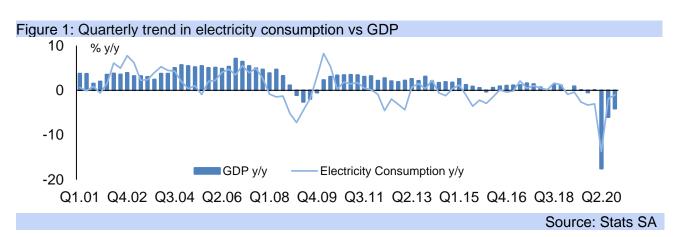
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Electricity update: Electricity supply constraints remain a downside risk to growth

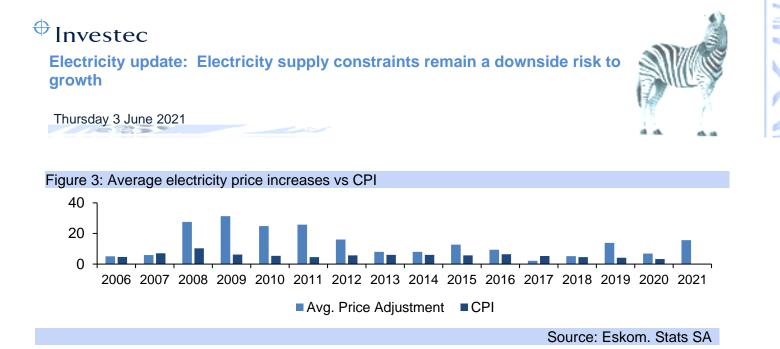


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- Production and consumption of electricity rose by 25.6% y/y and 25.7% y/y respectively in April, buoyed by the low statistical base effects created by the harsh lockdown measures put in place by government at the end of March last year, which restricted economic activity. Specifically, generation and distribution of electricity plunged by a marked -22.8% y/y and -23.3% y/y respectively in April 2020.
- Measured on a month-on-month basis however, production was down -1.8% in April, while consumption slid by -2.4%.
- The Energy Availability Factor (EAF) did improve somewhat in May and June of last year but has been below the 70% mark since the start of Q3.20 and is averaging just 60.90% year-to-date. This shortage is expected to continue, with Eskom's CEO reiterating at March's State of the system briefing, that "there will continue to be an electricity supply shortfall of approximately 4,000MW over the next five years". The high demand winter period will see further supply disruptions, according to Eskom, with the latest bout of load shedding, caused by the depletion of emergency generation reserves, coupled with breakdowns at certain generation units.
- Unreliable electricity supply remains one of the biggest downside risks to economic growth domestically. Indeed, it continues to hinder businesses (especially smaller players), already struggling to stay afloat after the devastating financial effects of the pandemic.
- The cash-strapped utility did reduce its debt burden by R83bn in the 2020/2021 financial year "due to the repayment of the maturing debt and changes in the exchange rate," according to Minister Pravin Gordhan, however Eskom's debt remains elevated at R410bn and it continues to be a huge strain on the country's fiscus and remains a key concern for credit rating agencies.
- Additionally, the power utility has opted to file for a dispute after failing to reach a wage agreement with unions. Unions are demanding unaffordable increases, despite the cash-strapped, utility struggling to stay afloat. Indeed, reducing the public sector wage bill remains a priority of Treasury on their path to fiscal consolidation.

Figure 2: Electricity production and consumption (%)						
% y/y	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 YTD*
Production	1.0	1.0	0.3	-1.5	-5.3	3.9
Consumption	-1.0	0.5	0.9	-1.9	-5.0	4.6
	Source: Investec, Stats SA					



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