Children's access to education

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Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution states that "everyone has the right to a basic education", and section 29(1)(b) says that "everyone has the right to further education", and that the state must make such education "progressively available and accessible".[1]

Article 11(3)(a) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child says "States Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realisation of this right and shall in particular ... provide free and compulsory basic education".[2]

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises "the right of the child to education" and also obliges the state to "make primary education compulsory and available free to all".[3]

Children attending an educational institution

This indicator shows the number and percentage of children aged 7 – 17 years who are reported to be attending a school or educational facility. It is different from "enrolment rate", which reflects the number of children enrolled in educational institutions, as reported by schools to the national Department of Basic Education early in the school year.

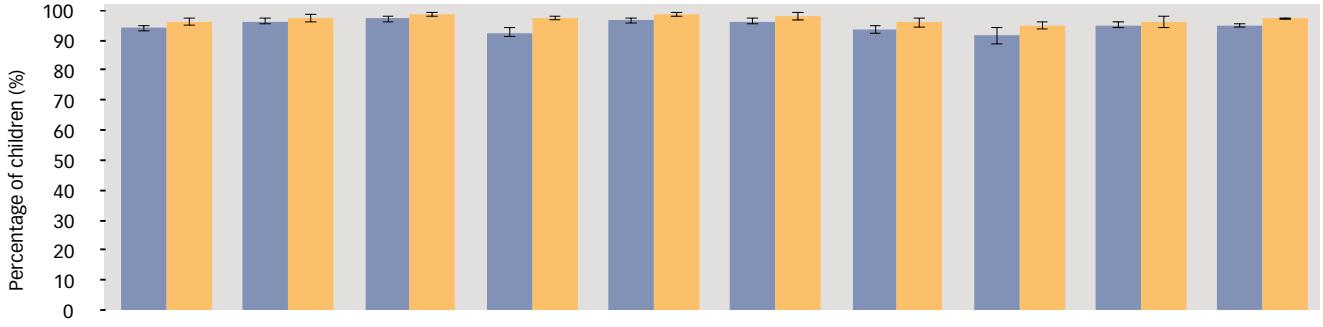
Education is a central socio-economic right that provides the foundation for life-long learning and economic opportunities. Children have a right to basic education and are admitted into grade 1 in the year they turn seven. Basic education is compulsory in grades 1 – 9, or for children aged 7 – 15. Children who have completed basic education also have a right to further education (grades 10 – 12), which the government must take reasonable measures to make available.

South Africa has high levels of school enrolment and attendance. Amongst children of school-going age (7 – 17 years), the vast majority (97%, or 11 million children) attended some form of educational facility in 2015. Since 2002, the national attendance rate has increased slightly. The is due mainly to a small but real increase in reported attendance rates for African and Coloured children over the 14-year period. Of a total of 11.3 million children aged 7 – 17 years, 300,000 were reported as not attending school in 2015. Attendance rates for Coloured children remained slightly below the national average in 2015, at 95%. At a provincial level, the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have seen significant increases in attendance rates. In the Northern Cape, attendance increased by four percentage points from 91% in 2002 to 95% in 2015. In KwaZulu-Natal, the attendance increased from 93% in 2002 to 98% in 2015.

Overall attendance rates tend to mask the problem of drop-out among older children. Analysis of attendance among discrete age groups shows a significant drop in attendance amongst children older than 14. Whereas around 99% of children in each age year from seven to 14 are reported to be attending an educational institution, the attendance rate drops to 97% for 15-year-olds. Schooling is compulsory only until the age of 15 or the end of grade 9, and the attendance rate decreases more steeply from age 16 onwards, with 94% of 16-year-olds, 90% of 17-year-olds, and 80% of 18-year-olds reported to be attending school (based on those who have not successfully completed grade 12).[4] No statistically significant differences exist in reported school attendance rates between boys and girls.

Amongst children of school-going age who are not attending school the main set of reasons for non-attendance relate to financial constraints. These include the cost of schooling (13%), or the opportunity costs of education, where children have family commitments such as child minding (5%) or are needed to work in a family business or elsewhere to support household income (5%). The second most common set of reasons is related to perceived learner

Figure 4a: School-age children (7 – 17-year-olds) attending an educational institution, by province, 2002 & 2015



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	94.1%	96.3%	97.2%	92.6%	96.6%	96.3%	93.6%	91.4%	95.1%	94.8%
	1,793,000	621,000	1,616,000	2,444,000	1,495,000	889,000	692,000	239,000	927,000	10,715,000
2015	96.2%	97.4%	98.5%	97.6%	98.6%	97.9%	95.8%	95.1%	96.0%	97.4%
	1,541,000	523,000	2,186,000	2,461,000	1,305,000	922,000	729,000	234,000	1,095,000	10,996,000

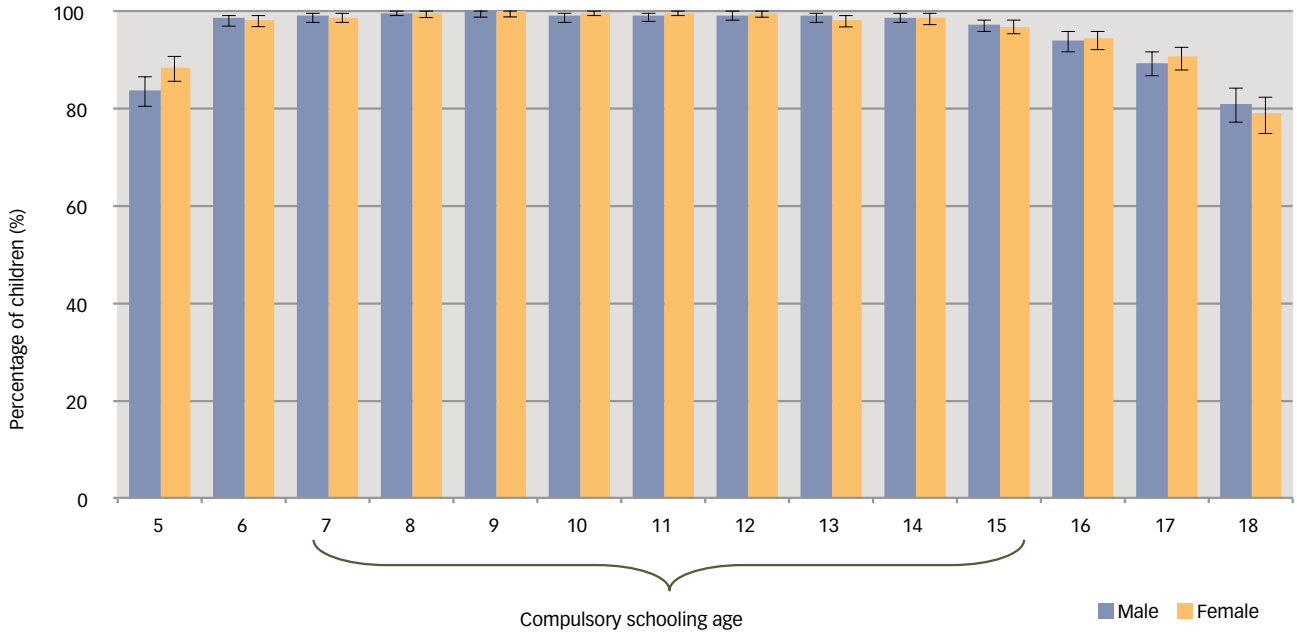
Source: Statistics South Africa (2003, 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

or education system failures, such as a perception that "education is useless" (11%), feeling unable to perform at school (8%), or exam failure (5%). Other reasons for drop-out are illness (4%) and disability (11%). Pregnancy accounts for around 11% of drop-out amongst teenage girls not attending school (or 5% of all non-attendance).[5] Another 5% were not in school because they were not accepted for enrolment, signifying barriers to institutional access.

There is little variation in school attendance rates across the bottom four income quintiles, where school attendance rates are between 96% and 98%. Children in the wealthiest 20% of households are most likely to be attending school (99%).

Attendance rates alone do not capture the regularity of children's school attendance, or their progress through school. Research has shown that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds – with limited economic resources, lower levels of parental education, or who have lost their mother – are less likely to enrol in school and are more prone to dropping out or progressing more slowly than their more advantaged peers. Racial inequalities in school advancement remain strong.[6] Similarly, school attendance rates tell us nothing about the quality of teaching and learning.[7]

Figure 4b: Reported attendance at an educational institution, by age and sex, 2015



Source: Statistics South Africa (2016) *General Household Survey 2015.* Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Access to early childhood learning programmes

This indicator shows the number and percentage of children aged 5 – 6 years who are reported to be attending an early childhood development (ECD) programme or educational institution – in other words, those attending out-of-home care and learning centres including ECD centres, pre-grade R, grade R or grade 1 in ordinary schools. While all these facilities provide care and stimulation for early learning for young children, the emphasis on providing learning opportunities through structured learning programmes differs by facility type.

Educational inequalities are strongly associated with structural socio-economic (and therefore also racial) inequalities in South Africa.[8] These inequalities are evident from the early years, even before entry into primary school. They are exacerbated by a very unequal schooling system,[9] and are difficult to reverse. But early inequalities can be reduced through pre-school exposure to developmentally appropriate activities and programmes that stimulate cognitive development.[10] Provided that they are of good quality, early learning programmes are an important mechanism to interrupt the cycle of inequality by reducing socio-economic differences in learning potential between children before they enter the foundation phase of schooling.

The Five-year Strategic Plan[11] of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) includes a broad goal to improve the quality of ECD provisioning and specifically to improve access to grade R through the supply of learning materials and improving the quality of grade R educators. Evidence suggests that quality group learning programmes are beneficial for cognitive development from about three years of age[12] and the National Development Plan (NDP) priorities, cited in the DBE's Strategic Plan, include universal access to two years of early childhood development programmes. The DBE funds and monitors thousands of community-based grade R centres in addition to the school-based grade R classes. The NDP proposes the introduction of a second year of pre-school education, and that both years be made universally accessible to children.[13] It therefore makes sense to monitor enrolment in early learning programmes of children in the 5 – 6-year pre-school age group.

In 2015, there were 288,212 learners attending 4,058 ECD centres in South Africa, according to the DBE's administrative data.[14] The number of learners in the ECD centres rose by 7% between 2013 and 2014 and then declined slightly again. The DBE snap survey counts another 827,200 learners attending grade R or pre-grade R at primary schools, of whom 93% were at public (government schools) while 7%, or 55,000, were at independent schools.[15]

In 2015, 92% of children (1.9 million) in the pre-school age group (5 – 6-year-olds) were reported to be attending some kind of educational institution, mostly in grade 0 or grade 1. This was an increase of 38 percentage points since 2002, when 1.1 million were reported to be attending an educational institution.

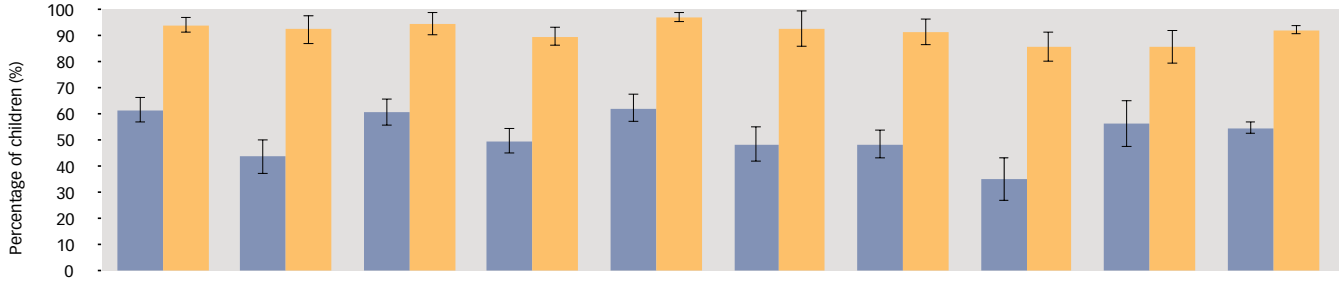
Attendance rates are high across all provinces. The highest attendance rates in 2015 were in Limpopo (97%), Gauteng (95%) and the Eastern Cape (94%), while the lowest rates were in the Western and Northern Cape (both at 86%). This pattern differs from many other indicators, where the Western Cape usually out-performs the poorer and more rural provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Similar patterns were found in analyses of the 2007 Community Survey and the 2008 National Income Dynamics Study data.[16]

Given the inequities in South Africa, it is pleasing to see that there are no substantial racial differences in access to educational institutions by African and White children of pre-school age, although levels of attendance among Coloured children remain slightly below the national average, at 87%. It is also encouraging that, as with formal school attendance, there are no strong differences in pre-school enrolment across the income quintiles. There are also no significant gender differences in access to pre-school.

As with the indicator that monitors school attendance, it should be remembered that this indicator tells us nothing about the quality of care and education that young children receive. High rates of attendance provide a unique opportunity because almost all children in an age cohort can be reached at a particularly important developmental stage; but this is a lost opportunity if the service is of poor quality.

Note: Prior to 2009, enrolment in crèches, playgroups and ECD centres would have been under-reported as the survey only asked about attendance at "educational institutions". More specific questions about ECD facilities were introduced in the 2009 survey, and are likely to have resulted in higher response rates. (For a more detailed technical explanation, see *www.childrencount.uct.ac.za*).

Figure 4c: Children aged 5 – 6 years attending school or ECD facility, by province, 2002 & 2015



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	61.4%	43.7%	60.7%	49.7%	62.2%	48.4%	48.2%	35.0%	56.1%	54.6%
	208,000	53,000	189,000	231,000	168,000	83,000	69,000	18,000	102,000	1,120,000
2015	94.0%	92.2%	94.6%	89.5%	97.1%	92.5%	91.3%	85.8%	85.7%	92.1%
	297,000	92,000	393,000	389,000	235,000	156,000	134,000	38,000	181,000	1,916,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall and Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Children living far from school

This indicator reflects the distance from a child's household to the school s/he attends. Distance is measured as the length of time travelled to reach school. The school the child attends is defined as "far" if a child has to travel more than 30 minutes to reach it, irrespective of mode of transport. Children aged 7 – 13 are defined as primary school age, and children aged 14 – 17 are defined as secondary school age.

Access to schools and other educational facilities is a necessary condition for achieving the right to education. A school's location and distance from home can pose a barrier to education. Access to schools is also hampered by poor roads, transport that is unavailable or unaffordable, and danger along the way. Risks may be different for young children, for girls and boys, and are likely to be greater when children travel alone.

For children who do not have schools near to their homes, the cost, risk and effort of getting to school can influence decisions about regular attendance, as well as participation in extramural activities and after-school events. Those who travel long distances to reach school may wake very early and risk arriving late or physically exhausted, which may affect their ability to learn. Walking long distances to school may also lead to learners being excluded from class or make it difficult to attend school regularly.

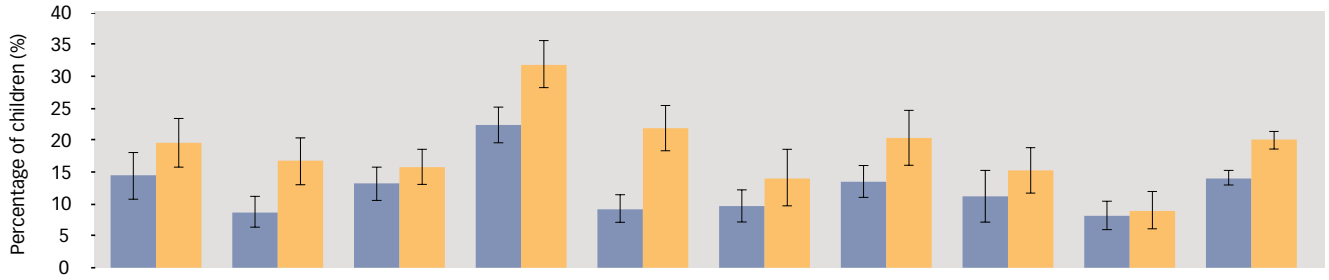
Over two-thirds (68%) of South Africa's learners walk to school, while 9% use public transport. Only 2% report using school buses or transport provided by schools or the government. The majority (77%) of White children are driven to school in private cars, compared with only 14% of African children.[17] These figures illustrate pronounced disparity in child mobility and means of access to school.

Assuming that schools primarily serve the children living in communities around them, the ideal indicator to measure physical access to school would be the distance from the child's household to the nearest school. This analysis is no longer possible due to question changes in the General Household Survey. Instead, the indicator shows the number and percentage of children who travel far (more than 30 minutes) to reach the actual school that they attend, even if it is not the closest school. Eighty-three percent of school-going children attend their nearest school. School-age children not attending school are therefore excluded from the analysis.

Overall, the vast majority (84%) of the 11 million children who attend school travel less than 30 minutes to reach school. Children of secondary school age are more likely than primary school learners to travel far to reach school. In mid-2015 there were over seven million children of primary school age (7 – 13 years) in South Africa. Over a million of these children (14%) travel more than 30 minutes to and from school every day. In KwaZulu-Natal this proportion is significantly higher than the national average, at 22%. Of the 4.1 million children of secondary school age (14 – 17 years), 20% travel more than 30 minutes to reach school, and again it is children in KwaZulu-Natal who are most likely to travel far (32%). The majority of these children come from poor households: 24% of secondary school age children in the poorest 20% of households travel far to school, compared to 15% of children in the richest 20% of households.

Physical access to school remains a problem for many children in South Africa, particularly those living in more remote areas where public transport to schools is lacking or inadequate and where households are unable to afford private transport for children to get to school.[18] There are nearly 26,000 schools in South Africa, of which 24,000 are public and 2,000 are independent.[19] A number of rural schools have closed since 2002, meaning that children in these areas may find it more difficult to access school. Nationally, the number of public schools has dropped by 10% (2,584 schools) between 2002 and 2015, with the largest decreases in the Free State, North West and Limpopo. Over the same period, the number of independent schools in the country has risen by 628 (54%).[20]

Figure 4d: School-aged children living far from school, by province, 2015



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
Primary	14.4%	8.7%	13.1%	22.4%	9.2%	9.7%	13.5%	11.2%	8.1%	14.0%
	141,000	30,000	188,000	375,000	74,000	56,000	66,000	18,000	59,000	1,005,000
Secondary	19.6%	16.7%	15.8%	31.9%	21.9%	14.1%	20.3%	15.3%	9.0%	20.0%
	122,000	33,000	124,000	272,000	115,000	51,000	55,000	14,000	37,000	827,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015.* Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Children's progress through school

Systemic evaluations by the Department of Education have recorded very low pass rates in numeracy and literacy amongst both grade 3 and grade 6 learners.[21] Despite measures to address the inherited inequities in the education system through revisions to the legislative and policy frameworks, and to the school funding norms, continued disparities in the quality of education offered by schools reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities, limiting the future work opportunities and life chances of children who are born into poor households.[22]

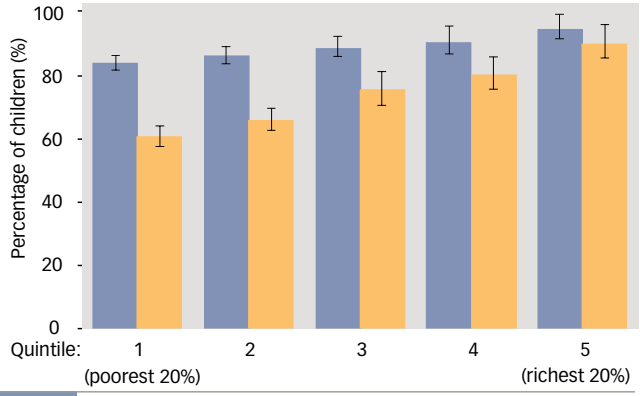
We have already seen that school attendance rates are very high during the compulsory schooling phase (grade 1 – 9). However, attendance tells us little about the quality of education that children receive, or their progress through the education system.

South Africa has poor educational outcomes by international standards and even within Africa,[23] and high rates of grade repetition have been recorded in numerous studies. For example, a study of children's progress at school found that only about 44% of young adults (aged 21 – 29) had matriculated, and of these less than half had matriculated "on time".[24] In South Africa, the labour market returns to education only start kicking in on successful completion of matric, not before. However it is important to monitor progress and grade repetition in the earlier grades as slow progress at school is a strong determinant of school drop-out.[25]

Assuming that children are enrolled in primary school at the prescribed age (by the year in which they turn seven) and assuming that they do not repeat a grade or drop out of school, they would be expected to have completed the foundation phase (grade 3) by the year that they turn nine, and the general education phase (grade 9) by the year they turn 15.

This indicator allows a little more leeway: it measures the number and proportion of children aged 10 and 11 years who have completed a minimum of grade 3, and the proportion of those aged 16 and 17 years who have completed a minimum of grade 9. In other words, it allows for the older cohort in each group to have repeated one grade, or more if they started school in the year before they turned seven.

Figure 4e: Completion of grade 3 (10 – 11-year-olds) and grade 9 (16 – 17-year-olds), by income quintile, 2015



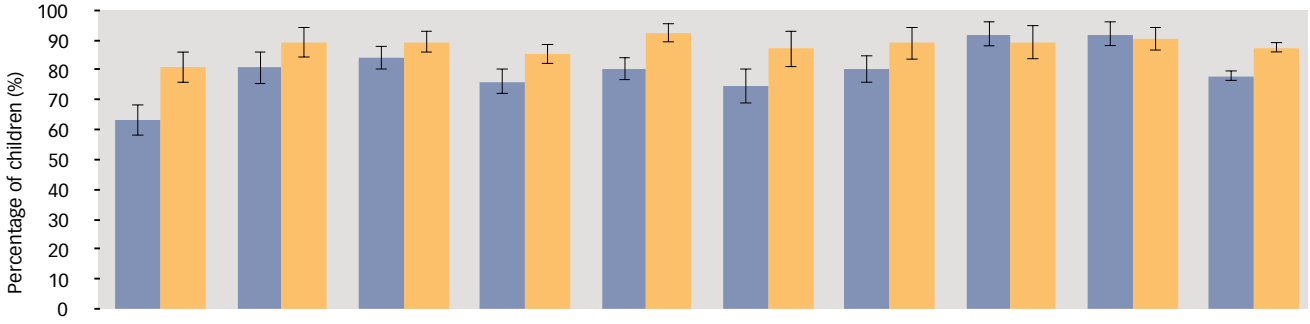
Grade 3	84%	86.6%	89.2%	90.9%	95%
	668,000	513,000	302,000	209,000	212,000
Grade 9	61%	66.3%	76.0%	80.6%	90%
	470,000	339,000	249,000	180,000	170,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2016) *General Household Survey 2015.* Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

In 2015, 87% of all children aged 10 and 11 were reported to have completed grade 3. This was up from 78% in 2002. This improvement in progress through the foundation phase was evident across most of the provinces, with significant advances in the Eastern Cape (from 63% to 81%), KwaZulu-Natal (from 76% to 85%) and Mpumalanga (from 75% to 87%). These improvements have narrowed the gap between provinces: most provinces record a progression rate of over 85% and the lowest performing province is the Eastern Cape – at 81%.

As would be expected, the rate of progression through the entire general education and training band (grades 1 – 9) is lower, as there

Figure 4f: Children aged 10 – 11 years who passed grade 3, by province, 2002 & 2015



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	63.1%	80.8%	84.1%	76.1%	80.5%	74.6%	80.3%	92.0%	92.0%	78.0%
	210,000	95,000	248,000	370,000	216,000	131,000	111,000	52,000	167,000	1,599,000
2015	81.0%	89.2%	89.4%	85.3%	92.6%	87.0%	88.8%	89.4%	90.5%	87.5%
	249,000	93,000	365,000	439,000	224,000	154,000	137,000	40,000	203,000	1,903,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015.* Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

is more time for children to have repeated or dropped out by grade 9. Seventy percent of children aged 16 – 17 years had completed grade 9 in 2015. This represents an overall improvement of 21 percentage points over the 14-year period, from 48% in 2002. Provincial variation is slightly more pronounced than for progress through the foundation phase: Gauteng had the highest rate of grade 9 progression (85%), followed by the Western Cape (76%). Progress was poorest in the Northern and Eastern Cape, where around half (50% and 54% respectively) of children had completed grade 9 by the expected age.

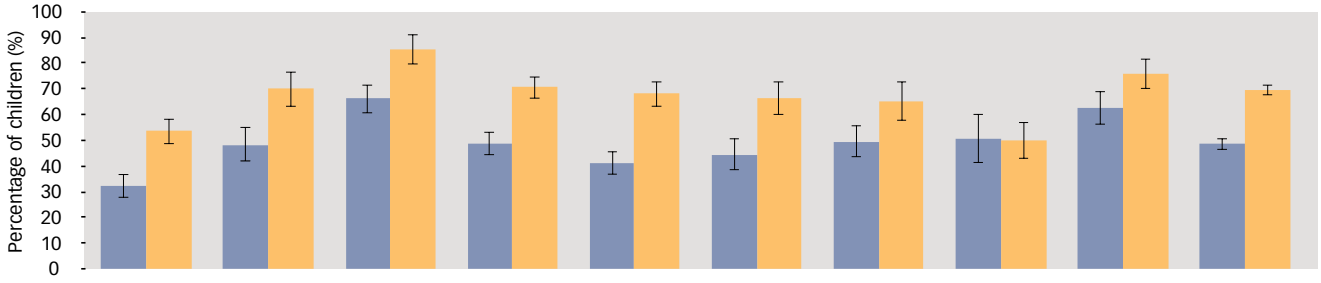
As found in other analyses of transitions through school,[26] educational attainment (measured by progress through school) varies along economic and racial lines. These differences become more pronounced as children advance through the grades. Gender differences in school progression, on the other hand, have remained consistent and even widened over the years: girls are more likely than boys to progress through school at the expected rate, and the difference becomes more pronounced in the higher grades. In 2015, 91% of girls aged 10 – 11 had completed grade 3, compared with 84% of boys; in the same year, 76% of 16 – 17-year-old girls had completed grade 9, compared with only 64% of boys in the same age cohort. This finding is consistent with analyses elsewhere.[27]

There are significant differences in grade completion across income quintiles, especially for grade 9: in 2015, 61% of 16 – 17-year-olds in the poorest 20% of households completed grade 9, compared to 90% in the richest 20% of households.

Of course, grade progression and grade repetition are not easy to interpret. Prior to grade 12, the promotion of a child to the next grade is based mainly on the assessment of teachers, so the measure may be confounded by the extent of the teacher's competence to assess the performance of the child. Analyses of the determinants of school progress and drop-out point to a range of factors, many of which are interrelated: there is huge variation in the quality of education offered by schools. These differences largely reflect the historic organisation of schools into racially defined and inequitably resourced education departments.

Household-level characteristics and family background also account for some of the variation in grade progression. For example, the level of education achieved by a child's mother explains some of the difference in whether children are enrolled at an appropriate age and whether they go on to complete matric successfully.[28] This in turn suggests that improved educational outcomes for children will have a cumulative positive effect for each subsequent generation.

Figure 4g: Children aged 16 – 17 years who passed grade 9, by province, 2002 & 2015



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	32.1%	48.3%	66.1%	48.8%	41.3%	44.6%	49.6%	50.8%	62.6%	48.4%
	107,000	54,000	191,000	227,000	113,000	71,000	63,000	21,000	107,000	953,000
2015	53.6%	69.9%	85.3%	70.6%	68.1%	66.4%	65.2%	50.0%	75.8%	69.7%
	166,000	63,000	325,000	294,000	184,000	119,000	91,000	23,000	144,000	1,407,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015.* Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

"NEETs" is a term used to describe young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training. The definition used here includes youth aged 15 – 24 who are not attending any educational institution and who are not employed or self-employed.[29]

Widespread concerns about the large numbers of youth in this situation centre on two main issues: the perpetuation of poverty and inequality, including intergenerational poverty; and the possible implications of a large "idle" youth population for risk behaviour, social cohesion and the safety of communities.

Little is known about what NEETs actually do with their time. Young people who are neither learning nor engaged in income-generating activities may neverthless be "productive" within their households, for example by helping maintain the home or look after children and others in need of care. However, in the absence of income, NEETs remain dependent on the earnings of other household members, and on grants that are directed to children and the elderly. The Old Age Pension in particular has been found to support job-seeking activities for young people[30] and it has been argued that this unenvisaged expenditure of the grant could be addressed by extending social security to unemployed youth[31].

The large number of NEETs in South Africa is linked to underlying problems in the education system and the labour market. Young people in South Africa have very high participation rates in education, including at secondary level. But less than half successfully complete grade 12, and this reduces prospects for further study or employment.[32] Low quality and incomplete education represent what are termed the "supply-side" drivers of youth unemployment, where young people do not have the appropriate skills or work-related capabilities to be employable or to set up successful enterprises of their own, and so struggle to make the transition from education to work.[33] The "demand-side" driver relates to a shortage of jobs or self-employment opportunities for those who are available to work.

In 2015 there were just over 10 million young people aged 15 – 24 in South Africa. Of these, 32% (3.3 million) were neither working nor enrolled in any education institution such as a school, university or college. The number of young people nationally who are not in education, training or employment has remained remarkably consistent over the last decade, but has increased over the two decades since 1996 when only two million NEETs were recorded.[34] South Africa has made no progress towards what is now an explicit target of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training by 2020.[35]

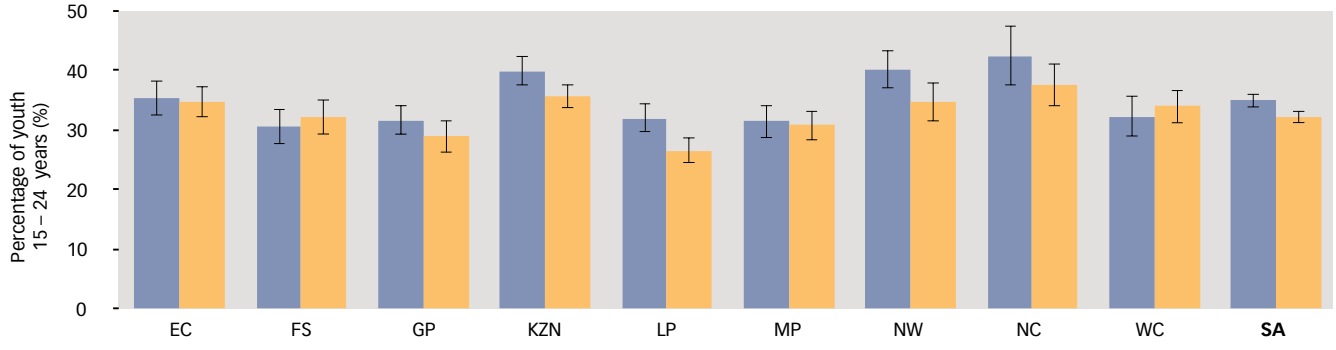
The NEET rates are fairly even across the provinces. This is hard to interpret without further analysis. Limpopo, for example, is a very poor and largely rural province. It is possible that the slightly lower-than-average proportion of NEETs in that province is partly the result of many young people migrating to cities in search of work and they are therefore counted among the NEETs in more urban provinces. It is possible that young people who are not employed in the labour market may nevertheless be employed in small-scale agriculture if their household has access to land, and this could also help to smooth the provincial inequalities that are characteristic of many other indicators.

The number and share of NEETs in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have declined between 2002 and 2015. Again, this could be related to changing levels of productive activity, or to youth migration. While the proportion of NEETs has not changed substantialy in Gauteng or the Western Cape, the actual number of NEETs in those provinces has increased substantially, by nearly 80,000 in Gauteng and by over 60,000 in the Western Cape. This is the result of a growing young urban population.

There is enormous variation within the broad youth group of 15 – 24 years. Only 6% of children aged 15 – 17 are classified as NEET because the vast majority are attending school. Within the 18 – 20 age band, 33% are NEETs, and half (51%) of those in the 21 – 24 age band are neither working nor in education.

While education attendance rates are fairly even for boys and girls, the gender disparity among NEETs is more pronounced. Thirty-six percent of young women are not in employment, education or training – compared with 29% of young men.

Figure 4h: Youth (15 – 24 years) not in employment, education or training (NEETs), by province, 2002 & 2015



	EC	FS	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	SA
2002	35.3%	30.5%	31.6%	39.9%	31.9%	31.4%	40.1%	42.5%	32.2%	34.8%
	475,000	168,000	555,000	820,000	351,000	217,000	260,000	81,000	290,000	3,215,000
2015	34.7%	32.2%	28.8%	35.5%	26.4%	30.7%	34.7%	37.4%	33.9%	32.1%
	496,000	164,000	632,000	756,000	333,000	267,000	227,000	81,000	351,000	3,305,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2016) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2015*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

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