

Zugänge, Barrieren und Potentiale für die internationale Mobilität von Wissenschaftlerinnen

Länderbericht Südafrika

Country dossier South Africa

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1 Objective of the Analysis

The *Study of the Potential of Internationally Mobile Women Scientists* aims to explore the reasons for the low female participation among grantees of the Humboldt Foundation. The Foundation wishes to receive impulses for action on how it can attract more excellent women scientists to the Humboldt Network. To this end, the study combines a needs analysis with a deficit analysis: The needs analysis will examine the potential for qualified female academics on the demand side and analyse the requirements for the international mobility of female academics and their needs.

The mobility culture and specific aspects of the scientific careers of women scientists will be addressed for some key countries, some of which will be analysed in more detail. For the deficit analysis on the supply side, gender-specific aspects of the Humboldt Programmes will be examined using three selected programmes as examples. By combining the two analyses, the desired impulses for changes that the Foundation could initiate will be identified. The needs analysis consists mainly of country dossiers. In this part of the study, international experts for 14 key countries examine the representation of female scientists and gender-specific qualification and career structures, especially regarding international mobility. The objective is to analyse the potentials and needs of women scientists.

The **overarching question** is: How high is the potential of female scientists in the individual country who could be attracted for a research stay in Germany due to their qualification and their willingness to be internationally mobile? The object of inquiry for this report is women's academic careers in South Africa, with a focus on internationalisation, in general, and on how highly-qualified South African academic women might be attracted to study in Germany via a Humboldt Programme initiative.

2 Object of Investigation

South Africa is a country on the southernmost tip of the African continent, with a population of 59,725,652 million in 2020. The classifications system for ethnic groups from Apartheid is still used. In 2018, the majority (roughly 46.5 million) were Black Africans, 5.021 million were 'Coloured', 4.469 million were White, and 1.430 million were Indian/Asian.

South Africa has eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. Most South Africans (over 99%) speak one of these languages as a first language. At most universities in South Africa, English has been adopted as the official medium for learning, teaching, research and administration. However, Zinn (2019) points out that English represents the mother tongue for only 9.6% of the total population.

In 2021, the GDP in South Africa was approximately 808.81 billion international dollars. However, a major challenge is maldistribution of wealth and opportunities. In 2017, South Africa

had the highest inequality in income distribution globally, with a Gini score of 63¹. The unemployment rate is 28.48%. The country spends approximately 5.9% of its GDP on education.

In many respects, South Africa is seen as one of the most progressive countries in sub-Saharan Africa in relation to equalities. For example, the post-apartheid Constitution was the first in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation, and South Africa was the fifth country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage (Hussein, 2020)².

3 Context Analysis of the Higher Education and Research System

3.1 Post-Apartheid Transformation

The African National Congress (ANC) government prioritised concerns about how to make higher education more inclusive in the post-Apartheid decades since 1994. The concept of transformation has been central to policy discourse in the newly-formed democratic state. The issue of access to higher education has been crucial, given the transformation imperative to redress the historical legacy of an unequal and segregated system resting on the systematic exclusion and political disempowerment of the majority of the population (Ashwin & Case, 2018). Higher education (HE) has been positioned as a major public good for the building of an effective democracy (Walker, 2018a).

A central concern has been to address the historical race-based privileges and seek social justice, social mobility, and inclusion for historically disadvantaged groups (Cooper 2015). The five pillars of the new South African higher education policy framework were:

1. a single nationally coordinated system of HE;
2. increased access and raised participation rates;
3. increased responsiveness to societal and economic needs;
4. programme differentiation and the development of institutional niche areas;
5. a planning and coordination imperative (Kraak, 2004).

Prior to Apartheid – which lasted from 1948 to 1994 – four ‘elite’ white higher education institutions (Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand, Pretoria) emerged as universities after 1918, with another five white university ‘colleges’ becoming universities after 1945, followed in 1960 (during Apartheid) by another two – establishing six Afrikaans-medium and four English-medium historically white universities across the country, plus the University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance learning university (Cooper, 2015).

Differences related primarily to race, but also to language, e.g. English or Afrikaans, and type of institution, e.g. university or technikon. By 1994, there were 36 higher education

¹ The income Gini coefficient measures the deviation of the distribution of income (or consumption) among individuals or households within a country from a perfectly equal distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, a value of 100 absolute inequality

² Same-sex relations are legal in only 22 of Africa's 54 countries, and are punishable by death, e.g. in Mauritania, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan, or lengthy prison terms in some nations, e.g. in Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, Gambia, Kenya and Malawi (Hussein, 2020).

institutions, including ten historically disadvantaged universities and seven historically disadvantaged technikons designated for the use of black (African, ‘Coloured’ and Indian) South Africans, while ten historically advantaged universities and seven historically advantaged technikons were designated for the exclusive development of white South Africans. The two distance institutions catered for all races (Bunting, 2006).

Fragmentation and racial segregation were key features of pre-1994 higher education. Under Apartheid, the separate higher education institutions for black and white population groups had programmes defined by apartheid beliefs about the roles considered appropriate for different social groups, e.g. nursing courses in black institutions, medicine in white universities. Under apartheid, black African students were legally prohibited from attending the 19 white higher education institutions and could only enrol in six institutions designated specifically for their use (Breetzke & Hedding, 2017).

The different categories of universities were governed and resourced differently, and white institutions were better funded and resourced than their black African ‘counterparts’. Policy since 1994 has aimed at the development of a single, coherent system that offers quality education to all South Africans and that will contribute to the economic and social needs of the new state and new society (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). The 1997 White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997) attempted to balance South Africa’s development needs via the massification of higher education and the development of a knowledge economy, redress and social justice for historically disadvantaged social groups. By 1997, the South African Qualifications Authority Act (Republic of South Africa, 1995) had been developed. This Act established a National Qualifications Framework.

In South Africa, as in many multi-racial societies, race, gender, and social class are heavily entangled (Badat, 2010). Naidoo and Ranchod (2018) argued that in South African higher education, the key transformative principle in the early post-Apartheid period was a narrow focus on demographic transformation, particularly of the student body, in relation to race, but this was later extended to gender, age, and disability.

3.2 Contemporary Challenges

Following the process of institutional mergers at the turn of the century, the public higher education sector currently comprises 26 public universities, classified by the Department of Higher Education and Training as 12 ‘traditional’ universities, 8 universities of technology, and 6 comprehensive universities. The latter two categories offer both diplomas and degrees (Ashwin & Case, 2018). South Africa currently has 5 universities in the top 500 of the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021*.

Table 1: Top five university rankings 2021

	Ranking
University of Cape Town	155th
University of the Witwatersrand	201–250th
Stellenbosch University	251–300th
University of KwaZulu-Natal	351–400th

Durban University of Technology

401–500

Source: Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021

There has been considerable disappointment about how higher education remains implicated in the perpetuation of deep inequalities in South African society (Schendel, 2018). A range of tensions emerged about how HE should be transformed, which values should take priority, e.g. discursive tensions – equity and economic development, and the effectiveness of policy implementation in South Africa (Kraak, 2004). While the South African higher education system has expanded considerably, doubling overall enrolment since democracy, with just under a million students now in the system, some groups of students remain under-represented. For example, while about half of the white and Indian youth cohort participate in higher education, for Black and ‘Coloured’ young people this is under a fifth of the overall cohort (Ashwin & Case, 2018).

Despite the introduction of an under-resourced state-funded financial aid system in 2000, socio-economically disadvantaged Black students are increasingly unable to afford tuition fees and access to the research-intensive universities (Luckett & Naicker, 2016). More than 85% of African socio-economically disadvantaged students attend the least research-intensive, low-status institutions, whereas at the five most elite universities Black (African) student numbers remain around 30% on average (Cooper, 2015: 260). Staffing patterns have also been slow to change, e.g. while Black Africans comprised 51.5% of staff in 2015, only 31.3% were represented in senior management, while women comprised 41.5% of those in senior management (Ese-osa Idahosa & Vincent, 2019).

Govinder et al. (2013) developed an ‘Equity Index’ (EI) to measure the state of demographic transformation of academic staff at the then 23 universities in South Africa. A main conclusion of their work was that more was required from government and other key role-players in order for the higher education sector to better reflect the demographics of South Africa. Cloete (2014) critiqued this research and pointed out that it was unlikely that the university would be a mirror of national demographics at this stage. According to Nkomo (2015), the higher education sector will not be nationally representative until 2055. The lack of investment and opportunities for primary and secondary education mean that higher education and its transformation have been at a premium for marginalised groups. For example, the first doctoral degree achieved by a Black South African was in 1946 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Breetzke & Hedding, 2017).

Government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was 6.5% in 2019. There has been a slight increase over the last five years, which signals a growing policy attention to invest in education. The percentage of total government expenditure on education for tertiary education was 15.25% in 2018.

Table 2: Government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
South Africa	5.9	5.9	6.1	6.1	6.5

Source: UIS, 2020

Table 3: Expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of total government expenditure on education

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
South Africa	12.4	12.1	12.5	..	14.3	15.25

Source: UIS, 2020

Public funding has not grown in accordance with growing enrolments in South Africa. Instead, capital expenditure by South Africa’s higher education institutions has fallen. The country’s 20 universities and 6 universities of technology recorded a 5.4% drop in capital expenditure in 2017 compared with 2016, falling from R6.22 billion to R5.89 billion (Stats SA, 2021).

Demand continues to outstrip supply of university places. For example, in 2017, the University of Cape Town (an elite research and teaching university) had 26,000 applications for 4,200 places (Walker, 2018b). Completion is also a challenge, and dropout rates are high, and the many students who do not complete their degrees, regardless of which institution they attend, are left with substantial debts but little return from their engagement in higher education, and these students are more likely to be from poorer backgrounds (Ashwin & Case, 2018). Le Grange (2016) reports that only 15% of the 60% of Black students who survive their first university year eventually complete their studies.

The #FeesMustFall protests that started in 2015 led by Black South African students were driven by anger over the structural inequalities that still exist in South African society in general, and in higher education in particular (Walker, 2018a). In March 2015, Black students at the University of Cape Town set up the #RhodesMust Fall collective and demanded the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes³. Later in the year, the protests were on most South African university campuses and incorporated a range of issues including: #PatriarchyMust-Fall, #FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing. The protests were underpinned by a strong desire for decolonisation and ‘real’ transformation, rather than the symbolic type encapsulated in earlier policy discourse. Students called for the end of domination by ‘white, male, Western, capitalist, heterosexual, European worldviews’ in higher education and incorporation of other South African, African and global ‘perspectives, experiences [and] epistemologies’ as the central tenets of the curriculum, teaching, learning and research in the country (Heleta 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Shay, 2016). Eurocentrism and the exclusion of diversity in the curriculum and pedagogy have been perceived as a form of epistemic violence.

³ Cecil John Rhodes was a British mining magnate and politician in southern Africa who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890–96. Rhodes was the ultimate imperialist; he believed, above all else, in the glory of the British Empire and the superiority of the ‘Englishman’ and British Rule, and saw it as his God-given task to expand the Empire, not only for the good of that Empire, but, as he believed, for the good of all peoples in the colonies.

4 Research

The South African research culture has been heavily influenced by the opportunity structures of Apartheid. For example, five historically white universities (HWUs), regularly produce approximately 60% of all research articles. The three most research-productive universities per capita are also HWUs. These three universities also have the largest proportion of permanent academic staff with doctoral degrees.

In order to assess the structure and strength of research and development (R&D) in South Africa, it is important to first look at the gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP. In 2017, the percentage was 0.83, which also shows a slight increase from 2012, which recorded at a percentage of 0.73. Across sectors, in 2017, GERD by sector of performance was: 0.34 by business enterprise as a percentage of GDP, 0.18 by government as a percentage of GDP, and 0.27 by higher education as a percentage of GDP.

Table 4: GERD as percentage of GDP

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
South Africa	0.73	0.72	0.77	0.79	0.81	0.83	..

Source: UIS, 2020

Table 5: GERD – performed by sector as a percentage of GDP

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Business sector	0.32	0.33	0.34	0.34	0.33	0.34
Government	0.16	0.16	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.18
Higher education	0.22	0.20	0.22	0.24	0.26	0.27

Source: UIS, 2020

The (2001) *National Plan for Higher Education* included a number of research goals, for example, a specific recommendation to increase the outputs of postgraduate students, especially at masters' and doctoral levels, to increase research outputs, build new centres of research excellence, and to facilitate more collaboration between research and postgraduate work (Mouton, 2011). The South African Government aims to increase the number of doctoral graduates by 2030 from the current graduation rate of fewer than 2000 to 5000 per annum.

However, Loots et al. (2016) suggested that transformation of postgraduate studies was about more than demographic change, and that it was crucial to scrutinise whether supportive and enabling doctoral studies environments had been created for marginalised groups. Mokhele (2013) stressed the need to pay more critical attention to the institutional and structural impediments in order to address the problem of marginalisation of Black women researchers within South African higher education.

The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) was established by the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa in 2006 to attract and retain researchers in public universities to support excellence in research. Sa' et al. (2020) examined this initiative and

reported a significant gender gap, e.g. stratified productivity and recognition among elite scientists, with men outperforming women in the number of publications, and receiving substantially more citations.

The total personnel in full-time employment (FTE) was 44,259.3 in 2017, of which women's share was 44% (19,695.2).

Table 6: R&D personnel (FTE)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total R&D personnel (FTE)	35050	37956.48	38465	41054.5	42533	44259.3
Women personnel in R&D (FTE)	15082	16487.75	16579.5	17923.1	18893.82	19695.2
Women's share (%)	43.03%	43.44%	43.10%	43.66%	44.42%	44.50%

Source: UIS, 2020

5 Women's Academic Careers

Women are enrolling in higher education as students, but transformation of the academic profession is slow. As the tables below indicate, women's enrolment declines in the higher-level degrees.

The total number of graduates with at least a Bachelor's or equivalent (ISCED 6 or higher) in 2017 recorded at 149,924, of which the women's share was 62% (93,064). At postgraduate levels, the total number of graduates from ISCED 2011 level 8 programmes in tertiary education was 3,074 in 2017. Women's share was 42% of the total, and remained steady over the five years from 2012 to 2017.

Table 7: Graduates from ISCED level 6 programmes in tertiary education, all (number)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Graduates, both sexes	108,328	122,487	126,409	132,100	141,580	149,924
Women graduates (number)	65,435	74,882	77,917	81,498	87,896	93,064
Women graduates (%)	60.40%	61.13%	61.64%	61.69%	62.08%	62.07%

Source: UIS, 2020

Table 8: Graduates from ISCED level 7 programmes in tertiary education, all (number)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Graduates, both sexes	11,293	11,648	12,466	13,554	13,444	13,515

Women graduates (number)	5,325	5,685	6,097	6,749	6,826	7,019
Women graduates (%)	47%	49%	49%	50%	51%	52%

Source: UIS, 2020

Table 9: Graduates from ISCED level 8 programmes in tertiary education, all (number)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Graduates, both sexes	1,900	2,060	2,270	2,536	2,815	3,074
Women graduates (number)	802	896	939	1,118	1,187	1,312
Women graduates (%)	42%	43%	41%	44%	42%	43%

Source: UIS, 2020

Higher education studies are well-developed in South Africa, with a journal (*South African Journal of Higher Education*), and several eminent scholars and research centres. However, gender is not always a category of analysis in their outputs, and the focus is often on policy, pedagogy, and practice, paying particular attention to much-needed racial equality. Moulton (2008) argued that gender research had been fragmented, marginalised and under-funded in recent decades and that this affected the ability to inform policy and politics.

Gendered analysis has been left mainly to a small group of feminist scholars in the post-Apartheid period. Most of these studies highlight the need to transform institutional cultures as well as demographics in higher education. Research has often been small-scale lone studies for postgraduate degrees. For example, in her doctorate on early-career women academics, Lewin (2019) argued that, despite progressive policy frameworks, South African universities retain highly gendered and racialised institutional cultures, which create constraints for staff in building academic careers.

Drawing on a capability theoretical approach, she argued that five dimensions emerged, based on the valued and aspirational functionings of the nine participants in her study:

1. **navigation:** to be able to navigate academic life successfully;
2. **recognition:** to be able to be recognised and valued for one's academic work;
3. **autonomy:** to be able to achieve professional autonomy;
4. **affiliation:** to be able to participate in social and professional networks; and
5. **aspiration:** to be able to aspire to a professional academic career.

Williams' Master's dissertation (2017) on women academics' career progression reported that women did not tend to see their family responsibilities or personal capacities as as great a problem as the obstacles that exist within the institution, and that they often referred to structural deficits of HEIs as contributing to their slow career progression.

This point was also made by Cheryl De La Rey, who was the first woman of colour to become a vice-chancellor of a South African university ([University of Pretoria](#) from 2009–2018). From

her research and experience on women in leadership (2010) she claimed that while there had been progress on recruitment of women academics, more needs to be done on academic promotion committees.

Riordan and Louw-Potgieter (2011) highlighted the impact of organisational culture on women's career progression and called for differentiated career advancement strategies for different career progress groupings. Hostile institutional cultures were also cited by Ramohai's (2019a) study as the most serious contributory factor to women's reluctance to take on or continue in senior managerial positions. Similar observations have been made by scholars focussing on black women academics. Ramohai (2019b) highlighted some of the complexities of different forms of marginalisation in South African society, and how gender and race had been put in competition, with limited understanding of diversity among women in general, or black women in particular. Naicker's (2013) study of black women academics also called for recognition of the entanglement of race, class, and gender in the complexities of transformation.

Other studies, while acknowledging structural discrimination, offer individual strategies such as mentoring or attitudinal change (Chitsamatanga et al, 2018). For example, Mahabeer et al. (2018) concluded that Black women entering the academy need to arm themselves and take time to adapt to the unfamiliar institutional space. In her doctoral study of Black African, 'Coloured', and Indian women academics in post-apartheid South Africa, Roy (2014) reported four broad domains of influence – context, community, commitment, and competence – on black women's academic careers, and that Black women academics in post-apartheid South Africa do not define their career success solely by advancement in title and rank or by achieving so-called higher positions in the academy. Rather, the degree to which these academics viewed themselves as being successful in their careers and lives was based on their personal definitions of success and was a function of their efforts to balance these four domains that exert influence on their careers.

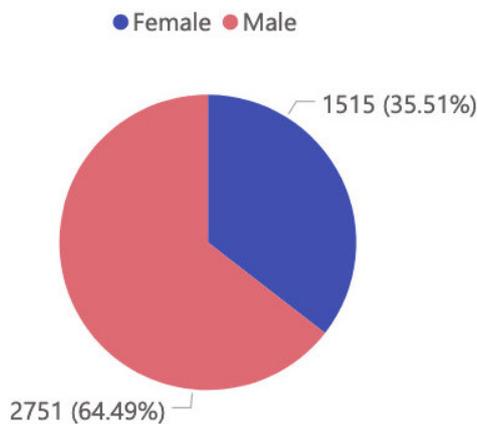
In their study of gender and race amongst female sociologists exiting academia in South Africa, Rabe and Rugunanan (2012) reported that racial and gender discrimination seemed to be most acutely felt where participants belonged to minorities in departments, but traces of gender discrimination can also be found where women are not in the minority – raising questions once again about the need to change institutional cultures rather than focus solely on changing demographics.

South Africa is often included in comparative research on women in higher education. For example, Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2019) compared South Africa and Zimbabwe and found that organisational cultures and a lack of support and career development opportunities were impeding women's progression.

5.1 Research structure after the postdoc phase

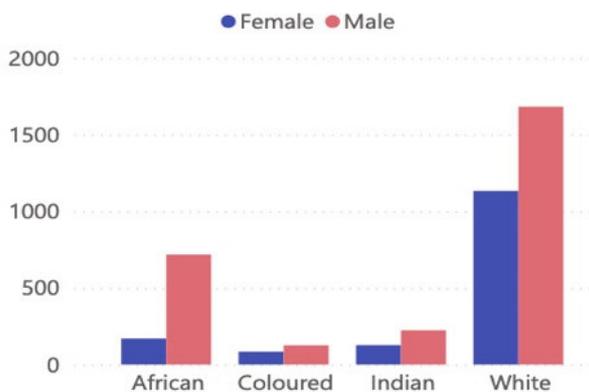
The National Research Foundation (NRF) has a rating system⁴ to measure research excellence across institutions. Researchers are graded for research expertise, funding and international research collaborations (A, B, C, P and Y-rated researchers⁵). Data provided by the NRF (2021) provide information on the gender composition of all rated researchers in South Africa, but information about the structure of the postdoc phase in terms of career trajectory, research collaborations and funding is limited. Across a total of 4,266 researchers rated by the NRF, the majority were men (64.49%), while women constituted 35.51%.

Figure 1: Researchers by gender



Source: NRF, 2021

Figure 2: Researchers by race and gender



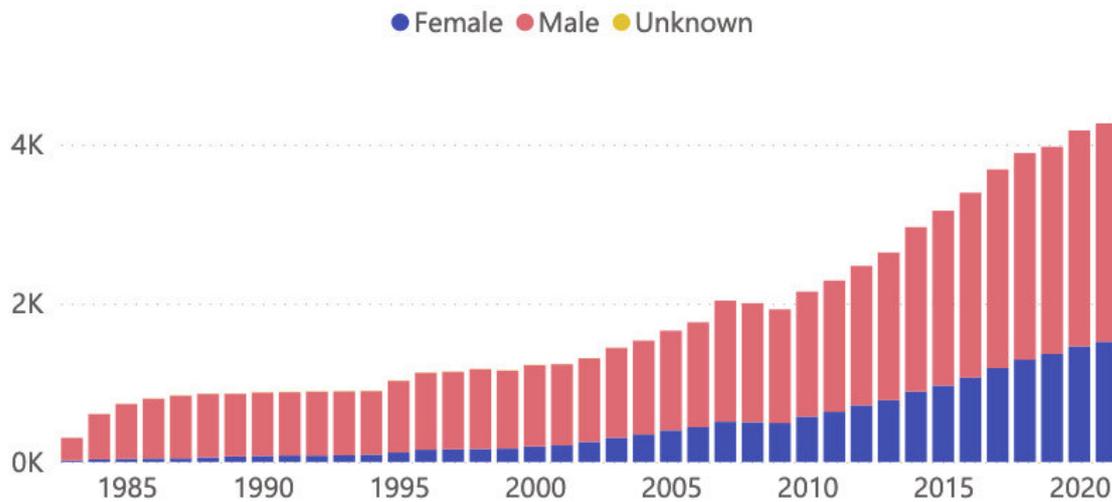
Source: NRF, 2021

⁴ Acquiring an NRF rating generates considerable acknowledgement and respect for the individual researchers as well as their institutions. The ratings are: A – Leading international researchers, B – Internationally acclaimed researchers, C – Established researchers, P – Prestigious Awards, Y – Promising young researchers.

⁵ A-rated researchers are unequivocally recognised by their peers as leading international scholars in their respective fields, for the high quality and impact of recent research outputs.

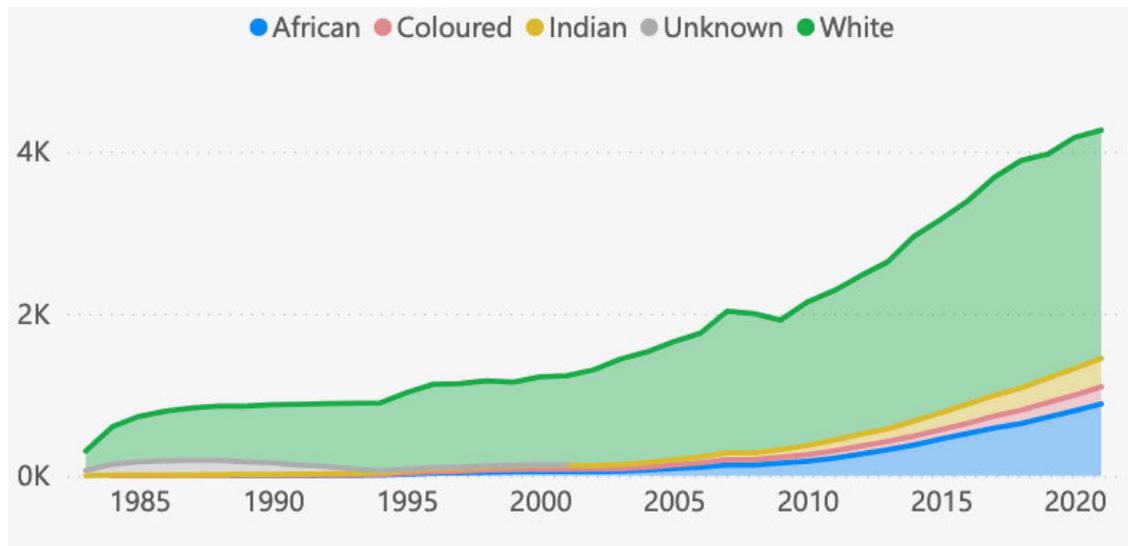
As the literature suggests, race needs to be considered in relation to women’s participation in research. As Figure 2 illustrates, ‘Coloured’ men and women have the lowest share of rated researchers.

Figure 3: Researchers by rating year and gender



Source: NRF, 2021

Figure 4: Researchers by rating year and race



Source: NRF, 2021

5.2 Academic Staff

White et al. (2012) included South Africa, the UK, and Australia in a comparative study of university leaders. They found that a typical South African vice-chancellor was a Black male academic who had at least one qualification from an overseas university, and that race was often a more significant identity marker than gender for selection panels. Morley et al.’s study of six Commonwealth countries, (2006) highlighted the need to intersect race and gender in South Africa, and also found that affirmative action policies meant that many Black women

were treated disrespectfully and as if they were appointed only for their racial identity to fill quotas, rather than for their merit, skills, and competence. The study also reported evidence of widespread gender-based violence on South African campuses that created a climate of fear and anxiety among women staff and students. Rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence have been researched by South African feminists. For example, Bennett (2009) argued that the climate of institutional commitment to this realm of transformation had become muted, and she stated that feminist activism in South Africa needed once more to theorise and challenge overt and covert forms of sexual violence facing higher education communities.

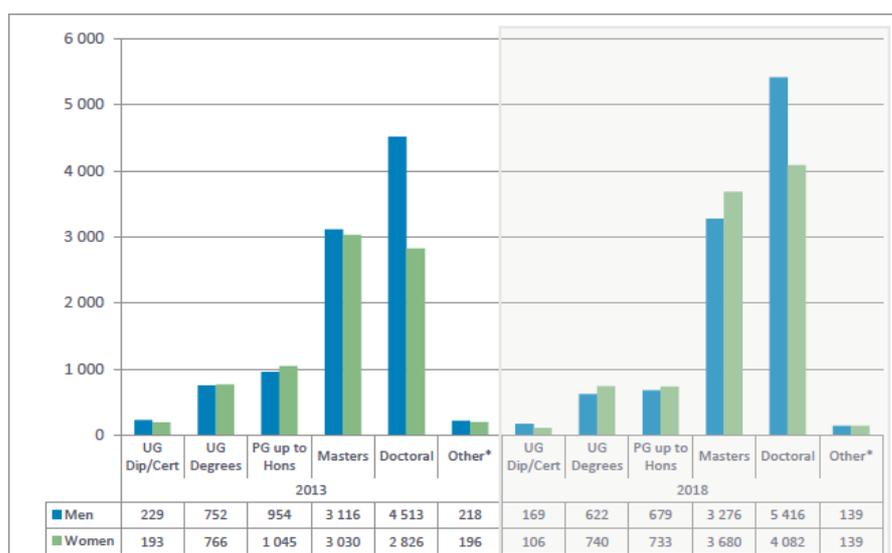
Table 10: Number and percentage of permanent staff in public universities, by ethnicity and gender in 2014

Institution	Total Permanent Staff			% of Black Staff in Total			% of Women Staff in Total		
	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	774	1 015	149	61	85	99	42	60	26
University of Cape Town	1 149	2 287	63	29	72	97	45	64	62
Central University of Technology, Free State	295	383	87	45	69	98	40	57	53
Durban University of Technology	579	766	67	73	92	100	47	53	16
University of Fort Hare	334	557	28	46	84	100	37	58	7
University of the Free State	986	1 240	286	22	39	98	49	67	49
University of Johannesburg	1 104	1 895	249	46	70	99	46	53	35
University of KwaZulu-Natal	1 348	1 873	388	59	85	97	47	60	50
University of Limpopo	941	752	255	86	85	100	43	58	45
Mangosuthu University of Technology	190	275	76	92	96	100	34	52	45
University of Mpumalanga	41	50	69	80	86	100	34	36	43
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	604	1 034	72	28	59	92	45	62	32
North -West University	1 342	1 966	378	28	34	95	47	66	46
University of Pretoria	1 176	1 866	364	23	48	91	50	65	34
Rhodes University	351	537	463	25	58	99	43	62	53
University of South Africa	1 718	3 158	77	52	74	99	50	59	23
University of Stellenbosch	1 035	1 921	237	22	49	100	43	64	42
Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	17	12	0	59	50	0	41	67	0
Tshwane University of	951	1 549	141	59	75	99	42	54	38

Technology									
University of Venda	372	342	136	94	99	100	35	49	57
Vaal University of Technology	378	463	217	61	76	99	43	62	61
Walter Sisulu University	591	659	152	88	96	100	44	57	52
University of the Western Cape	615	952	29	53	93	100	50	59	7
University of Witwatersrand	1 057	1 199	277	38	73	100	47	64	30
University of Zululand	285	391	196	81	93	100	42	50	38
Total	18 233	27 142	4 456	48	69	98	46	60	43

Source: South African Human Rights Commission (SAHR), 2018

Figure 5: Headcount of permanent academic staff by gender and qualification for 2013 and 2018



Source 1: Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2019

5.3 Developing Women's Academic Careers

HERS-SA is a self-sustaining non-profit organisation (NPO) which was registered in September 2003 by the Department of Social Development. It is dedicated to the advancement and leadership development of women in the higher education sector and works in partnership with higher education institutions to support their gender equity agenda through their nomination of women to attend HERS-SA programmes, by posting vacancies on the HERS-SA website, and by showcasing the achievements of women in their respective institutions (see <http://www.hers-sa.org.za>). To assist in honing women's leadership skills for the unique requirements of the academic environment, HERS-SA organises a twelve-day academy which supports women to develop the professional plans and networks needed for advancing as leaders in higher education administration (Shober, 2014).

A further important initiative is *The African Gender Institute* (AGI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). This is a teaching, learning and research institute which focuses on issues of gender, development, and the politics of sexuality on the African continent. Since its inception over 20 years ago, the AGI has delivered innovative integrated outcomes on gender justice, sexuality and human rights, peace and conflict studies and capacity-building in relation to gender and women’s studies knowledges; it is committed to practice-based research and designs and implements projects which strengthen research, networking, capacity-building and knowledge-creation throughout Africa (see <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/about/vision>).

6 Gender and International Academic Mobility

According to the annual report by the National Research Foundation’s (NRF) of 2019, current policy framework aims to create space for international/continental researchers and managers to share their research; it provides a platform for strategic networks among professionals in the sector. In future, student travel grants will be one-off, and international funds must be used for that specific purpose. The new PG Funding Policy does not include travel grants and will be phased out.

Table 11: Total outbound internationally mobile tertiary students studying abroad, all (number)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
South Africa	7273	7344	7860	8120	9130

Source: UIS, 2020

Table 12: Top five destinations for outward mobility in 2018

Study Destination	Total
United States	2078
United Kingdom	1490
Germany	671
Australia	668
Canada	301

Source: UIS, 2020

6.1 Data from Interviews: Research Methodology

We interviewed a Senior Lecturer in Science (Participant 1), an Emerita Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies (Participant 2), a Professor of Gender Studies and Deputy Dean (Participant 3), a Director of Research Support and Management (Participant 4), and a Professor of Law (Participant 5). Access to participants was through the global network of the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) – University of Sussex. The purposeful recruitment ensured diversity in terms of participants’ ethnicity, age and institutional type.

The universities included: University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela University, and North-West University.

All participants have a history of international mobility at postdoctoral level. Some participants were familiar with the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation programmes and others less so. The main research methods were semi-structured interviews. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Sussex Research Ethics Committee (Ref.ER/JBFB4/2) before the recruitment process. All participants were contacted via email and received a copy of the project information sheet, the cover letter prepared by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and a consent form.

Interviews were conducted using online distance telecommunication software programmes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party (WaywithWords). All participants received a copy of the interview transcript for verification and final approval. We opted for a numbering approach [Participant 1–5] to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The data analysis followed a thematic approach to provide 'an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions' (Braun & Clarke 2006: 28).

Emerging codes were grouped under three key themes as follows:

1. Career advantages for international outward mobility
2. Rationale for choosing study destination
3. Boundaries and barriers facing women academics to access opportunities for international outward mobility

Participants were invited to make suggestions and recommendations for the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation programmes. These suggestions and recommendations varied in length and scope but mainly addressed the type of support necessary to encourage more women to participate in international outward mobility.

6.2 Research Findings

6.2.1 Career advantages of international mobility

Career progress and prestige: International outward mobility is seen to provide women with opportunities to enhance their visibility, networking and research collaboration.

The higher your grading is, of course, then it gives you additional opportunities to get more funding, you get bigger projects. So, in general, it is good for female scholars to move around as much as possible and to have as many connections overseas as possible, collaborations and bigger research projects. (Participant 5)

International mobility will affirm their position or their standing in research or in academia. That is point number one. It's like an extra tag, an external sign of approval outside of the national arena. (Participant 1)

Scholarship and knowledge production: All participants unequivocally agreed on the importance of international outward mobility for scholarship and knowledge production. International collaborations in research and publications were seen as essential to achieve this

goal. Strong emphasis was also placed on the inclusion of knowledge from the Global South in the Global Knowledge Economy.

That we in the South, should be given the opportunity to express ourselves and to bring our ideas to the North. In that way, I think it's very important. (Participant 2)

South Africa is ambiguously positioned in the Global Knowledge Economy. As stated earlier, it has high-ranking research-intensive universities, but because of its geographical location in sub-Saharan Africa, it can often be seen as part of the Global South by scholars in the Global North. This can lead to patronising relationships.

And both the South Africans and the West African, the Caribbean scholars felt that we were being spoken down to. And it was just quite uncomfortable. It may just have been one example, but if I think about my own mobility, it put me off mobility to North America, quite a lot. (Participant 3)

Nonetheless, Participant 3 was also of the view that knowledge exchange in international outward mobility 'enriches thinking':

It opens up possibilities, then, for early-career scholars. And very often, in this country, those who are most disadvantaged as scholars, as people, in general, are women of colour because of the history.

To summarise, international outward mobility is considered to be very beneficial to promote collaborative research and publications; however, attention should be paid to the colonial legacy, epistemological imperialism, and Global North/South power relations.

Networking and Social Capital: International outward mobility is often encouraged for its benefits to enrich academic women's social capital and provide opportunities for networking that are not available locally (Coleman, 2010). However, early-career female researchers often do not have the necessary networks for mobility.

I get asked quite a lot by young postdocs, they want to apply for Humboldt, but they haven't got a host. They don't know anybody in Germany to help them. That's the most frequent question. (Participant 1)

Networking opportunities are gendered, classed and racialised (Grigoleit-Richter, 2017). It was suggested that there is prejudice against African scholars when it comes to securing partnerships from universities in the Global South:

I get asked quite a lot by young postdocs, they want to apply for Humboldt, but they haven't got a host. They don't know anybody in Germany to help them...I know that there are sites available via the Humboldt Foundation, also, where you can try to locate a host in your field or in your area. But it would also be nice if the South Africans could feed into that. So, the South African Institute, maybe the research office that is specifically supporting the mobility applications and initiatives, that they also can help. Because I know this from Germany, the German professor is sitting far up in the hierarchy. And he or she doesn't really not want to take an email that comes from Africa. Usually the emails they receive are hoax mails, and everybody's trying to con you out of money, and so on. And so, an email that comes out of Africa, including South Africa, just gets put into the bin. And perhaps if the email comes from a more official

point, so not from the from the candidate directly, who may be a young postdoc and has no credibility yet. Then it would carry a bit more weight if it comes from the research office to say, look, we know this is a real person, this is a valid query to find a host. Are you available, or can you please assist us? I think this is one of the biggest stumbling blocks why people in South Africa, women also, do not apply because in the end, they give up trying to find a host. They keep writing, they get no response. Or they get negative responses. And then they just give up. (Participant 1)

The role of university research offices in promoting networking opportunities is a major recommendation for change.

6.2.2 Rationale for choosing study destinations

International research collaboration in South Africa tends to face north to Europe and the USA. There remains a gap in South–South collaboration. We identified three main determinants that shape the rationale for choosing a study destination:

Colonial history: South Africa’s history and the social structure in post-apartheid society shape participants’ perceptions of specific countries/regions. Socio-cultural familiarity, language, sports and perhaps most importantly of compatibility between higher education systems are all factors in decision-making.

Afrikaans-speaking people like myself, that’s my mother tongue, it’s easier for us to go to a country where you understand the language. So that would be typically the UK. We understand Dutch if you speak Afrikaans, and German is also not that difficult if you focus. So, it depends a lot on the legal system which you have historical links with, and of course the languages that you can speak. (Participant 5)

Participant 1 also supported this view:

And the reason for these countries specifically, is because of the English language. Australia, New Zealand because of cultural and climate similarities. Sports are the same, like cricket and rugby, which we love. Then, also, yes, other cultural influences. And the colonial history does lead to the UK being considered to be one of the popular destinations. People like to just walk into a country and be able to understand a lot of what's going on immediately without having to put in any extra effort.

Language and socio-cultural familiarity are associated with quicker assimilation and integration into a new host environment.

Resources: The availability (or lack thereof) of resources and funding is the second most important factor. Decades of budgetary cuts and austerity measures recommended by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) mean that many African universities remain underfunded, underequipped and understaffed – posing challenges for international scholarships:

My sense is that scholars, too, in some ways, also value more resourced spaces because of access to resources that we might not have. So, in that respect, I suppose going to a space like Sweden or Germany or the Netherlands is great because there are resources, we might not be able to easily access. (Participant 3)

We have an exchange programme with Missouri University. So, we've had students visiting there. And I don't think these northern partners quite realise how, exactly how dependent students are on getting some sort of stipend. So, the students... hadn't eaten for some time, and they didn't feel that they could go to the university to actually explain that to them... at my university, 75% of students are food insecure. So, they have to decide, actually whether they're spending their money on transport, or on food. And my point is, that it requires a lot of resources to be able to travel in the first place. (Participant 2)

Participants reported that tuition funding has been severely diminished for South African scholars in recent years, and mobility tended to be for the privileged.

Lack of South–South collaboration: The lack of South–South collaboration relates partly to sporadic efforts for internationalisation in higher education across Africa. While South African higher education hosts students from other African countries, most opportunities for its students are offered by European higher education.

So, there are a lot of opportunities to go to European countries. But not so many to study in Africa. And one would find a lot of African people coming to study in South Africa. (Participant 2)

Prestige is also important for international mobility, and many of the universities at the top of the global universities ranking are in the USA or Europe.

6.2.3 Boundaries and barriers

While participants offered various views on existing barriers and boundaries for international outward mobility regardless of gender, our choice was to highlight key barriers facing women academics from South Africa.

Racial and class divisions: While South Africa ended the apartheid system in 1994, social divisions based on race, gender and class remain major barriers facing women academics in South Africa.

I think South African women scholars are generally still more challenged, especially when there's an intersection of race and historical class and gender. (Participant 3)

Xenophobia, racism and lack of diversity in host countries also influence participants' choice of study destination.

The increasing anti-black or anti-foreign sentiments that have come up in Germany over the last years, with the political party, the AfD and their followers, and what they have done blatantly to foreign people, that is very off-putting for people of colour from the South African background, and of course, especially for women. As I said before, personal safety tops everything else. (Participant 1)

Safe and ethnically diverse learning and living environments are essential for women's international mobility.

Academic responsibilities and institutional support: While international outward mobility and research collaborations are highly valued by South African higher education, the level of institutional support remains – in some cases – very limited. Gender stratification in terms of

academic responsibilities and administrative duties are a challenge facing academic women to negotiate their leave, as cover for absent academics often cannot be provided.

You don't get any leave from the university or the institution where you are and you decide to resign in order to take up this international scholarship. (Participant 5)

A major concern was lack of institutional support:

Women are usually more put upon, in terms, not only at home, but in terms of universities. So, they usually take up more of the teaching, whereas males go off and do the research. So, I'm not sure whether it would be a disadvantage. But I think that it would be more difficult for women to just say, well I'm leaving for a year. (Participant 2)

The NRF publishes opportunities for existing scholarships and research collaboration bids. However, lack of publicity in universities about available opportunities, and limited access to networking opportunities influenced who participated:

I have always known about it. Because I was in a lab of a fellow Humboldt Fellow. So, they let you know about it and what a great opportunity it is. (Participant 4)

Paradoxically, mobility can be seen as both enhancing and disrupting women's academic careers.

Personal and family responsibilities: Participants agreed that both long and short stays abroad were valuable. While long-term stays provided opportunities for more substantive research, negotiating family⁶ responsibilities could be a problem:

Not all families in South Africa are very geared towards women leaving the home to pursue further careers in academia. So, we are I think a little bit more traditional in that sense, so not all husbands are happy with the fact that a mother would go out and spend longer periods of time from home. It's not always possible to take the children with you. (Participant 5)

Longer stays are challenging unless one has the resources to travel ... I have scholars that did whatever they could, colleagues, to take their family with them. But it's at great expense because you also can't really engage in the context when you're divided ... And even just travelling, I think, with young children and settling them into new spaces is kind of time-consuming. (Participant 3)

Traditional family arrangements combined with difficult working environments can deter South African academic women from international mobility.

7 Study Limitations

While there is scholarship on gender and higher education and women's academic careers in South Africa, much of this is the result of lone, small-scale studies – often from postgraduate dissertations. Higher education studies are well-developed, with a journal (*South African Journal of Higher Education*) and several eminent scholars and research centres. However,

⁶ Family structure was often referred to in heterosexual opposite-sex (wife & husband) arrangements.

gender is not always a category of analysis in their outputs. South Africa is frequently included in international studies, but with differing levels of depth of analysis.

The availability of public policy documentation was also problematic, with government websites malfunctioning, reports failing to download, etc. Furthermore, many of the URLs or DOIs cited in research papers did not function, or paywalls were presented for newspaper articles etc.

8 Conclusion

The potential and interest of South African women for taking up opportunities offered by the Humboldt Foundation are high. Germany is a popular choice – especially with Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

The areas that need attention are enhanced networking and partnership possibilities; institutional support, publicity, and promotion of information; provision of fully-funded packages, and awareness of racialised, as well as gendered opportunity structures.

9 Recommendations

1. **Build networks, coalitions and international partnerships:** Participants indicated how difficult it can be for South African women to find partners for international collaboration. The role of university research offices in promoting networking opportunities is a major recommendation for change. Another solution is to develop a database for academics in partner universities so that potential applicants can identify them and develop links between academics.
2. **Enhance publicity and links with South African universities:** It was reported that knowledge is currently uneven about Humboldt opportunities, and not always promoted via university research offices.
3. **Fully funded opportunities:** To provide full grants, where participants wouldn't have to worry about meeting basic maintenance needs (i.e. food, housing and transportation). Funding also needs to include cover for academic responsibilities while women are abroad.
4. **Researchers' profile and visibility:** To ensure that by the time of graduation, postgraduate students have strong and visible research profiles that allow them to compete globally. To serve this purpose, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation – in collaboration with universities – could design tutorial seminars and run training workshops tailored to the needs of postgraduate students.
5. **Intersectionality:** Race, as well as gender, needs to be a key factor in the promotion of opportunities for international mobility for South African women, and universities with high participation rates of Black women could be targeted in terms of publicity.

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