

South Africa

Rating report

Rating rationale

Large and well-diversified economy: South Africa has the largest economy of the African continent, and an elevated GDP per capita compared against sub-Saharan Africa regional averages. Its large economy, relatively supportive business environment and floating exchange rate anchor a positive net international investment position and adequate international reserves.

A favourable debt structure, strong capital market access: Public debt is mostly denominated in domestic currency, on fixed-rate bases and with long average maturities, mitigating interest-rate, forex and debt roll-over risk. South Africa benefits from a large financial sector and deep financial markets, alongside budgetary measures to reach a primary surplus.

A robust monetary policy framework: Strong independence and governance support the South African Reserve Bank's effectiveness in its management of inflation and the preservation of financial stability. The new inflation target of 3%, with a 1 percentage point tolerance band, could better anchor inflation expectations and support external competitiveness.

A resilient banking system: A large and well-regulated financial industry anchors economic development and the resilience against external-sector crises and mitigates government funding dependencies on volatile international debt capital markets.

Rating challenges include: i) rising government debt driven by elevated headline deficits, low debt affordability, and a crystallisation of contingent liabilities; ii) modest economic-growth potential curbed by under-investment in public infrastructures alongside associated pressure on economic competitiveness; iii) governance challenges; and iv) socio-economic vulnerabilities such as high unemployment, poverty and income inequality.

Figure 1: South Africa's sovereign-rating drivers

Risk pillars		Quantitative		Reserve currency*	Political risk**	Qualitative***	Final rating
		Weight	Indicative rating	Notches	Notches	Notches	
Domestic economic risk		35%	bbb-	ZAR	South Africa	0	BB
Public finance risk		20%	ccc			0	
External economic risk		10%	a-			+ 1/3	
Financial stability risk		10%	aa-			+ 2/3	
ESG risk	Environmental factors	5%	cc	[+0]	[-1]	- 1/3	
	Social factors	7.5%	a			- 1/3	
	Governance factors	12.5%	bb-			- 1/3	
Sovereign Quantitative Model****		bb				0	
Additional considerations						0	

* The reserve-currency quantitative adjustment applies to currencies in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket.

** The political-risk quantitative adjustment is based on the World Bank's Political Stability & Absence of Violence/Terrorism index.

*** The qualitative scorecard analyst adjustments, capped at one notch per rating pillar, are weighted equally with an aggregate adjustment rounded to the nearest integer.

**** The Rating Committee approved an SQM indicative rating of 'bb'.

For details, please see Scope's [Sovereign Rating Methodology](#). Source: Scope Ratings.

Foreign currency

Long-term issuer rating/Outlook

BB/Stable

Senior unsecured debt/Outlook

BB/Stable

Short-term issuer rating/Outlook

S-3/Stable

Local currency

Long-term issuer rating/Outlook

BB/Stable

Senior unsecured debt/Outlook

BB/Stable

Short-term issuer rating/Outlook

S-3/Stable

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Credit strengths and challenges

Credit strengths

- Large and well-diversified economy
- Favourable structure of the public debt
- Credible monetary-policy framework
- Sophisticated and resilient financial system

Credit challenges

- Rising government debt and high interest-payment burden
- Moderate economic-growth potential
- Governance challenges
- Socio-economic vulnerabilities

Outlook and rating triggers

The Stable Outlook underscores the view that risks for the ratings are balanced.

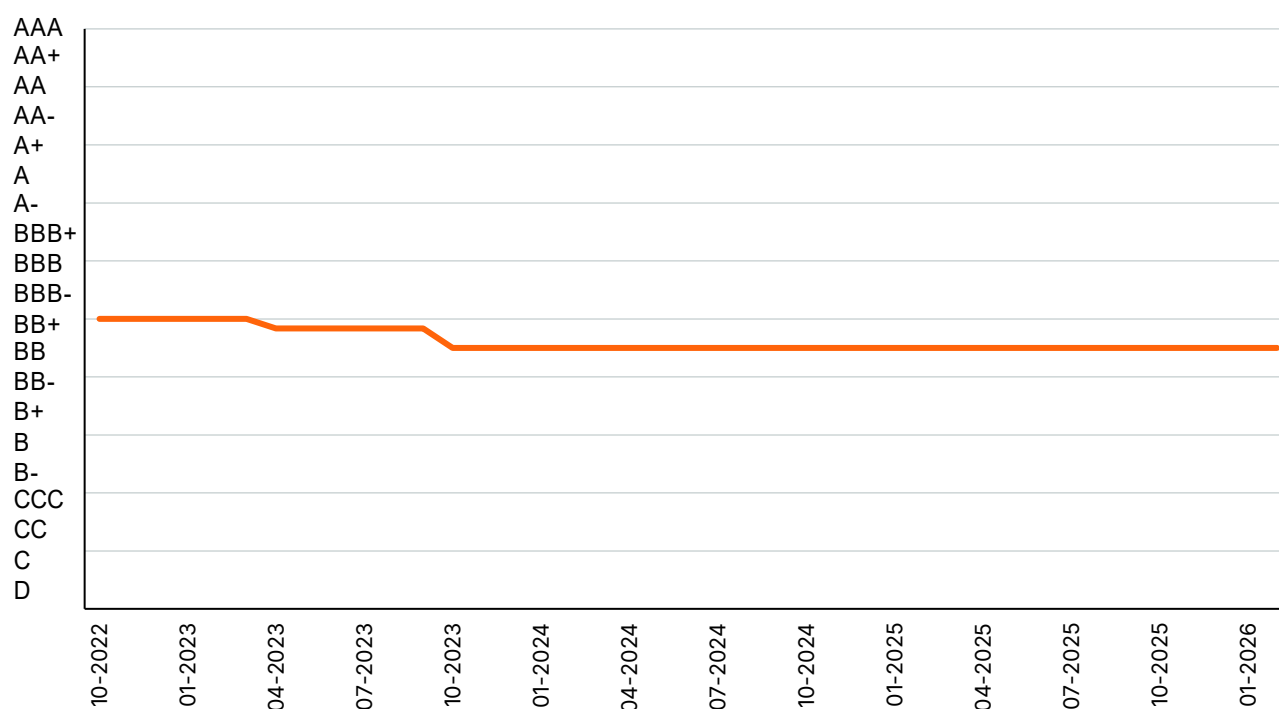
Positive rating-change drivers

- Stabilisation of the public-debt trajectory
- Reforms enhance economic-growth potential
- External-sector risks decrease

Negative rating-change drivers

- Public-debt burden rises further
- Growth outlook stays impaired
- External-sector risks rise
- Governance challenges escalate

Figure 2: Rating history



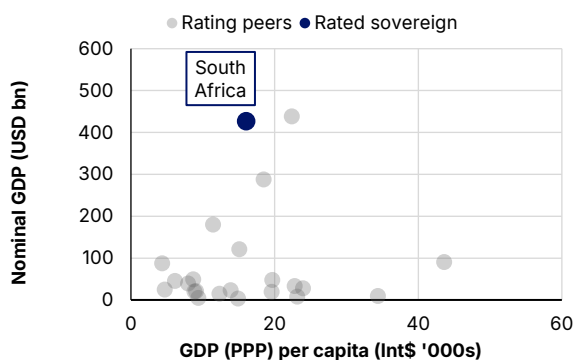
Foreign-currency long-term issuer rating. Positive/Negative Outlooks are treated with a +/-0.33-notch adjustment. Credit Watch positive/negative with a +/-0.67-notch adjustment. Source: Scope Ratings.

Domestic economic risk

Overview of Scope's assessments of South Africa's Domestic Economic Risk

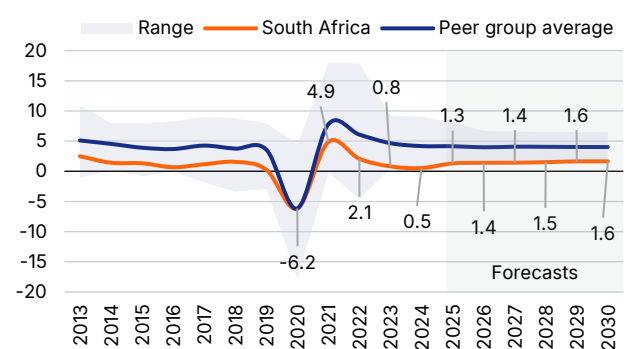
SQM ¹ indicative rating	Analytical component	Assessment	Notch adjustment	Rationale
bbb-	Growth potential and outlook	Weak	- 1/3	Long-standing energy and infrastructure bottlenecks and rigid labour markets dampen productivity and economic growth
	Monetary policy framework	Strong	+ 1/3	Effective management of inflation is supported by a strong and independent central bank, and a robust monetary framework
	Macroeconomic stability and sustainability	Neutral	0	A large and highly diversified economy anchors the resilience to economic crises and commodity price fluctuations

Figure 3: Nominal GDP and GDP per capita (2025E)



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO), Scope Ratings

Figure 4: Real GDP growth, %



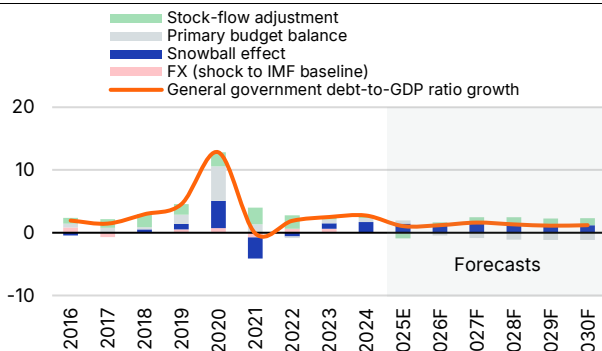
Source: IMF WEO, Scope Ratings forecasts

Public finance risk

Overview of Scope's assessments of South Africa's Public Finance Risk

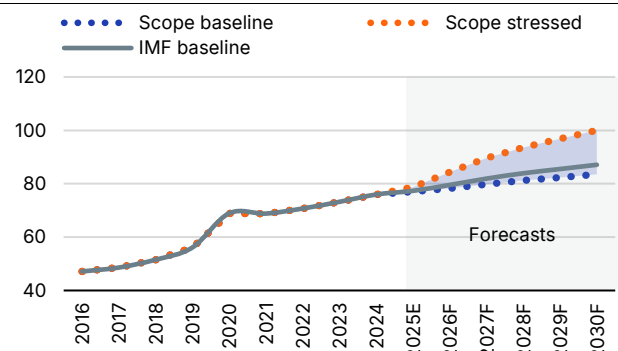
SQM indicative rating	Analytical component	Assessment	Notch adjustment	Rationale
CCC	Fiscal policy framework	Weak	- 1/3	Spending rigidities and rising debt point to the weakness of the fiscal framework; discussions about long-term fiscal rules
	Long-term debt trajectory	Neutral	0	Steady rise of the government debt, which remains elevated by emerging-market standards; high contingent liabilities
	Debt profile and market access	Strong	+ 1/3	Mostly local-currency denominated government debt with long average maturities but comparatively high borrowing rates

Figure 5: Contributions to change in debt levels, pps of GDP



Source: IMF WEO, Scope Ratings forecasts

Figure 6: Debt-to-GDP forecasts, % of GDP



Source: IMF WEO, Scope Ratings forecasts

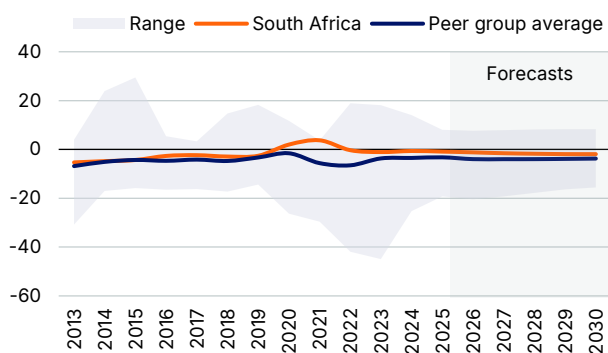
¹ Sovereign Quantitative Model

External economic risk

Overview of Scope's assessments of South Africa's External Economic Risk

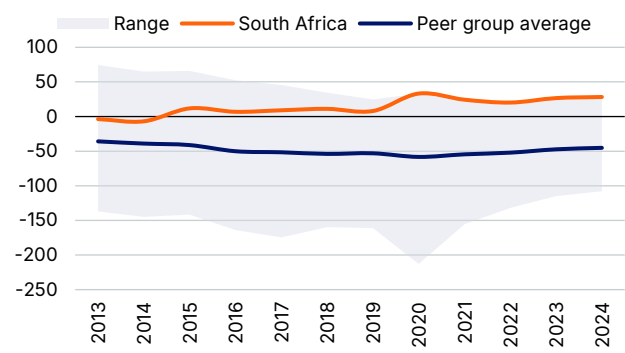
SQM indicative rating	Analytical component	Assessment	Notch adjustment	Rationale
a-	Current account resilience	Neutral	0	Modest current account deficits but vulnerability to foreign capital outflows; bilateral tensions with the United States
	External debt structure	Strong	+ 1/3	Manageable levels of external debt alongside a strong external-debt structure
	Resilience to short-term external shocks	Neutral	0	Moderate albeit adequate levels of international reserves; floating exchange rate helps to absorb external shocks

Figure 7: Current-account balance, % of GDP



Source: IMF WEO forecasts, Scope Ratings

Figure 8: Net international investment position (NIIP), % GDP



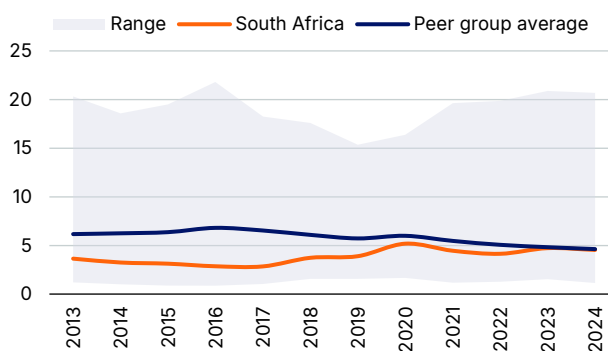
Source: IMF, Scope Ratings

Financial stability risk

Overview of Scope's assessments of South Africa's Financial Stability Risk

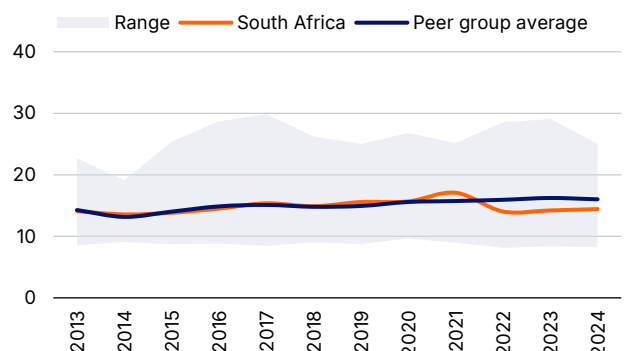
SQM indicative rating	Analytical component	Assessment	Notch adjustment	Rationale
aa-	Banking sector performance	Strong	+ 1/3	A robust funding structure with well-developed and deep domestic financial markets
	Financial sector oversight and governance	Strong	+ 1/3	Well-regulated banking system (Basel-III); withdrawal of the FAPT grey list but lingering vulnerabilities remain
	Financial imbalances	Neutral	0	Moderately indebted households, but corporate debt levels are low; financial system highly exposed to government debt

Figure 9: Non-performing loans (NPLs), % of total loans



Source: World Bank (WB), Scope Ratings

Figure 10: Tier 1 capital, % of risk-weighted assets



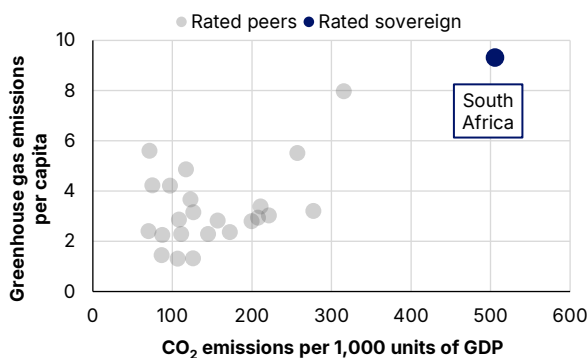
Source: IMF, Scope Ratings

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risk

Overview of Scope's assessments of South Africa's ESG Risk

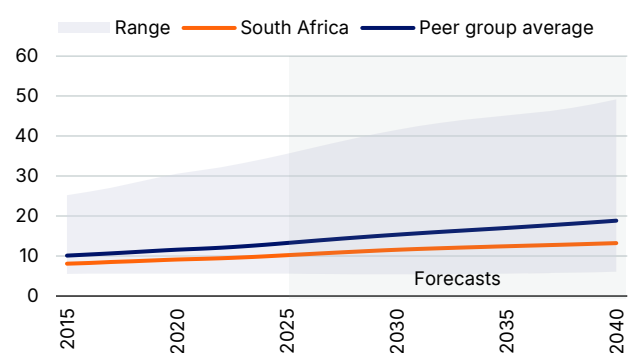
SQM indicative rating	Analytical component	Assessment	Notch adjustment	Rationale
bb-	Environmental factors	Weak	- 1/3	Significant greenhouse gas emissions and transition costs as compared against sovereign rating peers
	Social factors	Weak	- 1/3	Acute socio-economic risks given high poverty, inequality and unemployment; relatively weak education and health outcomes
	Governance factors	Weak	- 1/3	Despite structural challenges, government of national unity formed after the 2024 elections could strengthen policymaking

Figure 11: CO₂ emissions per GDP, mtCO₂e (2024)



Source: European Commission (EC), Scope Ratings

Figure 12: Old-age dependency ratio, %



Source: United Nations (UN), Scope Ratings

Reserve-currency adjustment

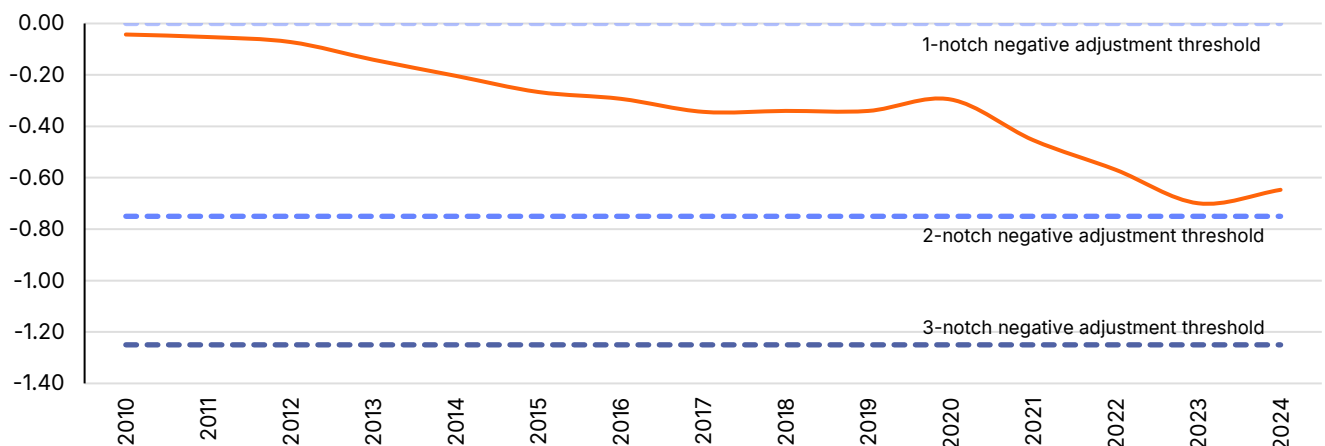
IMF SDR basket and Scope reserve-currency adjustment

Currency	U.S. dollar	Euro	Chinese yuan	Japanese yen	Pound sterling	Other
IMF SDR basket weights, %	43.4	29.3	12.3	7.6	7.4	0.0
Positive adjustment, notches	3	1	1	1	1	0

Source: IMF, Scope Ratings

Political-risk adjustment

Figure 13: WB Political Stability & Absence of Violence/Terrorism index, South Africa, three-year moving average



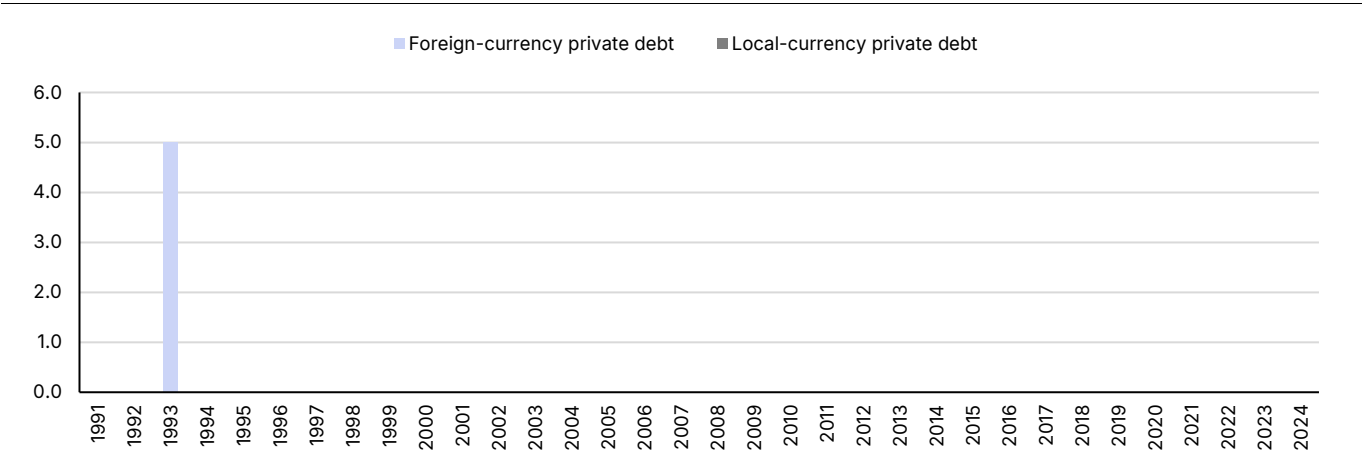
Source: WB, Scope Ratings

Additional considerations

No adjustment has been applied to the credit rating from additional considerations.

Appendix 1. Sovereign default history

Sovereign default history, USD bn



Depicted private-debt defaults may not always constitute a credit event under [Scope's credit-rating definitions](#).
Source: [Bank of Canada–Bank of England Sovereign Default Database](#), Scope Ratings.

Appendix 2. Rating peers

Rating peers are related to sovereigns with an indicative rating in the same rating category or adjacent categories, as assigned by Scope's sovereign quantitative model after accounting for methodological reserve-currency and political-risk adjustments.

Peer group*
N/A

*Publicly-rated sovereigns only; the full sample of sovereign-rating peers includes privately-rated sovereigns.

Appendix 3. Economic development and default indicators

IMF Development Classification	Emerging market and developing economy
5-year USD CDS spread (bps) as of 29 January 2026	137.09

Appendix 4. Statistical table for selected SQM indicators

This table presents a selection of the indicators (24 out of 30 – with the governance indicator reflecting a composite of five indicators) used in Scope's quantitative model, in line with Scope's Sovereign Rating Methodology. The metrics and sources for the data presented here ensure comparability across global country peers, and may therefore differ from data from national and other international statistical series and may not immediately reflect latest national updates.

Pillar	Core variable	Source	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025E
Domestic Economic	GDP per capita (PPP), Int\$ '000s	IMF	12.8	13.9	15.0	15.5	15.7	16.0
	Nominal GDP, USD bn	IMF	338	420	407	381	401	426
	Real growth, %	IMF	-6.2	4.9	2.1	0.8	0.5	1.1
	CPI inflation, %	IMF	3.3	4.6	6.9	5.9	4.4	3.4
	Unemployment rate, %	WB	29.2	34.0	33.3	32.1	32.3	-
Public Finance	Public debt, % of GDP	IMF	68.9	68.8	70.7	73.2	76.0	77.3
	Net interest payment, % of government revenue	IMF	16.3	15.5	16.3	18.3	19.0	19.1
	Primary balance, % of GDP	IMF	-5.5	-1.3	0.3	-0.6	-0.6	-0.7
External Economic	Current-account balance, % of GDP	IMF	2.0	3.7	-0.3	-1.1	-0.7	-0.9
	Total reserves, months of imports	WB	7.1	5.6	4.9	5.3	5.7	-
	NIIP, % of GDP	IMF	33.2	24.4	20.2	26.7	28.2	-
Financial Stability	NPL ratio, % of total loans	IMF	5.2	4.5	4.1	4.7	4.5	-
	Tier 1 ratio, % of risk-weighted assets	IMF	15.0	15.9	16.8	13.7	14.2	14.3
	Credit to the private sector, % of GDP	WB	109.1	93.2	91.6	90.4	90.4	-
ESG	CO ₂ per EUR 1,000 of GDP, mtCO ₂ e	EC	561.1	531.9	499.6	493.7	505.7	-
	Income share of bottom 50%, %	WID	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3	-	-
	Labour-force participation rate, %	WB	58.3	59.6	61.0	62.7	62.8	-
	Old-age dependency ratio, %	UN	9.1	9.3	9.5	9.7	9.9	10.2
	Composite governance indicators*	WB	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	-
	Political stability, index	WB	-0.3	-0.5	-0.6	-0.7	-0.6	-

*Average of the following five World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators: Control of Corruption, Voice and Accountability, Rule of Law, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality.

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Applied methodology

[Sovereign Rating Methodology](#), January 2025

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