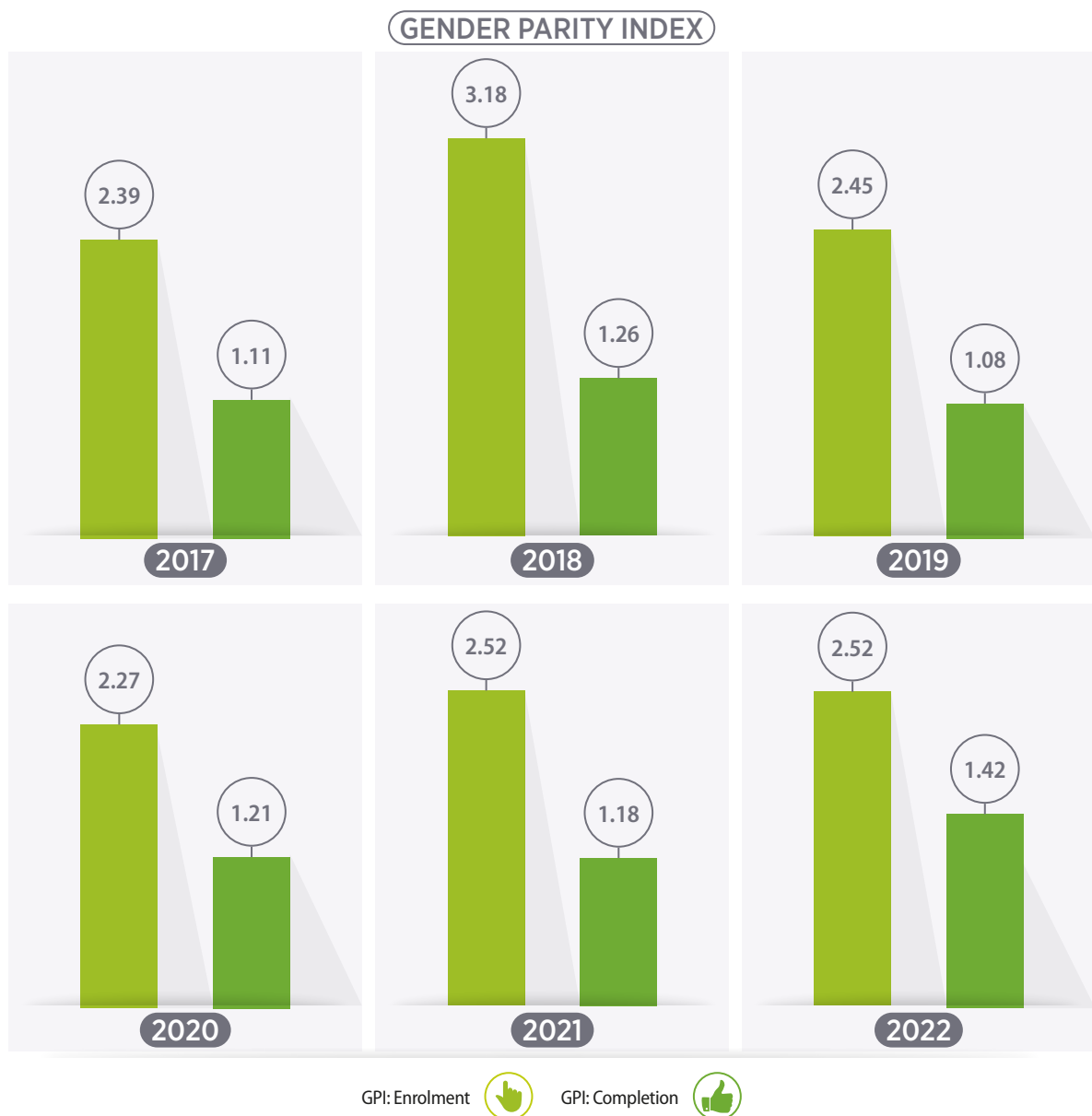


TRENDS IN GENDER PARITY AT CET COLLEGES

Figure 1 highlights substantial gender disparities at CET colleges for the period 2017 to 2022, with female students consistently leading in both enrolment and completion rates. Their GPI for enrolment remained notably high throughout this period, exceeding 2.0 each year. This indicates that female participation at CET colleges is more than double that of males. However, the completion GPI, while also favouring females, displayed a narrower disparity, fluctuating between 1.08 and 1.42 over the six years, with a notable increase to 1.42 in 2022 from 1.18 in 2021.

The sustained prevalence of females in CET enrolment underscores the need to promote male participation in order to balance representation and inclusivity. Encouraging male enrolment through targeted outreach and addressing barriers such as societal perceptions of CET programmes could mitigate this imbalance.

FIGURE 1: Gender Parity Index for enrolment and completion at CET colleges, 2017–2022



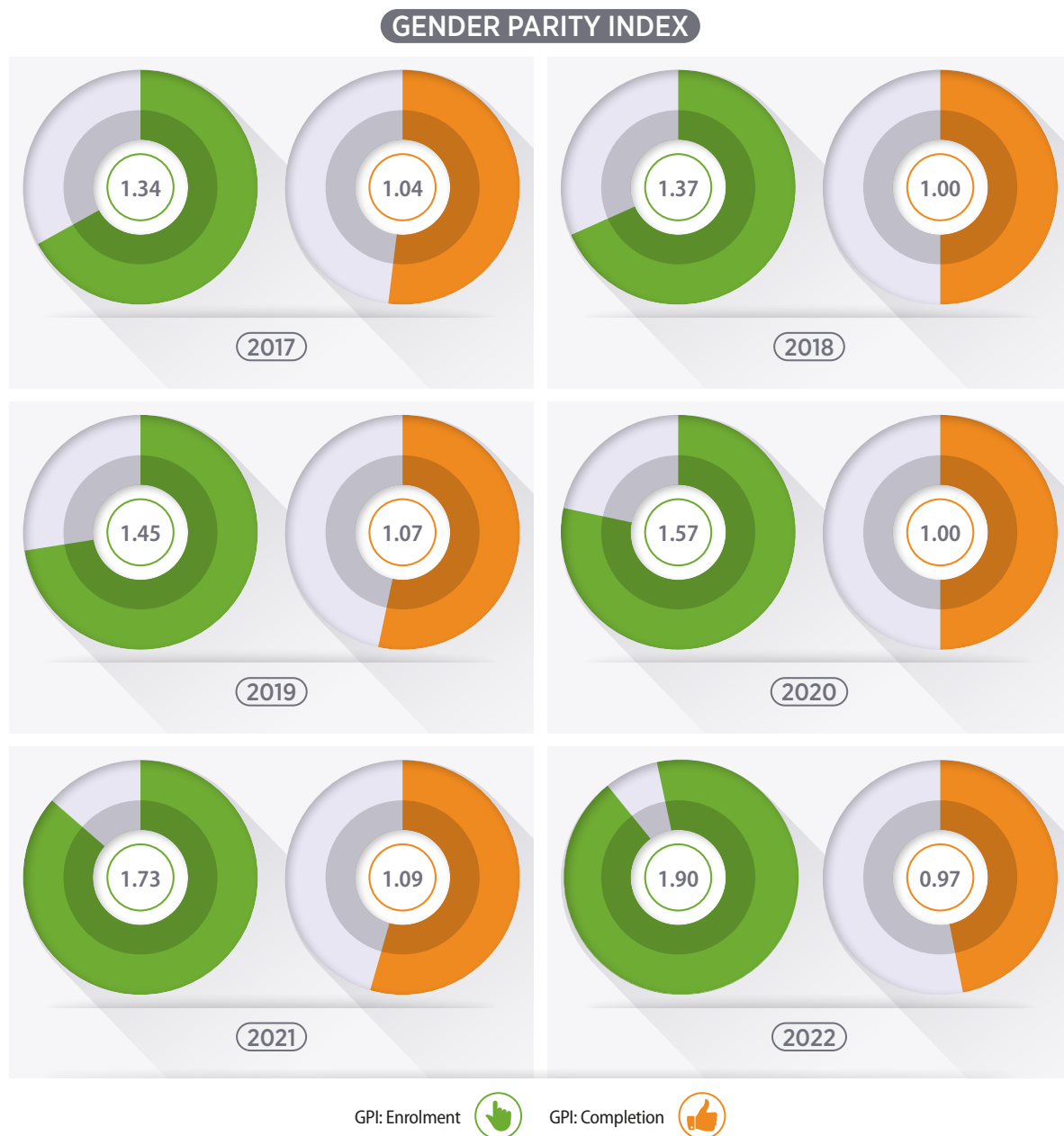
Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022) and Stats SA Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023



TRENDS IN GENDER PARITY AT TVET COLLEGES

Similar to CET colleges, females consistently and predominantly enrolled at TVET colleges between 2017 and 2022, as shown in Figure 2, with their GPI reaching 1.90 in 2022. However, the GPI for completion remained near parity in all the years under review. The GPI was in favour of females from 2017 to 2021, and in favour of males in 2022. These results suggest that while we see more females participating at TVET colleges than males, their performance in terms of completion was on par with that of males. The data points to the need for interventions to support greater male enrolment in order to achieve a more balanced and inclusive vocational education and training system.

FIGURE 2: Gender Parity Index for enrolment and completion at TVET colleges, 2017–2022

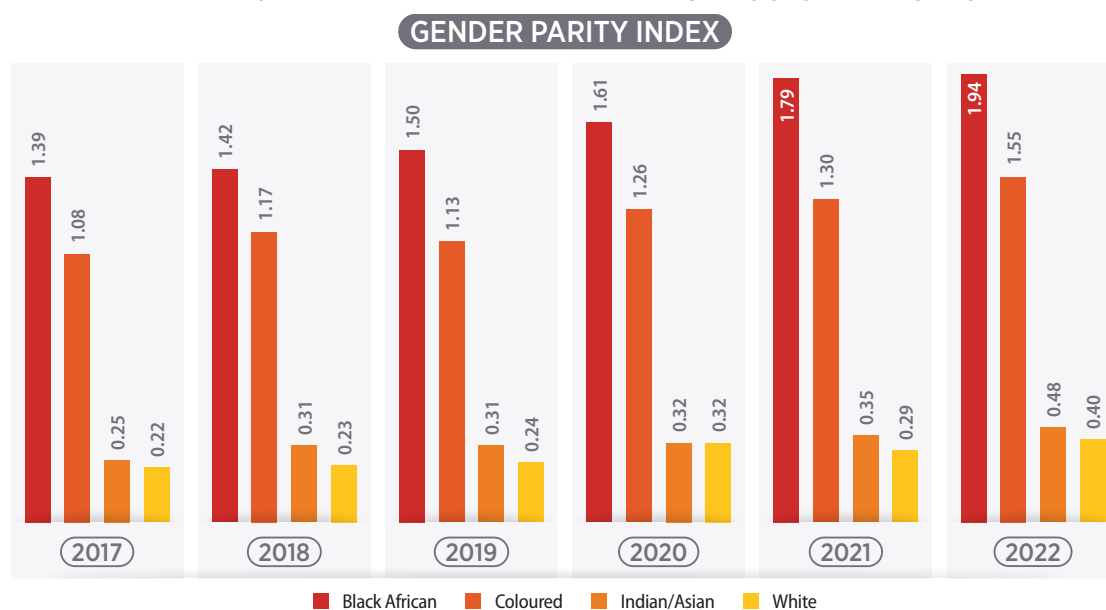


Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022) and Stats SA Mid-Year Population Estimates 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022; and Stats SA Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023

Figure 3 highlights the GPI for enrolment at TVET colleges by population group from 2017 to 2022. Among Black African and Coloured populations, the GPI consistently exceeds 1, indicating strong enrolment by females relative to males. The GPI for Black Africans reached levels above 1.5 during this period, signifying a disproportionate representation of females at these institutions. Conversely, White and Indian/Asian populations show a prevalence of male enrolment trends, with GPIs below 1.

This stark contrast points to systemic and cultural factors influencing gender participation at TVET colleges across different racial groups. Strategically, this necessitates outreach campaigns tailored to specific populations, such as addressing societal perceptions of TVET for White and Indian/Asian females and enhancing the engagement of males within Black and Coloured populations.

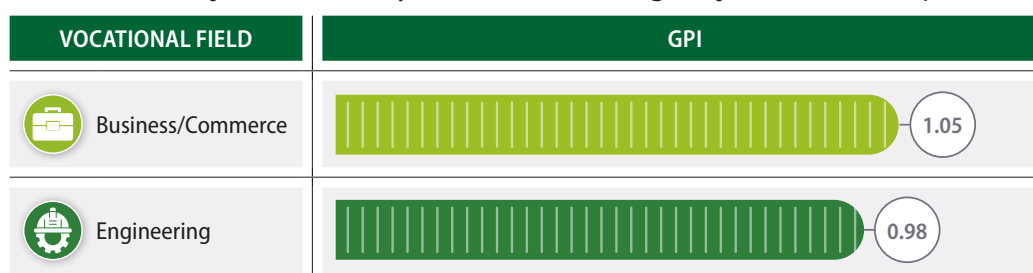
FIGURE 3: Gender Parity Index for enrolment at TVET colleges by population group, 2017–2022



Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022) and Stats SA Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023

Table 2 focuses on completion rates at TVET colleges by vocational field, providing critical insight into gender disparities. The GPI for Business and Commercial studies was 1.05 in 2022, showing near-parity in favour of females. However, the field of Engineering recorded a GPI of 0.98, showing near parity in favour of males. This reveals a notable improvement in female completion rates in this traditionally 'male-dominated' field, suggesting that targeted policies for women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and technical mentorship initiatives are yielding results.

TABLE 2: Gender Parity Index for completion at TVET colleges by vocational field, 2022



Sources: Own calculations based on the DHET's Technical and Vocational Education and Training Management Information System (2022)

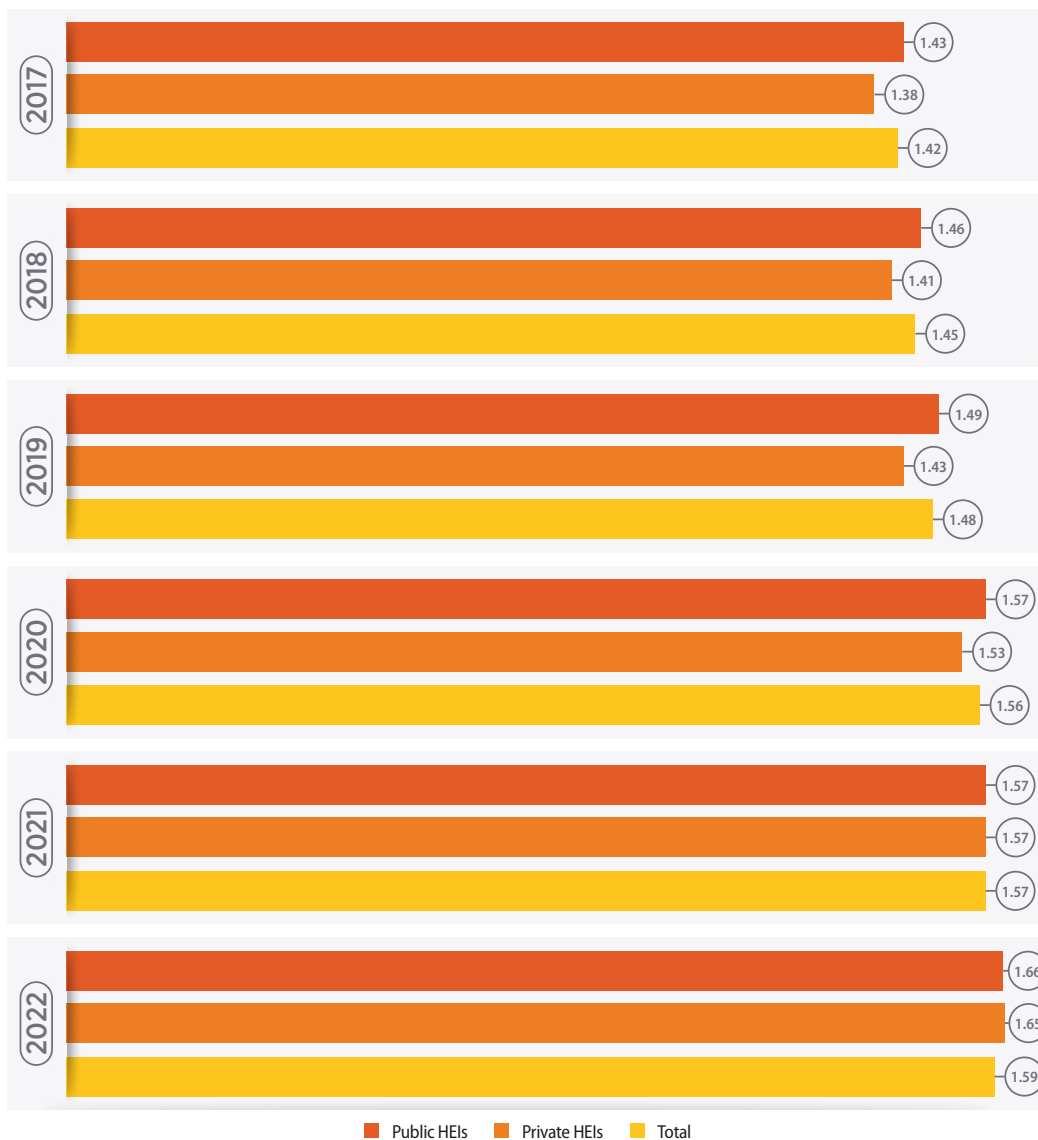


TRENDS IN GENDER PARITY AT HEIS (UNIVERSITIES–PUBLIC AND PRIVATE)

Figure 4 reveals trends in the GPI for enrolment at public and private universities from 2017 to 2022. Both public and private universities saw steady increases in the GPI - from 1.43 in 2017 to 1.66 in 2022 for public universities, and from 1.38 to 1.65 for private universities in the same period.

There is overall disparity in favour of female students at both public and private universities, showing that these institutions are playing a larger role in improving access for women. However, the sustained underrepresentation of males, as evidenced by GPIs consistently above 1, signals a growing disengagement of men from higher education institutions compared to women.

FIGURE 4: Gender Parity Index for enrolment at public and private universities, 2017–2022



Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022); Stats SA Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023; and DHET Annual Report submitted by private higher education institutions for the 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 year of reporting.

Figure 5 breaks down the GPI for enrolment at public and private universities by population group. Across all the races, female participation consistently exceeds that of males. Black Africans achieved a GPI of 1.69 in 2022, reflecting remarkable strides in addressing historical inequities. Meanwhile, the GPI of Coloured students was 1.92 in the same year, indicating the group's growing predominance of females in higher education compared to Coloured males.

FIGURE 5: Gender Parity Index for enrolment at public and private universities by population group, 2017–2022

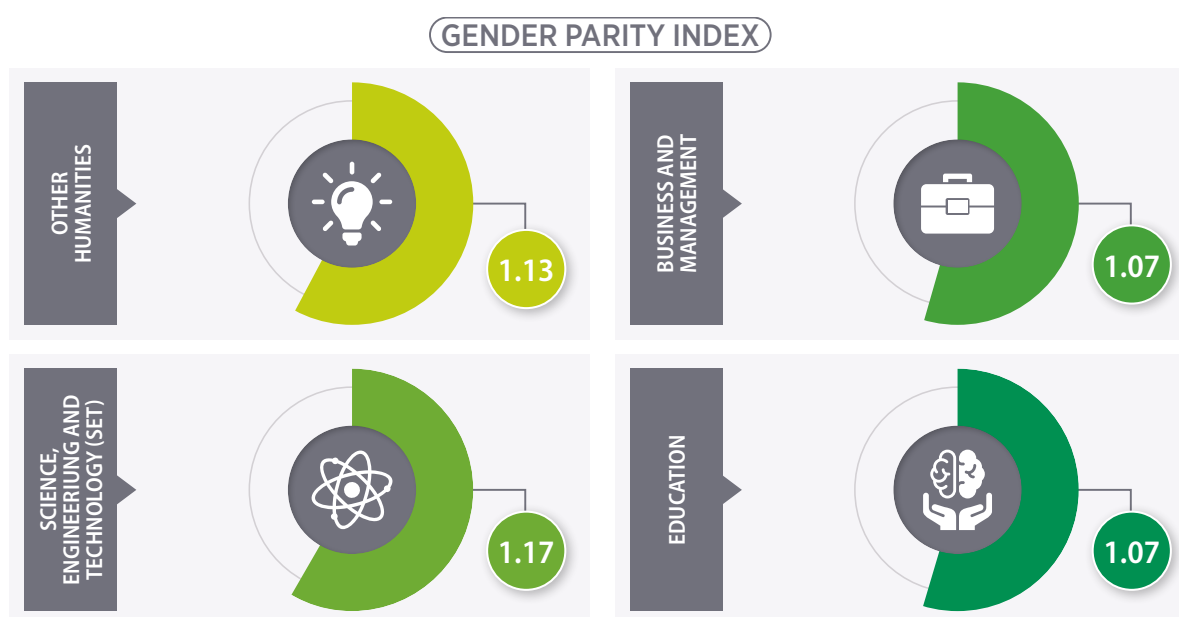


Sources: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 and DHET Annual Report submitted by private higher education institutions for the 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 year of reporting.

Figure 6 highlights the GPI for graduation at public universities by field of study in 2022, with female graduation rates surpassing male graduation rates across all disciplines. Notably, the fields of science, engineering and technology recorded the highest GPI at 1.17, signalling significant progress in these domains traditionally dominated by males. Fields like Business and Management, and Education also reported GPIs of 1.07, suggesting more balanced outcomes.

These patterns reflect the success of targeted initiatives geared towards encouraging women’s participation in STEM studies. This kind of progress could signal long-term labour market transformations, although sustaining this trajectory will require ongoing investments in gender-equitable resources and career pathways.

FIGURE 6: Gender Parity Index for completion (graduation) at public universities by field of study, 2022



Source: Own calculations based on DHET Statistics on Post-School Education and Training 2022

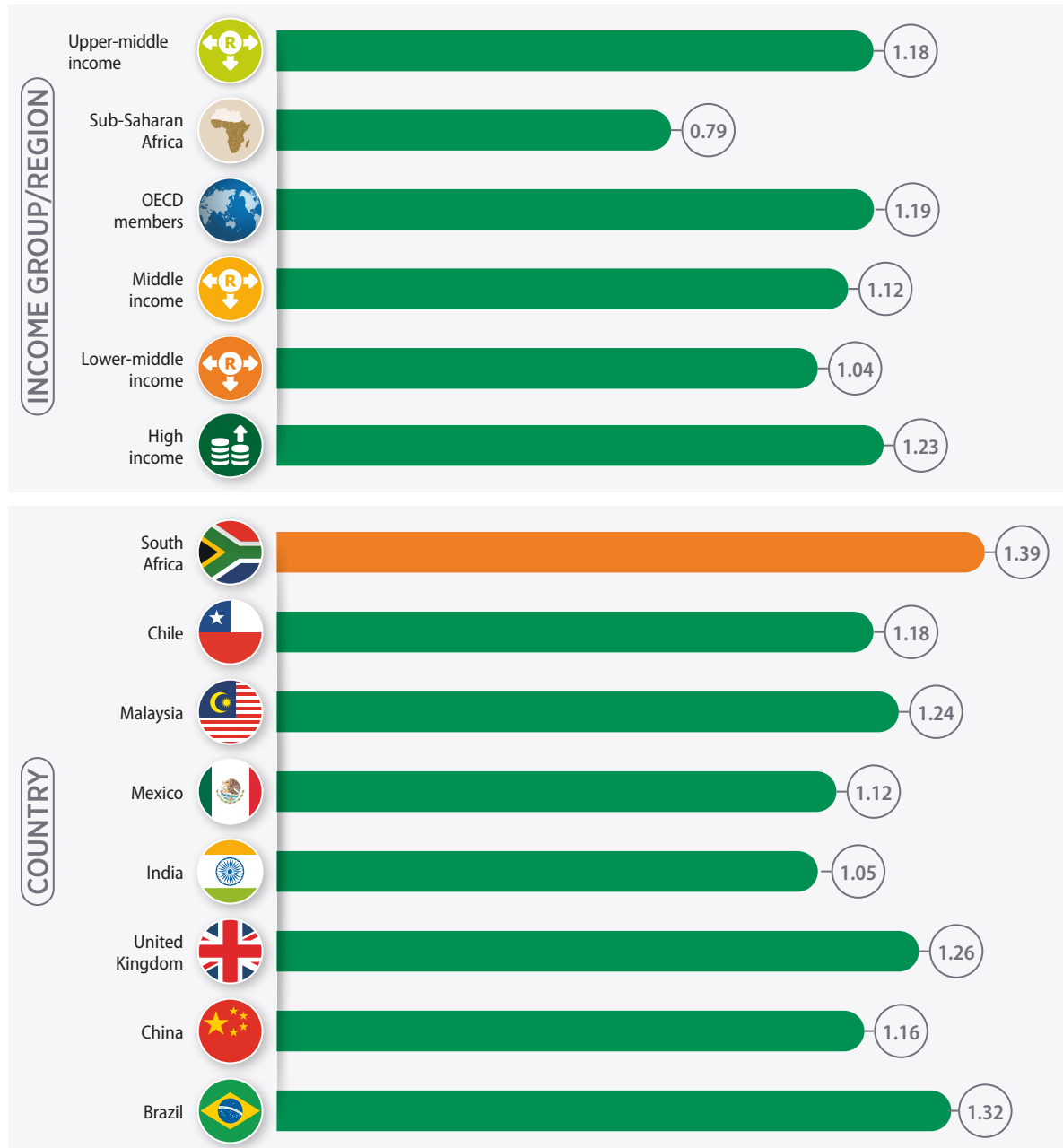
Figure 7 compares South Africa’s GPI for gross tertiary enrolment in 2021 with those of other countries and regional averages, highlighting the country’s exceptional performance in promoting female participation in tertiary. South Africa recorded a GPI of 1.39, indicating significantly higher enrolment in tertiary education by females than males.

This figure places South Africa ahead of high-income countries (average GPI of 1.23), upper-middle-income nations (average GPI of 1.18), and OECD member states (average GPI of 1.19). Additionally, South Africa’s GPI surpasses those of other BRICS nations and even developed economies like the United Kingdom (1.26), underscoring the country’s leadership in fostering female representation in tertiary education.

While South Africa’s high GPI reflects considerable progress in reducing the barriers to PSET for women, it also highlights concerns about male disengagement from higher education. The pronounced gender gap in enrolment rates points to the underrepresentation of males, which

may be influenced by socio-economic factors, cultural norms, or a perceived lower value of education for men. These challenges will need to be addressed in order to create a more inclusive educational landscape. Even though the high GPI demonstrates the effectiveness of policies aimed at fostering female participation, the next critical step is to balance this progress by implementing strategies that prioritise and support male enrolment, thus ensuring equitable opportunities for all.

FIGURE 7: Gender Parity Index for gross tertiary enrolment by country, 2021



Source: World Bank, 2024

Note: The countries included were selected based on the availability of the latest data.

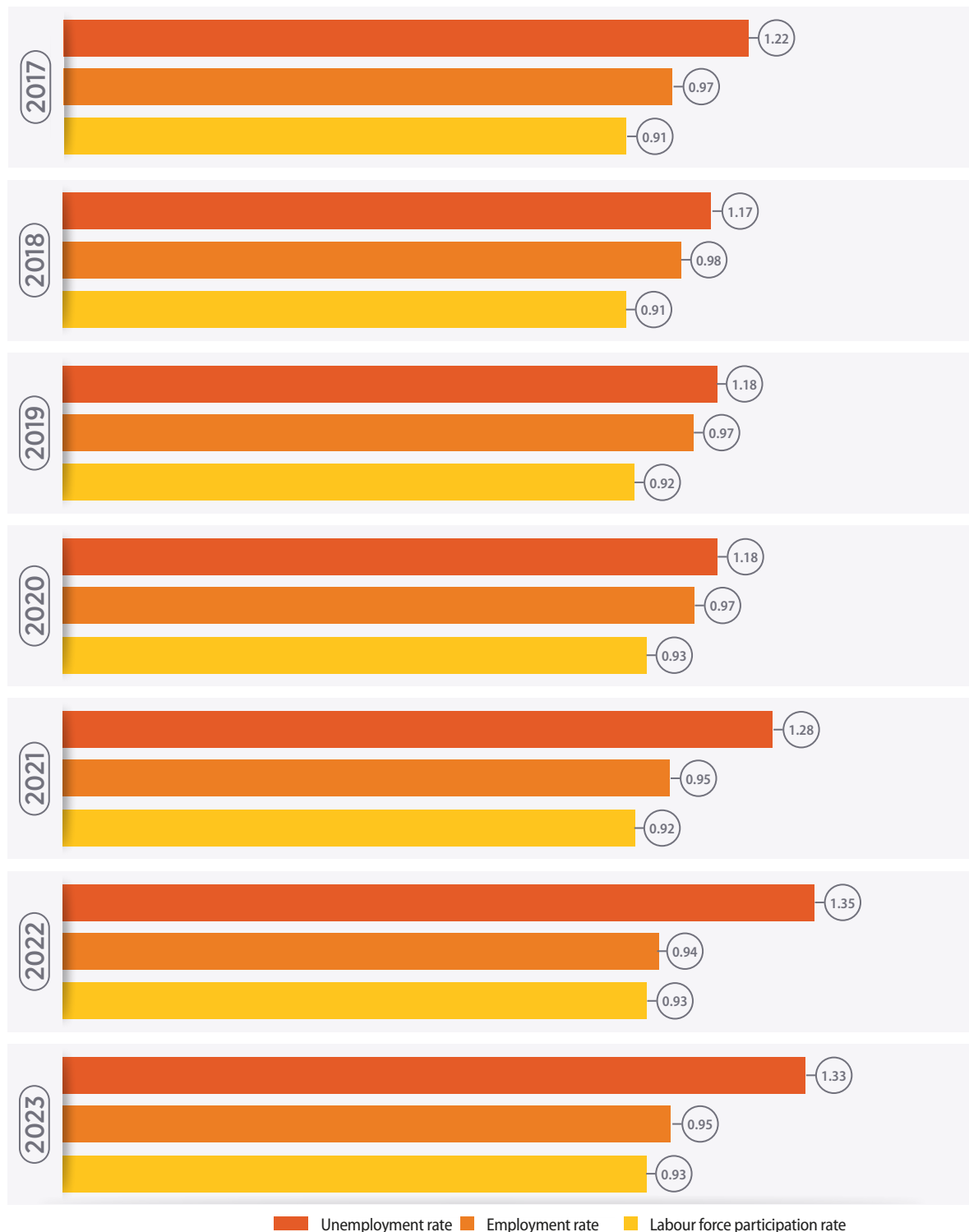


EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Figure 8 reveals the GPI trends for employment, unemployment, and labour force participation for persons who completed tertiary education (a post-matric qualification) from 2017 to 2023, exposing stark disparities between educational achievements and labour market outcomes for women. In 2023, the GPI for unemployment stood at 1.33, indicating higher unemployment rates for females compared to males. Conversely, the GPI for employment was 0.95, reflecting a lower employment rate for females. Similar to the GPI for employment, the GPI for labour force participation was 0.93, which shows a lower participation rate for females.

This discrepancy suggests that structural barriers such as gender discrimination and unequal opportunities continue to undermine women's labour market integration despite their educational advantages. Addressing these disparities requires a multi-faceted approach, including employer incentives to hire women, skills development aligned with labour market needs, and policies that promote equal pay and workplace flexibility. Policymakers must focus on boosting male participation in education while simultaneously addressing the socio-economic and institutional barriers hindering women's transition from education to employment.

FIGURE 8: Gender Parity Index by employment, unemployment, and labour force participation for persons who completed tertiary education, 2017–2023



Source: Own calculations based on Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS Trends 2008–2022: Q3)

Note: Tertiary education includes the following qualifications: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6, certificate with Grade 12/Standard 10, diploma with Grade 12/Standard 10, higher diploma, post higher diploma (master's, doctoral), postgraduate diploma, bachelor's degree, honours degree, and higher degrees (master's, doctoral).



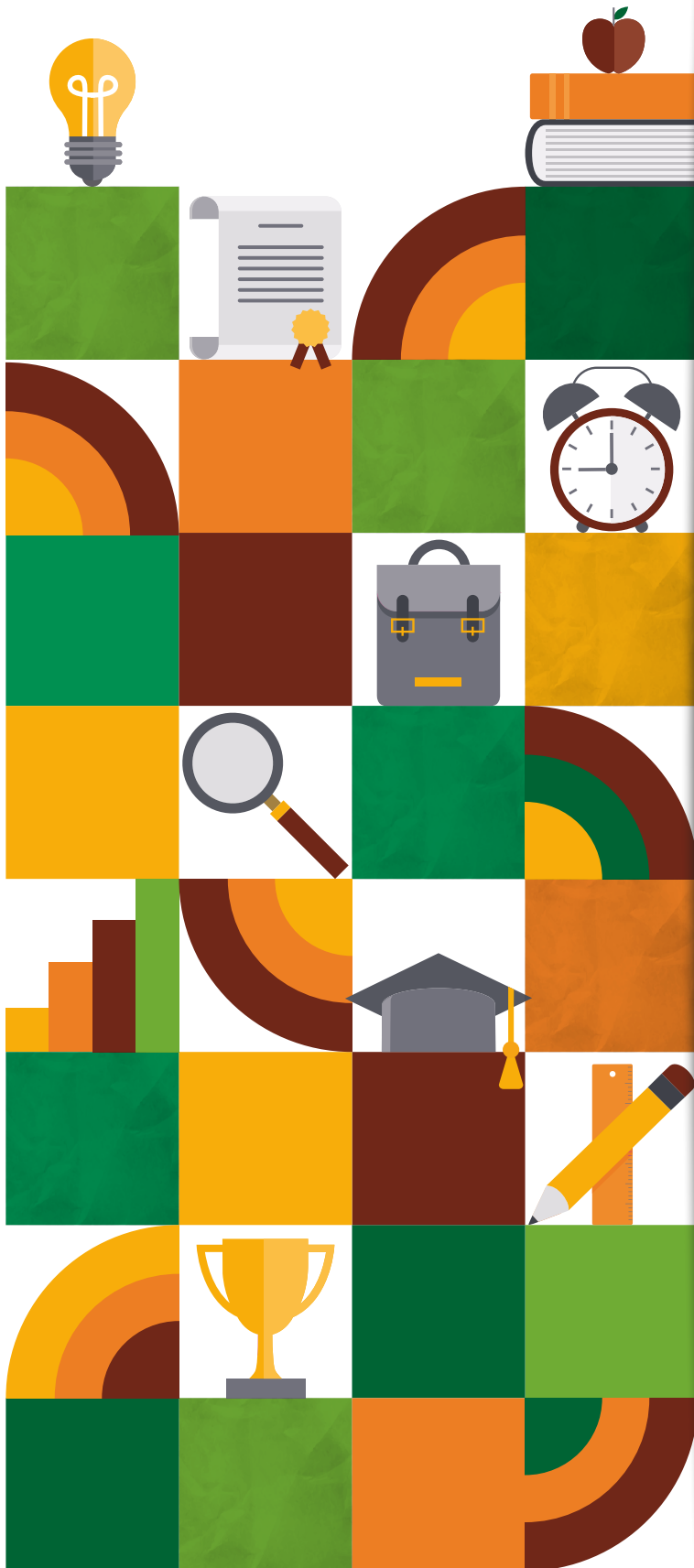
CONCLUSION

The findings in this Fact Sheet highlight South Africa's substantial progress in promoting gender parity in education and training, particularly in the PSET system. Female participation and completion rates have consistently outpaced those of males across most PSET institutions and fields of study, with notable progress in traditionally 'male-dominated' disciplines such as science, engineering, and technology. These achievements underscore the success of targeted interventions and policies aimed at fostering inclusivity.

However, the data also reveals critical challenges that must be addressed to ensure balanced and equitable outcomes. Although females dominate enrolment and completion rates at PSET institutions, the continued underrepresentation of males, particularly at TVET and CET colleges, raises concerns about disengagement and structural barriers.

Furthermore, the labour market outcomes for females present a concerning disconnect between education and training attainment and employment equity. Despite higher educational achievements, females face persistently higher unemployment rates and lower employment, and labour force participation rates compared to males. Structural inequalities in the labour market, such as gender discrimination, unequal pay, and limited access to leadership roles, undermine the progress made in education. Bridging this gap will require a multi-dimensional approach that includes skills development aligned with labour market demands, employer incentives for gender-equitable hiring, and policies supporting workplace flexibility and equal pay.

Strategically, addressing these disparities requires a dual focus. Efforts must continue to support female success in education and employment while implementing targeted measures to engage and retain males within the PSET system. Equally, systemic labour market reforms are essential to translate educational gains into equitable economic opportunities for all genders. Achieving true gender parity in education and training as well as in employment will not only benefit individuals but also drive inclusive economic growth and social cohesion. By investing in equitable education and training opportunities and dismantling structural barriers in the labour market, South Africa can ensure that the potential of its entire population is harnessed for sustainable development.



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