

South Korea



REGION: ADVANCED ASIA

Also included in this region: Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan

PART I: ENROLMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

South Korea’s HE system loosely follows the North American model. Over three-quarters of students were enrolled in comprehensive universities in 2018, with nearly all the rest in short-cycle HEIs. Total enrolments peaked at about 3.7 million in 2011, and subsequently fell by about 9%. With the number of HEIs staying roughly constant, these trends produced a gradual reduction in average institution size. Less than one-quarter of students attended public providers in 2018, which was below the average across the rest of Advanced Asia.

TABLE 1 – Types of higher education providers

CATEGORY	INSTITUTIONS	INSTITUTIONS COUNT IN 2018		
		PUB.	PRIV.	TOTAL
Comprehensive universities	Universities; graduate school colleges; graduate schools; air and correspondence universities; Cyber universities and distance universities delivering predominantly undergrad programs	38	217	255
Specialised Universities	Universities of education; Technical colleges; Industrial universities; Miscellaneous schools	11	4	15
Short-cycle HEIs	Junior colleges; specialisation colleges; polytechnic colleges; Miscellaneous schools delivering college programs; Cyber universities and distance universities delivering college programs	9	143	152
Semi-HE	College in the company	NA	NA	NA

FIGURE 1 – Numbers of institutions by type, 2006-2018

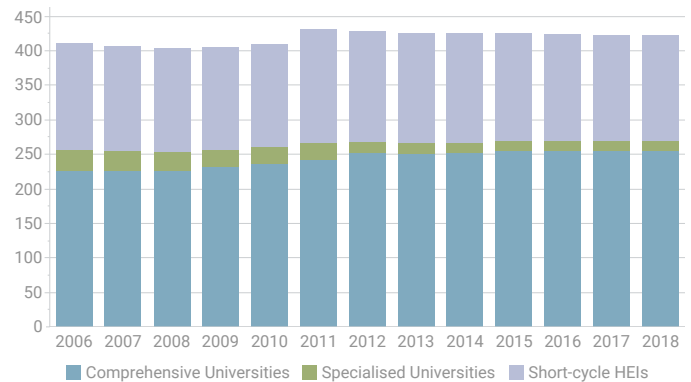


FIGURE 2 – Total enrolments with public and private higher education providers, 2006-2018 (Millions)

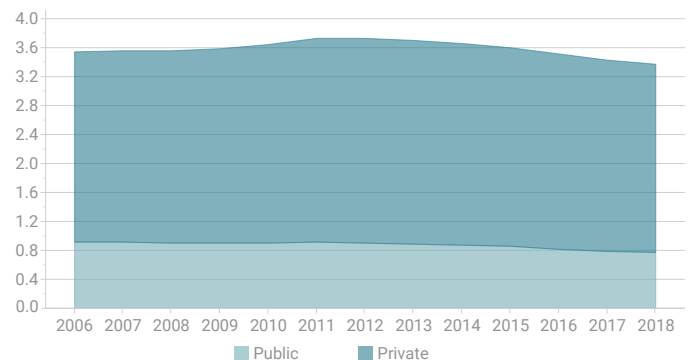


FIGURE 3 – Changes in enrolment, in South Korea, the rest of Advanced Asia and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

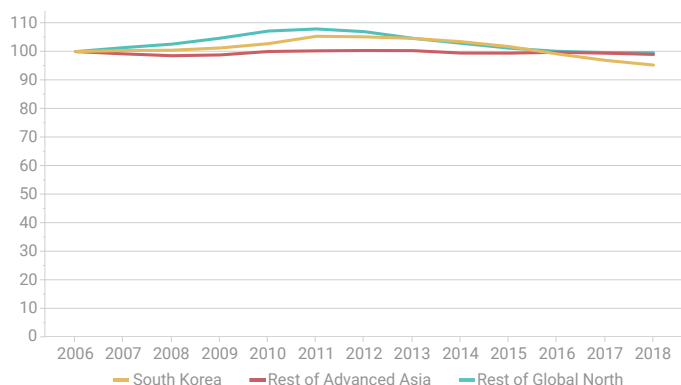


FIGURE 4 – Share of enrolments by institution type in South Korea and the rest of Advanced Asia, 2006 and 2018 (2006=100)

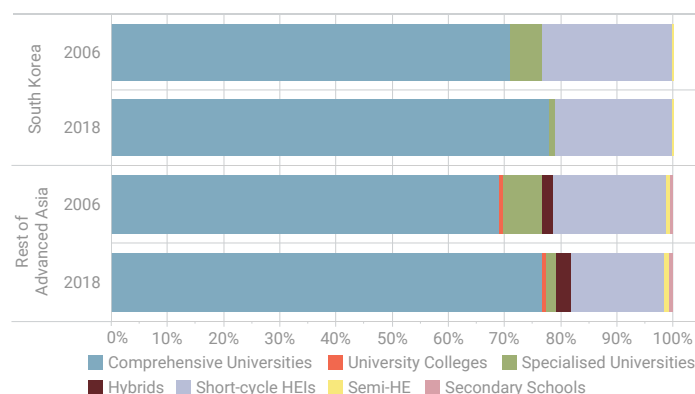


FIGURE 5 – Share of enrolments in public and private institutions, by institution type in South Korea and the rest of Advanced Asia, 2018

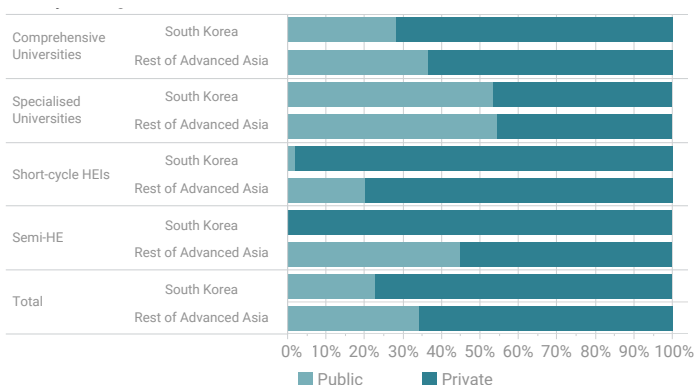
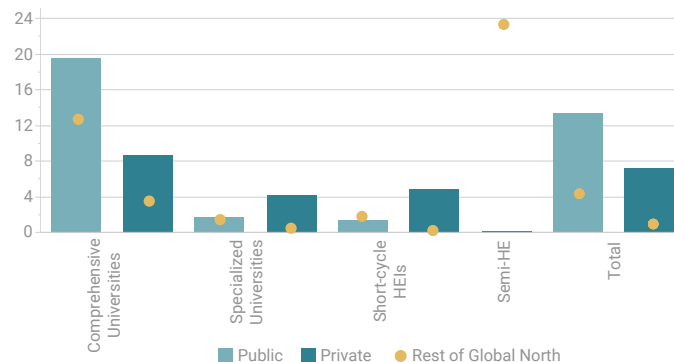


FIGURE 6 – Average institution-size by institution type in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2018 (Thousands)



PART II: HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCING

Public HE spending in South Korea rose 175% from 2006 to 2018, which was among the highest growth rates in the world. Public spending doubled relative to GDP, jumping from 0.4% to 0.8%, and in so doing it reached the average for the rest of the Global North and came to exceed the average for the rest of Advanced Asia by 60%. However, total expenditures of public HEIs rose much more slowly, and in the case of short-cycle HEIs it fell considerably, because much of the increased spending took the form of student financial assistance (see Part IV). At private higher education institutions, attended by most students, total expenditures increased for universities at the same pace in South Korea as across the rest of the Global North, albeit with all growth occurring up to 2013, after which spending fell moderately. Total spending of private short-cycle HEIs only increased by about one-third as much, though it followed the same pattern of growth and then decline. Ultimately, private universities in South Korea spent half as much per student as their peers across the rest of the Global North in 2018, while South Korean private short-cycle HEIs spent about 25% less than their Global North peers.

FIGURE 7 – Change in real total public spending on higher education in South Korea, the rest of Advanced Asia and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

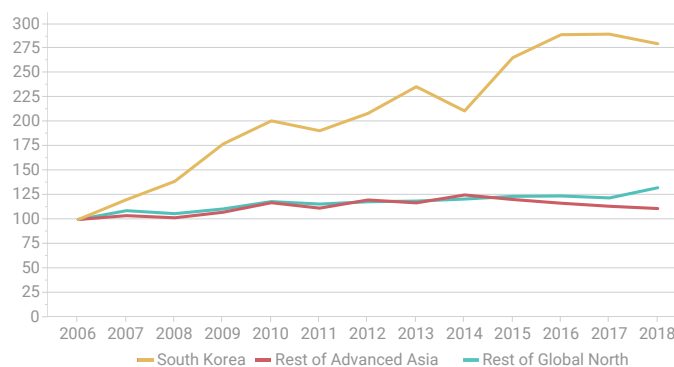


FIGURE 8 – Total public spending on higher education relative to GDP in South Korea, the rest of Advanced Asia and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

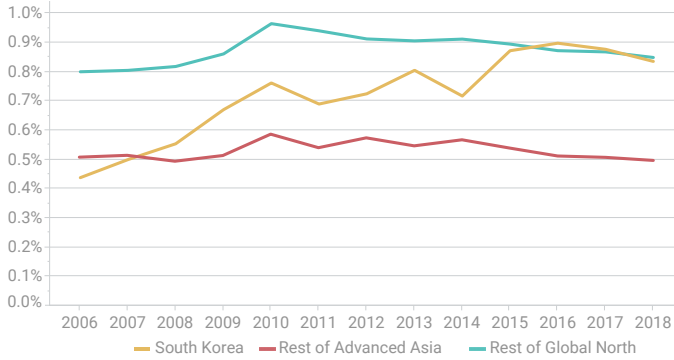


FIGURE 9 – Change in real total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

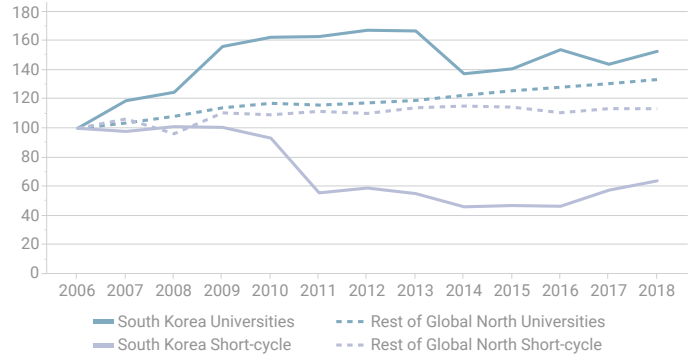


FIGURE 10 – Per-student total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type in real PPP, in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

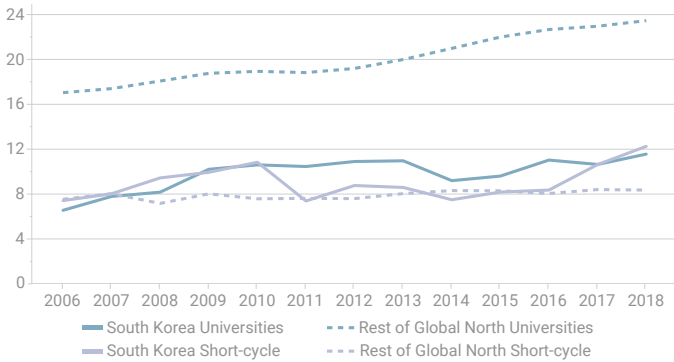


FIGURE 11 – Government transfers relative to total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type, in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006 and 2018

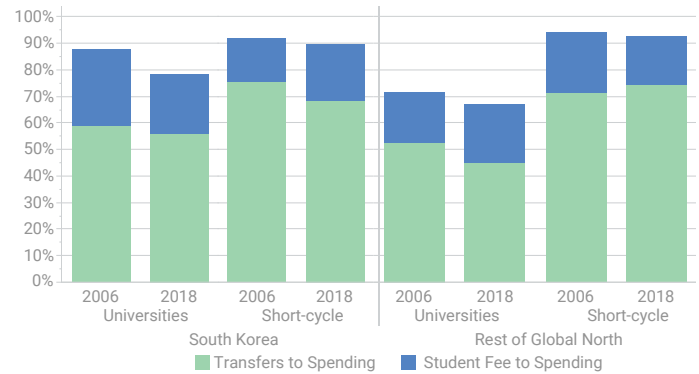
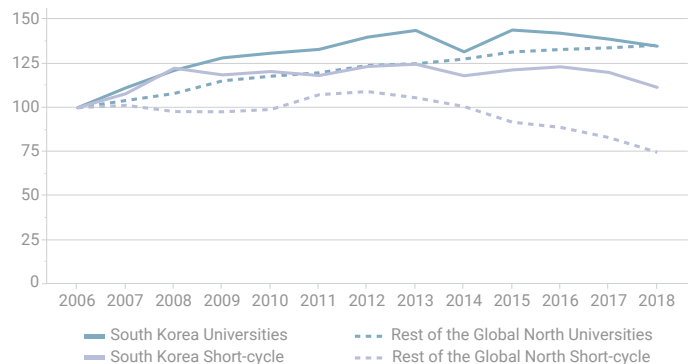


FIGURE 12 – Change in real total institutional spending of private institutions by institution-type in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018 (2006=100)



Yonsei University, South Korea

FIGURE 13 – Per-student total institutional spending of private institutions by institution-type in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

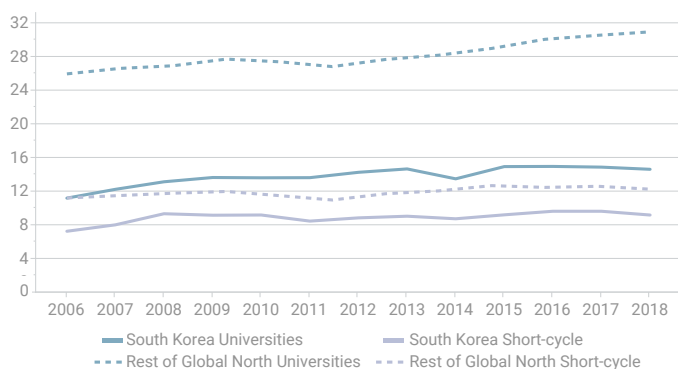
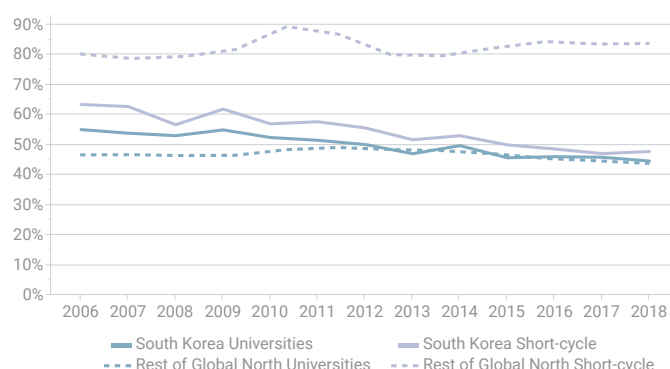


FIGURE 14 – Student fee revenues relative to total institutional spending of private institutions by institution-type in South Korea and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018



PART III: STUDENT FEES

All students pay fees in South Korea without any kinds of differentials. As noted above, most students study in the private sector, which had basically stable fees revenues per student over the period of interest, with some increases up to 2009 followed by modest decline up to 2018. Fees were lower than for private institutions in the rest of the Global North for both categories of HEIs. Public sector fee revenues per student were roughly half the levels in the public sector and were more volatile. In particular, public short-cycle HEIs experienced a substantial increase in fees per student in 2016 to 2018, coming to match levels at public universities.

FIGURE 15 – Share of students at public institutions under each type of tuition regime in South Korea, the rest of Advanced Asia and the rest of the Global North, 2006 and 2018

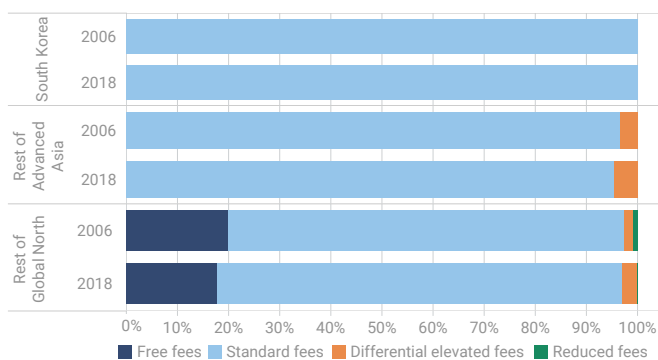


FIGURE 16 – Fee revenues per student paying “regular” rates at public institutions by institution type in PPP, 2006-2018

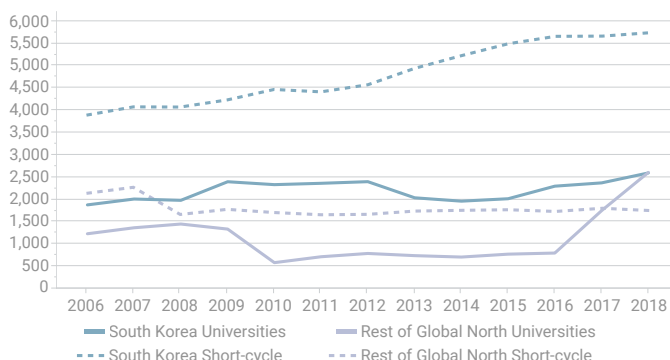
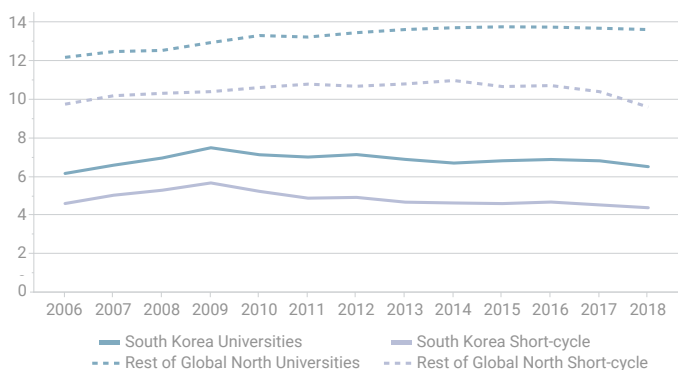


FIGURE 17 – Fee revenues per student at private institutions by institution type in PPP, 2006-2018



PART IV: STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

Government student financial aid in South Korea is comprised of a mix of grants and loans. In 2018, disbursements of loans exceeded grants at a 2:1 ratio. The student financial aid system changed enormously from 2006 to 2018. The number of students taking out loans increased from 200,000 to over nearly 1 million in 2015, before falling back to 650,000. The number of grant increased over more dramatically, up one-hundredfold from 20,000 to over 3 million. However, the average size of grants fell significantly. Total disbursements increased sevenfold in aggregate and more than fivefold relative to GDP.

TABLE 2 – Student financial aid regime, including recipients and amounts disbursed in 2018

CATEGORY	PROGRAMS	BASIS OF ALLOCATION	RECIPIENTS	AMOUNTS DISBURSED (USD)
Grants	Various grant programs operated by the Korea Student Aid foundation; Family Income Connected National Scholarship (FICNS)	Need-based	2,889,364	4,500,879,156
Loans	Various loan programs operated by the Korean Student Aid Foundation	Need-based	642,660	2,069,719,519

FIGURE 18 – Total disbursements to students in financial aid relative to Gross Domestic Product, in South Korea, the rest of Advanced Asia and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

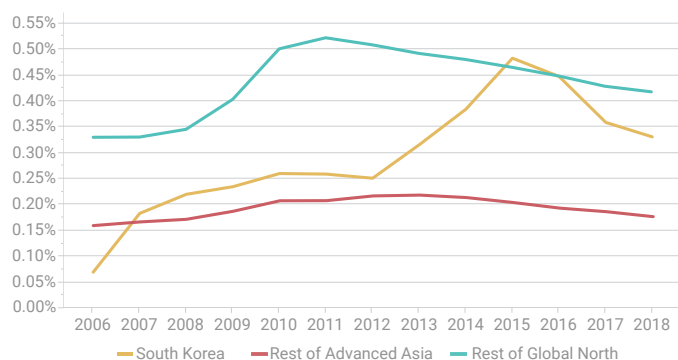


FIGURE 19 – Change in amounts disbursed to students by form of financial aid in South Korea and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

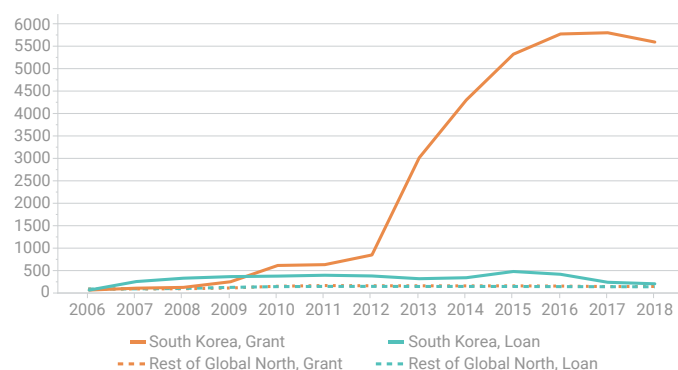


FIGURE 20 – Share of higher education students receiving student financial aid by type, in South Korea and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018

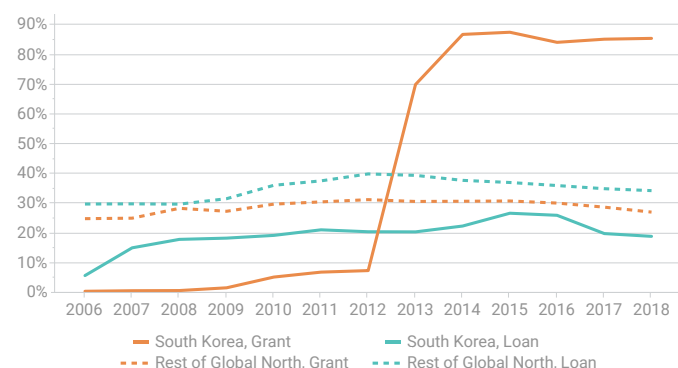
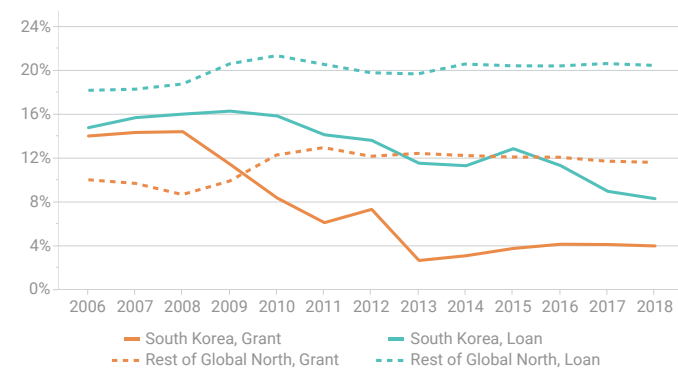


FIGURE 21 – Financial aid per recipient relative to GDP per capita by form of financial aid, in South Korea and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018



***Note:** For more on methodology and data quality please see [Appendices A and B](#).