

How's Life in South Africa?

The figure below shows South Africa's relative strengths and weaknesses in well-being, with reference to both the OECD average and the average outcomes of the OECD partner countries considered in *How's Life? 2017* (i.e. Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and South Africa).













South Africa has some areas of strength relative to both the OECD and partner countries: **Housing affordability** in South Africa stands close to the average across the OECD partner countries, and is better than in the OECD average level. At almost 74% in 2014, **voter turnout** is above the OECD average rate, and higher than in most partner countries.

In the case of **social support**, 88% of South Africans report having friends or relatives whom they can count on in times of trouble, roughly in line with the average for both the OECD (89%) and the partner countries (90%).

There is one area where South Africa performs better than the partner country average but worse than the OECD average: The **homicide rate** is half the level of the partner country average, but still three times higher than the OECD average.

South Africa also has several areas of weakness compared to both the OECD and the other partner countries: The **employment rate**, **life expectancy** at birth, satisfaction with the local **water quality** and feeling **safe when walking alone at night** are among the lowest in both the OECD and the partner countries, and the **long-term unemployment** rate is one of the highest across OECD and partner countries. 37% of South Africans live in housing without **basic sanitation**, the highest share across both the OECD and partner countries, while average **air quality** (measured in terms of exposure to outdoor air pollution by fine particulate matter, PM_{2.5}) is very poor. 43% of South African adults have attained at least an upper secondary degree, below both the OECD average and the average across the partner countries.

Current well-being strengths and weaknesses in South Africa












Strengths	Strengths relative to the OECD average	Strengths relative to partner countries	Weaknesses
Above average for both the OECD and partner countries	Above the OECD average, but below partner countries' average	Above partner countries' average, but below the OECD average	Below average for both the OECD and partner countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Housing affordability  Voter turnout 		<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Homicides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Employment  Long-term unemployment  Basic sanitation  Working hours  Life expectancy  Educational attainment  Water quality  Air quality  Feeling safe at night

Note: Both the OECD and partner country averages are typically population-weighted (see the online data annex for further details). Only headline well-being indicators with a complete or almost complete coverage of OECD partner countries are considered (i.e. one or no missing countries per indicator).

Additional information, including the data used in this country note, can be found at:


www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-2017-country-notes-data.xlsx


Change in South Africa's average well-being over the past 10 years


Dimension	Description	Change
 Income and wealth	In South Africa, household net adjusted disposable income was nearly 700 USD higher in 2014 than in 2008 (no comparable data are available prior to this period). While for OECD countries this would be a comparatively small change over a 10-year period, for South Africa it represents a cumulative increase of around 9%.	↔
 Jobs and earnings	The employment rate in South Africa has remained relatively stable since 2005, and currently stands at 43%. Although the long-term unemployment rate has increased by 0.4 percentage points, job strain has improved over the past decade.	↔ ↘ ↗
 Housing conditions	Housing has become more affordable since 2005, with the share of household disposable income spent on housing costs down by 1.9 percentage points. The share of households lacking basic sanitation has fallen from 41.3% to 38%.	↗ ↗
 Work-life balance	The past decade has seen a large fall in the share of employees working 50 hours or more per week in South Africa, from nearly 24% in 2008 to 19% in 2016.	↗
 Health status	Life expectancy at birth in South Africa has increased by nearly 6 years since 2005, but still stands well below the OECD average.	↗
 Education and skills	The share of the adult working-age population who has attained at least an upper secondary education increased from 37% in 2008 to 43% in 2015.	↗
 Social connections	Social support has increased gradually, with the share of the population reporting that they have relatives or friends whom they can count on to help in case of need increasing from 84% to 88%.	↗
 Civic engagement	Voter turnout among the population registered to vote fell by 4 percentage points between the 2009 and 2014 general elections in South Africa.	↘
 Environmental quality	Satisfaction with local water quality has fallen slightly over the last 10 years. Annual exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution has meanwhile increased by 7% since 2005, peaking in 2013.	↘ ↘
 Personal security	The homicide rate in South Africa fell from 12 to 10 deaths per 100 000 people in 10 years. On the other hand, feelings of safety when walking alone at night have not improved, and remain at almost half the OECD average level.	↗ ↔
 Subjective well-being	In South Africa, there is tentative evidence of a slight fall in life satisfaction since 2005, from an average of 5.1 to 4.8 (measured on a 0-10 scale).	↘


Note: For each indicator in every dimension: ↗ refers to an improvement; ↔ indicates little or no change; and ↘ signals deterioration. This is based on a comparison of the starting year (2005 in most cases) and the latest available year (usually 2015 or 2016). The order of the arrows shown in column three corresponds to that of the indicators mentioned in column two.

South Africa's resources and risks for future well-being: Illustrative indicators

 Natural capital		
Indicator	Equivalent OECD tier	Change
CO ₂ emissions from domestic consumption	1	↘ 2001-2011
Exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution	3	↘ 2005-2013
Forest area	2	↔ 2005-2014
Renewable freshwater resources	3	.. Long-term annual avg
No data available on greenhouse gas emissions, freshwater abstractions and threatened species.		

 Human capital		
Indicator	Equivalent OECD tier	Change
Young adult educational attainment	3	↗ 2008-2015
Long-term unemployment	3	↘ 2005-2016
Life expectancy at birth	3	↗ 2005-2015
Smoking prevalence	2	↗ 2005-2015
Obesity prevalence	3	↗ 2008-2014
No data available on cognitive skills at age 15, educational expectancy and adult skills.		

 Economic capital		
Indicator	Equivalent OECD tier	Change
Gross fixed capital formation	3	↘ 2005-2014

 Social capital		
Indicator	Equivalent OECD tier	Change
Trust in the national government	1	↘ 2005-2016
Voter turnout	2	↘ 2009-2014

No data available on produced fixed assets, financial net worth of total economy, intellectual property assets, investment in R&D, household debt, household net wealth, financial net worth of government and banking sector leverage.

No data available on trust in others, trust in the police, government stakeholder engagement and volunteering in organisations.

1	Equivalent to the top-performing OECD tier, latest available year
2	Equivalent to the middle-performing OECD tier, latest available year
3	Equivalent to the bottom-performing OECD tier, latest available year

↗	Improving over time
↘	Worsening over time
↔	No change
..	No data available

HOW LARGE ARE WELL-BEING INEQUALITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA?

What is inequality and how is it measured? Measuring inequality means trying to describe **how unevenly distributed** outcomes are in society. *How's Life? 2017* adopts several different approaches:

- Measures of “**vertical**” inequalities address how unequally outcomes are spread across all people in society – for example, by looking at the size of the gap between people at the bottom of the distribution and people at the top.
- Measures of “**horizontal**” inequalities focus on the gap between population groups defined by specific characteristics (such as men and women, young and old, people with higher and lower levels of education).
- Measures of “**deprivation**” report the share of people who live below a certain level of well-being (such as those who face income poverty or live in an overcrowded household).

The single indicator of **vertical inequality** available for South Africa – household income – highlights levels of inequality that are well above those found in the OECD on average as well as in partner countries: South Africans in the top quintile of the distribution have, on average, a household income nearly 38 times higher than that of those in the bottom quintile.

In general, the **gender divide** is more pronounced in South Africa than in most OECD countries. For instance, unemployment is far more common among women than among men, and women also devote less time to leisure and personal care. However, unlike most OECD countries, in South Africa women are significantly more likely than men to vote at national elections.

In a majority of OECD countries, **young people** lag behind **middle-aged adults** in terms of income,

unemployment and voter turnout, but fare better when it comes to time devoted to social activities. Young South Africans experience the typical disadvantages in income, unemployment and turnout – with gaps greater than in OECD on average. Additionally, they devote substantially less time to socializing than the middle-aged do.

Attaining **tertiary education** makes a clear difference on the job market: those with a **secondary** level of education are over twice as likely to be unemployed than those with higher levels of educational attainment. On other indicators, the performance of those with secondary education in South Africa is mixed. For instance, their disadvantage in terms of social support is more pronounced than in most OECD countries but in terms of voter turnout, they do not experience the same gap as in the OECD on average.

South Africa records high levels of **deprivation** in 8 out of 9 available indicators. Deprivations that are widespread in the country include income poverty (26.6%), unemployment (26.7%), low educational attainment (57.6%) and exposure to high levels of air pollution (69.4%).

Well-being inequalities in South Africa

	Vertical inequality	Horizontal inequality by			Deprivation
		Gender	Age	Education	
		Women relative to men	Young relative to middle-aged	Secondary relative to tertiary	
Household income	●		●		●
Household net wealth	○		○	○	○
Earnings	○	○	○	○	
Low pay		○			○
Employment		●	●	●	
Unemployment		●	●	●	●
Housing affordability					○
Rooms per person					○
Life expectancy	○				
Perceived health		○	○	○	○
Working hours	○	○	○	○	○
Time off		●	●		
Educational attainment		●	●		●
Cognitive skills at 15	○	○		○	○
Adult skills	○	○	○	○	○
Time spent socialising		●	●		
Social support		●	●	●	●
Voter turnout		●	●	●	●
Having a say in government	○	○	○	○	○
Air quality					●
Water quality		●	●	●	●
Homicides		●			●
Feeling safe at night		●	●	●	●
Life satisfaction	○	○	○	○	○
Negative affect balance					○

BETTER LIFE INDEX

The **Better Life Index** is an interactive web application that allows users to compare well-being across OECD countries and beyond on the basis of the set of well-being indicators used in *How's Life?*. Users chose what weight to give to each of the eleven dimensions shown below and then see how countries perform, based on their own personal priorities in life.

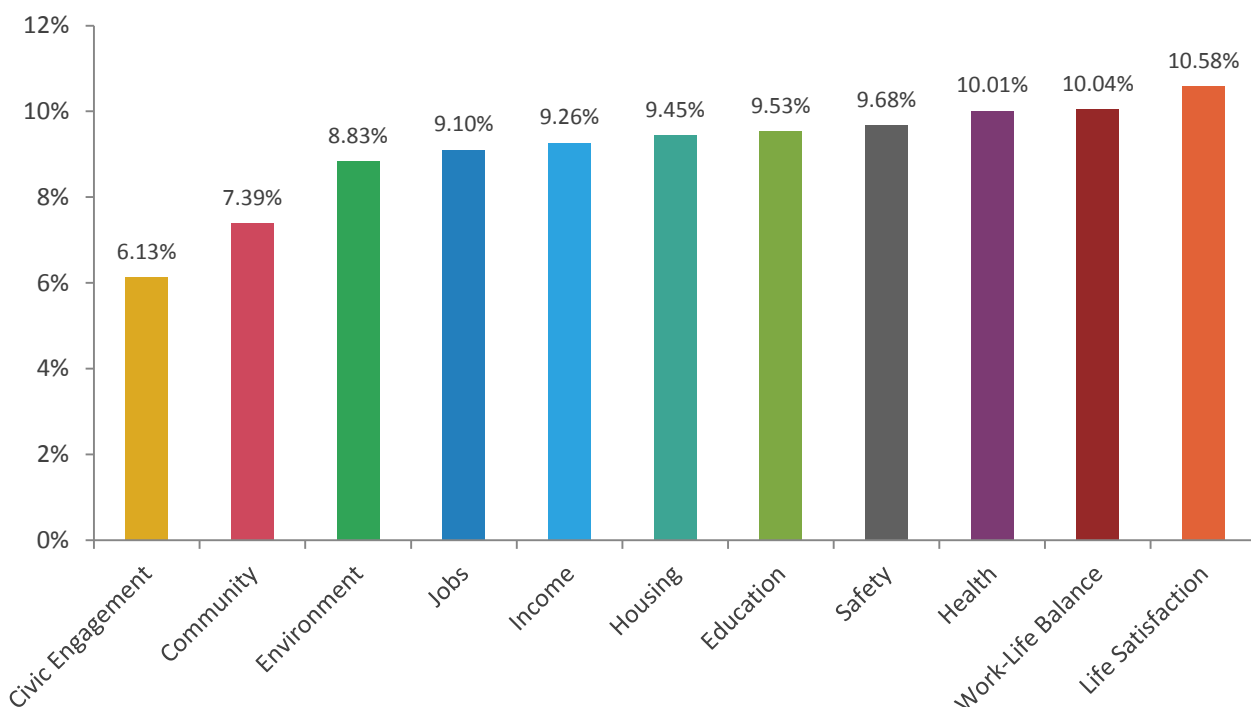


Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, and how these preferences differ across countries and population groups.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Since its launch in May 2011, the Better Life Index has attracted **over ten million visits from just about every country on the planet** and has received over **22 million page views**. To date, over 28,000 people in South Africa have visited the website making South Africa the 49th country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are CapeTown (27% of visits), Sandton, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared with the OECD by 354 website visitors in South Africa. Findings are indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For South African users of the Better Life Index, life satisfaction, work-life balance and health are the three most important aspects of their life** (shown below).¹ Up-to-date information, including a breakdown of participants in each country by gender and age can be found here: <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#ZAF>.



¹ User information for South Africa is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and September 2017.

The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's Life?* report. It also includes an interactive web application, the *Better Life Index*, and a number of **methodological and research projects** to improve the information base available to understand well-being levels, trends and their drivers.

The OECD Better Life Initiative:

- Helps to inform policy making to improve quality of life.
- Connects policies to people's lives.
- Generates support for needed policy measures.
- Improves civic engagement by encouraging the public to create their own *Better Life Index* and share their preferences about what matters most for well-being
- Empowers the public by improving their understanding of policy-making.

This note presents **selected findings for South Africa from the *How's Life?* 2017 report** (pages 1-4) and shows what **South African users of the Better Life Index** are telling us about their **well-being priorities** (page 5).

HOW'S LIFE?



How's Life?, published every two years, provides a comprehensive picture of well-being in OECD and selected partner countries by bringing together an internationally comparable set of well-being indicators. It considers eleven dimensions of current well-being including: income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing; health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security; and subjective well-being. It also looks at four types of resources that help to sustain well-being over time: natural, human, economic and social capital.

The *How's Life?* 2017 report presents the latest data on well-being in OECD and partner countries, including how lives have changed since 2005. It includes a special focus on inequalities, the well-being of migrants in OECD countries, and the issue of governance – particularly how people experience and engage with public institutions. To read more, visit: www.oecd.org/howslife.

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