

MARCH 2021

# FACT SHEET

## The Highest Level of Education Attainment in South Africa

Authors: Mamphokhu Khuluvhe and Vusani Negogogo



higher education  
& training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Department of Higher Education and Training

123 Francis Baard Street  
Pretoria  
South Africa

Private Bag X174  
Pretoria  
0001

Tel.: 0800 87 22 22

[www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za)

© Department of Higher Education and Training

The ideas, opinions, conclusions and policy recommendations expressed in this report are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The DHET will not be liable for any incorrect data and for errors in conclusions, opinions and interpretations emanating from the information.

Khuluvhe, M. and Negogogo, V., (2021) *Highest Level of Education Attainment in South Africa*, Department of Higher Education and Training, Pretoria.

This Fact Sheet is available on the Department of Higher Education and Training's website: [www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za)

Enquiries:

Tel.: 012 312 5465/5673

Fax: 086 457 0289

Email: [Khuluvhe.m@dhet.gov.za](mailto:Khuluvhe.m@dhet.gov.za)

Date of publication: March 2021



**higher education  
& training**

---

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## 1. BACKGROUND

Government has consistently expressed commitment to the development of *a skilled and capable workforce* as reflected in its policy and planning documents such as the Medium Term Strategic Framework<sup>1</sup> (MTSF). A proxy measure of the skills and capability of South Africa's workforce is its *Highest Level of Education Attainment* (HLEA). The HLEA is therefore often used internationally to compare the education levels of people across various countries. Such comparisons serve as a barometer for how countries perform in terms of their education systems; but they often also serve as indicators that investors draw on to assess investment potential in a country.

The Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system as envisaged by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is expected to be equitable, accessible and affordable to all sections of the population. This requires the redress of past and present injustices, including overcoming barriers to progress based on, amongst others, race, gender, age and disability. In the dawn of democracy, the new government was faced with an enormous task of piecing together the various opportunities for adults and youth into a single and coherent form that would fit the development needs of the South African society, and had to do this within the context of rebuilding a society ravaged by deep structural inequalities. In 1994, only 1.7 million people had post-matriculation as their highest level of education attainment, of whom 56% were white, 36% were African, 4% were coloured and 3% were Indian<sup>2</sup>. In 1996, about 3.8 million people out of a total population of 17.1 million aged 26 and above in South Africa had no education; of these about 3.5 million (93%) were African<sup>3</sup>. The immediate aim in the post-1994 period was therefore to turn around a system that had concentrated on providing skills to whites into one in which those who had been previously locked-out could gain entry and accreditation.

One of the first challenges for the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system is to therefore expand access to education and training and to change the makeup of the skills set of the population in the country. This is essential not only to take account of the needs of the youth who completed school but also for those who do not complete their schooling and for adults who need further education and training to allow them to live fuller and more productive lives as both workers and citizens. Given such challenges, this Fact Sheet aims to monitor the skills set amongst people in the population to assess whether the post-school education and training is making any transformational impact.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. 2014. Medium Term Strategic Framework 2014-2019. Republic of South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> SAIRR, 1995/96 South Africa Survey, p.97: using data sourced from Central Statistical Service, October Household Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Africa, A., Budlender, D. and Mpetsheni, Y. 2001. Education in South Africa: Selected findings from Census'96. Statistics South Africa, Pretoria.

## **2. PURPOSE**

The information provided in this Fact Sheet is intended to draw policymakers' attention to the trajectory of South Africa's education system in terms of the highest level of education attainment of the population, including its workforce. It provides signals on how best to balance the provisioning of education at different levels and seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What is the highest level of education attainment of South Africa's population, including its workforce?
- What is the profile of those who completed education at various levels, in terms of gender, race, province and age categories?
- To what extent has South Africa achieved its Constitutional obligation for the right to basic education?
- How does South Africa compare internationally, in terms of the achievement of literacy and those who have completed degrees, especially in terms of its workforce?

## **3. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

### **3.1. Adult**

Adult in this factsheet refers to individuals aged 25-64 years. The reason for selecting the age group is that at this age an individual has at-least completed their first school qualification or highest post-school qualification.

### **3.2. Employed**

Refers to those who performed work for pay, profit or family gain for at least one hour in the seven days prior to the interview or who were absent from work during these seven days, but did have some form of paid work to return to.

### **3.3. Highest Level of Educational Attainment**

Highest level of education refers to the highest grade completed at school or the highest post-school qualification obtained.

### **3.4. Tertiary education**

Tertiary education refers to the following qualifications:

- an undergraduate degree
- a post-graduate degree
- a diploma
- a Higher Certificate (upon completion of matric)
- an advanced Diploma or advanced Certificate

### **3.5. Unemployed**

Two definitions of unemployment are used in South Africa, the strict<sup>4</sup> and the expanded definition. Both definitions include people who are not employed, but who are available for work. But they differ from each other in the following way: a requirement of the first or strict definition is that a given individual has taken specific steps to seek employment in the four weeks prior to a given point in time. The second or expanded definition focuses on the desire to work, irrespective of whether or not the person has taken active steps to find work.

---

<sup>4</sup> Also referred to as the official or narrow definition.

#### 4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows that significantly more South African adults have some secondary (less than Grade 12) and secondary education (Grade 12 and equivalent) as their highest level of education attainment than a decade ago. The share of the population aged 25-64 year olds who have some secondary education as their highest level of education attainment increased by 2.2 percentage points from 36.1% to 38.3% while for those with secondary education (Grade 12 and equivalent) increased by 7.1 percentage points from 25.4% in 2010 to 32.5% in 2020. However, despite some progress, only 5.9% of South African adults have a degree as their highest level of education attainment in 2020.

**Table 1: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 years, by highest level of education attainment, 2010 and 2020**

Highest level of education attainment	2010		2020	
	Number	% Share	Number	% Share
No Schooling	1 244 865	5.4%	583 889	2.0%
Less than primary	2 874 446	12.4%	1 986 050	6.8%
Primary	1 389 347	6.0%	1 209 666	4.2%
Some secondary	8 386 298	36.1%	11 134 720	38.3%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	5 906 079	25.4%	9 457 439	32.5%
Certificate	597 955	2.6%	1 004 677	3.5%
Diploma	1 325 562	5.7%	1 725 793	5.9%
Degree	1 194 823	5.1%	1 721 255	5.9%
Other	288 321	1.2%	234 326	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 207 696</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>29 057 813</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE ,SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Table 2 shows gendered differences in the highest levels of education attainment. In South Africa, more men have secondary education as their highest level of education attainment than women. 50.9% of men and 49.1% of women attained this level in 2020. In contrast, more women (53.4%) have a degree as their highest level of education attainment than men (46.6%) in 2020.

**Table 2: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 year olds, by highest level of education attainment and gender, 2010 and 2020**

Highest level of education attainment	Q4:2010				Q4:2020				
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
No schooling	473 219	38.0%	771 645	62.0%	1 244 864	243 872	41.8%	340 017	583 889
Less than primary	1 362 808	47.4%	1 511 638	52.6%	2 874 446	995 424	50.1%	990 626	1 986 050
Primary	630 718	45.4%	758 630	54.6%	1 389 348	592 192	49.0%	617 474	1 209 666
Some Secondary	4 003 656	47.7%	4 382 642	52.3%	8 386 298	5 508 333	49.5%	5 626 387	11 134 720
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	3 027 976	51.3%	2 878 103	48.7%	5 906 079	4 813 813	50.9%	4 643 626	9 457 438
Certificate	313 293	52.4%	284 662	47.6%	597 955	483 671	48.1%	521 006	1 004 677
Diploma	562 755	42.5%	762 806	57.5%	1 325 561	629 302	43.8%	805 929	1 435 231
Degree	641 760	53.7%	553 063	46.3%	1 194 823	937 776	46.6%	1 074 042	2 011 818
Other	173 000	60.0%	115 321	40.0%	288 321	134 162	57.3%	100 164	234 326

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RIGUDE ,SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC(V) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC(V) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC(V) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Table 3 shows that Africans and Coloured population groups had the largest proportions of persons who have some secondary schooling as their highest level of education attainment. The largest proportions of Indian/Asians and Whites, meanwhile, had secondary education as their highest level of education attainment. In general, there were improvements in the share of persons with degree qualifications within each of the population groups. Although the proportion of African adults who have a degree as their highest level of education attainment has almost doubled over the past decade, only 4.8% of Africans had a degree in 2020, compared to 26.8% of White adults who had a degree in 2020 (up from 22.6% in 2010).

**Table 3: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 year olds, by highest level of education attainment and race, 2010 and 2020**

Highest level of education attainment	African				Coloured				Indian/Asian				White			
	Q4:2010		Q4:2020		Q4:2010		Q4:2020		Q4:2010		Q4:2020		Q4:2010		Q4:2020	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
No schooling	1 188	6.7%	548	2.4%	52	2.3%	26	1.0%	4	0.6%	6	0.7%	1	0.0%	3	0.1%
Less than primary	2 577	14.6%	1 797	7.7%	259	11.4%	172	6.5%	29	4.1%	6	0.7%	10	0.4%	11	0.5%
Primary	1 160	6.6%	1 042	4.5%	189	8.3%	142	5.4%	31	4.4%	14	1.7%	10	0.4%	13	0.6%
Some Secondary	6 844	38.7%	9 529	41.0%	937	41.2%	1 142	43.3%	200	28.5%	180	21.7%	405	15.8%	284	12.1%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	4 010	22.7%	7 277	31.3%	579	25.5%	783	29.7%	295	42.1%	394	47.5%	1 022	39.8%	1 003	42.7%
Certificate	434	2.5%	759	3.3%	33	1.5%	99	3.8%	12	1.7%	22	2.7%	118	4.6%	125	5.3%
Diploma	772	4.4%	964	4.1%	109	4.8%	126	4.8%	44	6.3%	80	9.7%	401	15.6%	265	11.3%
Degree	464	2.6%	1 127	4.8%	74	3.3%	131	5.0%	75	10.7%	125	15.1%	582	22.6%	629	26.8%
Other	214	1.2%	199	0.9%	41	1.8%	16	0.6%	11	1.6%	2	0.2%	22	0.9%	17	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 663</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>23 242</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2 273</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2 637</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2 571</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2 350</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE .SANU), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

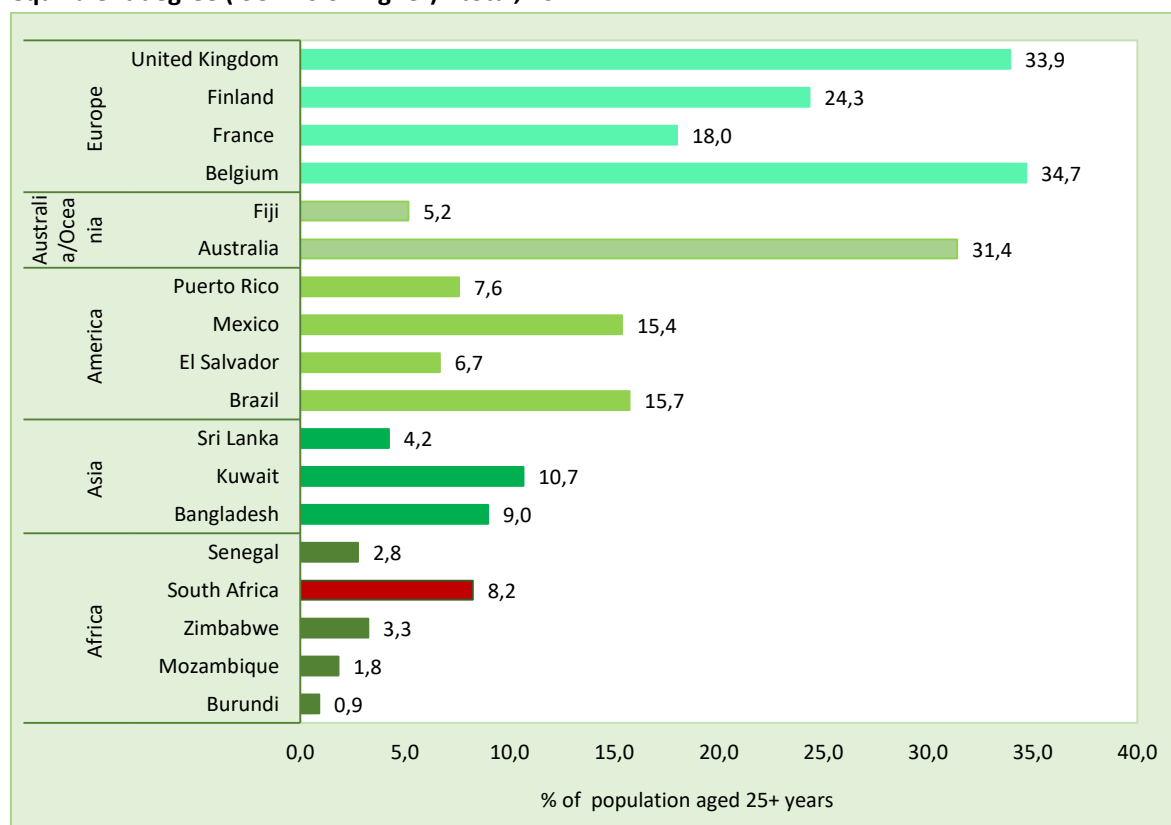
Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Figure 1 compares persons who completed a bachelor's degree relative to the population, across a range of countries based on the figures calculated by the World Bank. The graph depicts that the percentage of population aged 25 years and above with at least a completed bachelor's or equivalent degree (ISCED 6) or higher in South Africa, stood at 8.2% in 2017. South Africa's performance in this regard was higher relative to other African nations such as Senegal (2.8%), Zimbabwe (3.3%), Mozambique (1.8%) and Burundi (0.9%). Internationally, South Africa's position was also higher than countries such as Sri Lanka (4.2%), Fiji (5.2%), El Salvador (6.7%) and Puerto Rico (7.6%). However, South Africa's position in relation to other countries, especially European countries, and similar middle income countries such as Brazil and Mexico remains very low. Kuwait (10.7%), Mexico (15.4%), Brazil (15.7%), France (18.0%), Finland (24.3%), Australia (31.4%), United Kingdom (33.9%) and Belgium (34.7%) have much higher proportions of adults with degrees than South Africa. Even Bangladesh, which has a lower GDP than South Africa, has a higher proportion of adults with degrees than South Africa.

**Figure 1: Percentage of population aged 25 years and above with at least a completed bachelor's or equivalent degree (ISCED 6 or higher) - total, 2017**



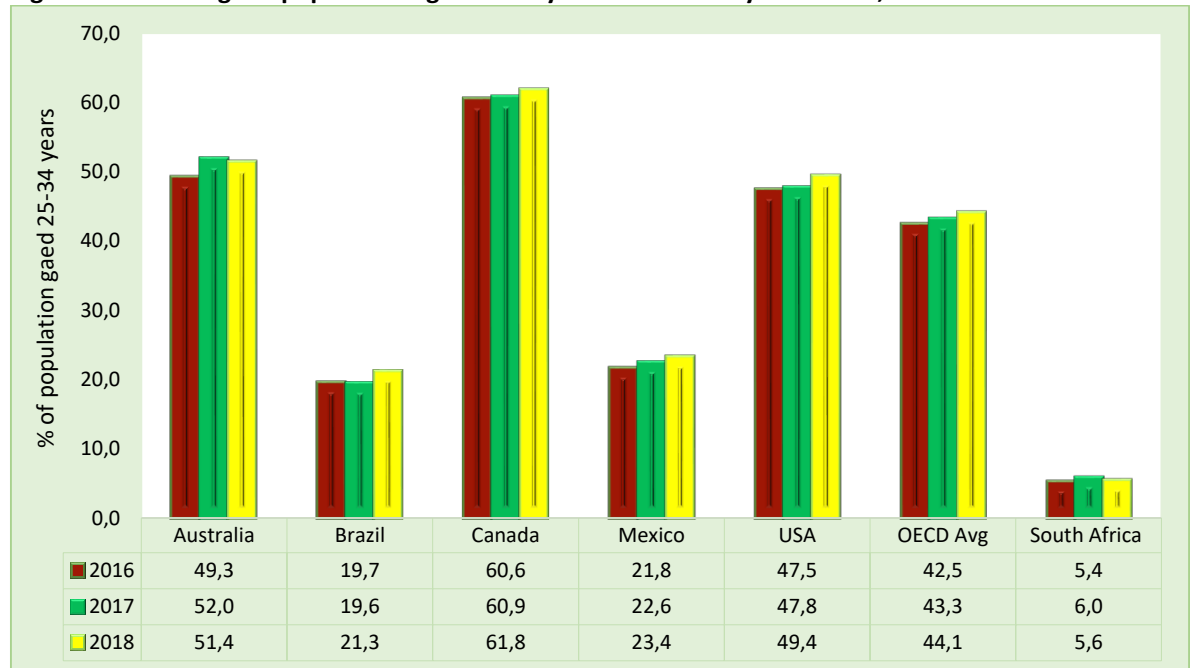
Source: World Bank Education Statistics 2020

Note 1: Latest data available at the time of producing the report was for the year 2017.

Note 2: The countries included in this Figure were selected based on availability of latest data.

Figure 2 indicates the number of 25-34 year olds in the population with tertiary education , expressed as a percentage of the number of persons in the same age group for South Africa, relative to those in selected countries in the world. Over the years 2016 to 2018, South Africa’s share of population aged 25-34 years with tertiary education compares lower at 5.4% and 5.6% in 2016 and 2018 respectively, relative to other countries in the OECD group. South Africa’s performance was lower than the OECD averages of 42.5% in 2016 and 44.1% in 2018, as well as Brazil (19.7% in 2016 and 21.3% in 2018) and Mexico (21.8% in 2016 and 23.4% in 2018).

**Figure 2: Percentage of population aged 25-34 years with tertiary education, 2016-2018**



Source: OECD Education at a glance: Educational attainment and labour-force status 2020

In 2020, the unemployment rate for the adults aged 25-64 years old was 29.3%<sup>5</sup>, reflecting a significant increase of 9.5 percentage points over the past decade. It is striking that 5.9 million adults in South Africa are currently unemployed. While the share and unemployment rates are lower for those who had post-school certificates, diplomas and degrees as their highest level of education attainment, Table 4 shows that from 2010 to 2020, unemployment rates had increased across all education levels, except for adults who had no schooling or less than primary as their highest level of education. This could be attributed to the negative impact of economic contractions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in many adults being retrenched.

**Table 4: Number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who are unemployed (strict definition), by highest level of education attainment, 2010 and 2020**

Highest level of education attainment	2010			2020		
	Number unemployed	% Share	Unemployment rate	Number unemployed	% Share	Unemployment rate
No Schooling	79 499	2.5%	0.5%	36 065	0.6%	0.2%
Less than primary	305 234	9.7%	1.9%	281 613	4.8%	1.4%
Primary	156 262	5.0%	1.0%	213 790	3.6%	1.1%
Some secondary	1 439 862	45.9%	9.1%	2 675 649	45.4%	13.3%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	947 541	30.2%	6.0%	2 090 821	35.4%	10.4%
Certificate	81 032	2.6%	0.5%	188 413	3.2%	0.9%
Diploma	76 142	2.4%	0.5%	236 347	4.0%	1.2%
Degree	30 229	1.0%	0.2%	139 577	2.4%	0.7%
Other	20 139	0.6%	0.1%	36 236	0.6%	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 135 938</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>5 898 512</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE ,SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

<sup>5</sup> This figure is based on the strict definition of unemployment

Table 5 shows that from 2010 to 2020, the total number of persons employed increased by 1.6 million from 12.7 million in 2010 to 14.2 million in 2020. The Table reveals that over the last decade higher levels of education have correlated with higher employment rates. Thus, while those who had some secondary education and lower as their highest level of education attainment saw their employment levels decline from 2010 to 2020, the employment share of those with secondary, post-school certificates and degrees had increased in the same period. However, it is concerning that the employment share of those with a diploma as their highest level of education attainment decreased by 1.8 percentage points from 8.8% in 2010 to 7.0% in 2020.

**Table 5: Number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who are employed, by highest level of education attainment, 2010 and 2020**

Highest level of education attainment	2010		2020	
	Number employed	% Share	Number employed	% Share
No Schooling	394 492	3.1%	177 401	1.2%
Less than primary	1 065 827	8.4%	724 420	5.1%
Primary	617 591	4.9%	491 240	3.4%
Some secondary	4 110 890	32.5%	4 563 015	32.0%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	3 701 381	29.2%	4 934 425	34.6%
Certificate	433 902	3.4%	639 096	4.5%
Diploma	1 111 788	8.8%	1 000 865	7.0%
Degree	1 049 967	8.3%	1 604 792	11.3%
Other	182 087	1.4%	112 430	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12 667 925</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>14 247 684</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE ,SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

PSET qualifications provide good returns to individuals. It improves their chances of both employment and better wages. Table 6 shows that the median wages of workers with a degree are more than 6 times as large as those of workers without at least matric or secondary education. The race gap in median wages favours Whites above all other race groups at all levels of education. However, disparities in median wage earnings per month narrowed substantially among persons with a degree across all the four population groups, where the lowest median wage was R18 488 among Africans while the highest median wage was R20 142 among White counterparts.

The gender gap in median wages favours men above women at all levels of education; however, similar to that of racial disparities, the gap between males and females with a degree is narrowing. In 2019, the median wage of males with a degree was 7.6% (R1 409) higher than the female median wage of R18 591.

**Table 6: Median wages per month by race, gender and highest level of education attainment, 2019**

	No matric	Matric	Certificate	Diploma	Degree	Total
African	3 021	4 000	5 164	7 023	18 488	3 563
Coloured	3 491	4 500	4 923	5 681	18 591	3 683
Indian	4 648	5 900	20 033	14 460	19 624	7 453
White	12 216	9 668	19 337	15 107	20 142	13 132
All males	3 580	4 648	10 833	8 728	20 000	4 131
All females	2 545	3 850	4 886	7 050	18 591	3 466
Total	3 200	4 190	7 500	8 000	19 135	3 822

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2019

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This Fact Sheet shows that levels of education attainment are improving in South Africa. Currently, significantly more adults have Grade 12 as their highest level of education attainment (32.5%) than a decade ago (25.4%). Similarly, more South African adults have degrees today (~ 1.7 million) than a decade ago (1.2 million); this however translates to only 5.9% of South African adults currently having a degree. In this regard, South Africa continues to fare very poorly in comparison to other middle income countries thereby compromising its international economic competitiveness.

The substantial increase in numbers of people who have completed Grade 12 points to a potential increase in the demand for PSET, and the consequent need for a pronounced expansion of the PSET system.

The Fact Sheet also reveals that PSET qualifications provides good returns to individuals. It improves adult's chances of employment and better wages. The median wages of workers with a degree are more than 6 times as large as those of workers without at least matric. While the gender gap in median wages favours men above women at all levels of education, this gap is proportionally smallest amongst more educated workers. A similar pattern applies in terms of race.

## 6. APPENDICES

**Table 7: Number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who are unemployed (broad or expanded definition), by highest level of education attainment**

Highest level of education attainment	2010			2020		
	Number unemployed	% Share	Unemployment rate	Number unemployed	% Share	Unemployment rate
No Schooling	195 250	3.7%	1.1%	82 643	0.9%	0.9%
Less than primary	666 864	12.7%	3.7%	496 004	5.5%	5.5%
Primary	327 509	6.2%	1.8%	343 903	3.8%	3.8%
Some secondary	2 382 517	45.3%	13.3%	4 201 961	46.9%	46.9%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	1 377 868	26.2%	7.7%	3 034 719	33.8%	33.8%
Certificate	122 627	2.3%	0.7%	262 517	2.9%	2.9%
Diploma	108 928	2.1%	0.6%	304 530	3.4%	3.4%
Degree	37 575	0.7%	0.2%	188 082	2.1%	2.1%
Other	37 489	0.7%	0.2%	51 198	0.6%	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 256 628</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>8 965 557</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010-2020 (Quarter 4).

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE ,SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/Phd).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.