

Children's access to housing

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Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa¹ provides that “everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing”, and section 28(1)(c) gives children “the right to ... shelter”.

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child² states that “every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his/her development” and obliges the state “in cases of need” to “provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to ... housing”.

Distribution of children living in urban and rural areas

This indicator describes the number and proportion of children living in urban or rural areas in South Africa. According to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, one of the elements of adequate housing is location.³ Houses should ideally be situated in areas close to work opportunities, clinics, police stations, schools and child care facilities. In a country with a large rural population, this means that services and facilities need to be well distributed. In South Africa, service provision to rural areas still lags far behind urban areas.

The General Household Survey (GHS) reported a rural/urban variable up to 2004; thereafter the variable was no longer reported. This is a pity because information on the whereabouts of children sheds light on population movement and urbanisation, and can inform spatial targeting of services.

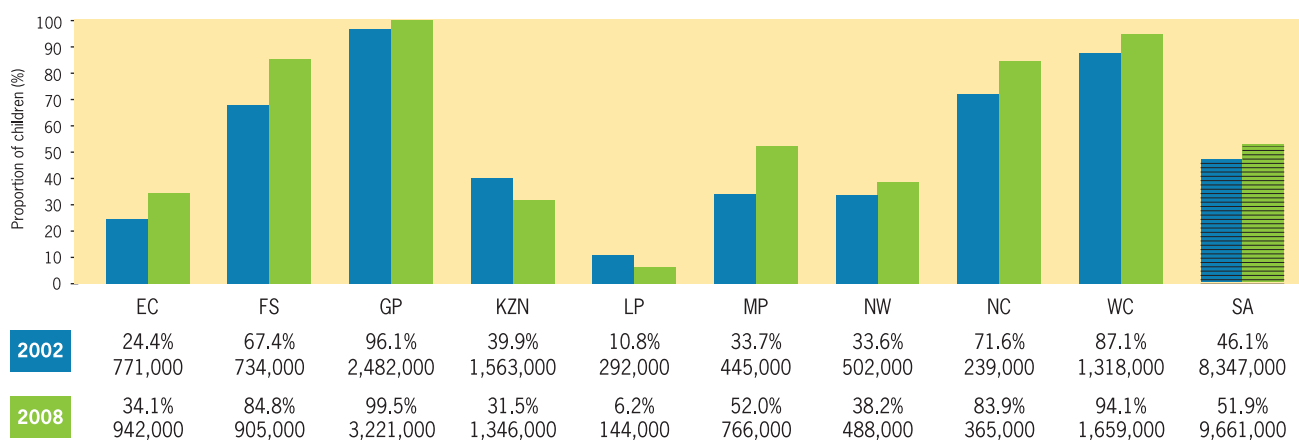
Results for the period 2002 – 2004 were fairly consistent: More than half of South Africa's children (54%, or about 10 million children) were found in rural households. More recent figures on

the urban/rural child population were obtained from the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS) 2008.

There are marked provincial differences. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces are home to three-quarters (76%) of all rural children in South Africa. The most rural province is Limpopo, where only 6% of children live in urban areas. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have large rural populations, but are also home to some of the largest cities in the country. Children living in Gauteng are almost entirely urbanised, and 94% of children in the Western Cape are in urban areas.

South Africa has a history of migrant labour, and there are very few formal work opportunities in rural areas. Adults living in rural areas often move to urban centres in search of work, while their children remain in rural areas, to be cared for by family members. According to NIDS, a third of all rural children do not live with their mothers.⁴ (See p. 80 for more statistics on parental co-residence.

Table 5a: Number and proportion of children living in urban areas, 2002 & 2008



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003) *General Household Survey 2002*. Pretoria: Stats SA. National Income Dynamics Survey 2008. Available: www.nids.uct.ac.za. Calculation by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as people aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Data from the two surveys are not directly comparable. ④ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 104 – 106. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

The number and proportion of children living in adequate housing

This indicator shows the number and proportion of children living in formal, informal and traditional housing. For the purposes of the indicator, “formal” housing is considered a proxy for adequate housing and consists of: dwellings or brick structures on separate stands; flats or apartments; town/cluster/semi-detached houses; units in retirement villages; rooms or flatlets on larger properties. “Informal” housing consists of: informal dwellings or shacks in backyards or informal settlements; dwellings or houses/flats/rooms in backyards; caravans or tents. “Traditional dwelling” is defined as a “traditional dwelling/hut/structure made of traditional materials”. These dwelling types are listed in the General Household Survey, which is the data source.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights identifies “access to services” as one of the key elements of adequate housing⁵. Children living in formal areas are more likely to have easy access to municipal services than those living in informal settlements or remote rural villages. Formally housed children are also more likely to be close to social infrastructure like schools, libraries, clinics and hospitals.

Seventy percent of children in South Africa live in households where the main dwelling is formal. There has been little change in this proportion since 2002. Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the North West and Northern Cape all have relatively high proportions of children in formal housing – yet, in the case of Limpopo, these children live almost entirely in rural areas.

Provinces with the largest proportions of children accommodated in “traditional” dwellings are the Eastern Cape (where half

of children live in traditional housing) and KwaZulu-Natal (with 38% of children). Together, these provinces are home to 89% of all children housed in traditional dwellings.

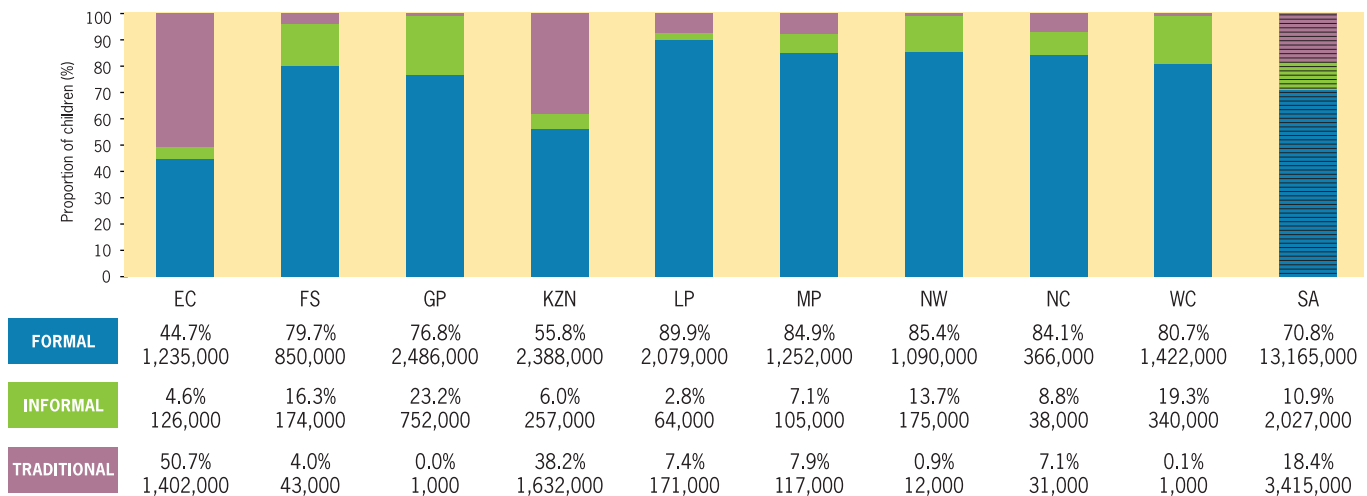
Another element of adequate housing defined by the UN Committee is that it must be “habitable”: The dwelling should provide physical safety and protection from the elements, and should not be overcrowded. Informal housing in backyards and informal settlements is generally not habitable in these terms, and makes up the bulk of the housing backlog in South Africa.

Just over two million children live in backyard dwellings or shacks in informal settlements. The mainly metropolitan provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape have the largest proportions of children in informal accommodation, accounting for more than half of all informally housed children in the country. Two provinces which appear to have reduced the number of children in informal housing since 2002 are KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

Over 40% percent of children in informal housing are in the 0 – 5-year age group. These young children are particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards associated with informal housing, such as shack fires and paraffin poisoning. When comparing children and adults, proportionately fewer children live in informal dwellings, and more in traditional dwellings.

The General Household Survey 2009 shows persistent racial inequalities in housing access. Virtually all White and Indian children live in formal housing, compared with 89% of Coloured children and only 67% of African children.

Table 5b: Number and proportion of children living in formal, informal and traditional housing, 2009



Source: Statistics South Africa (2010) *General Household Survey 2009*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as people aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 104 – 106. ④ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

References

- 1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996.
- 2 Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN General Assembly Resolution 44/25*. Geneva: United Nations.
- 3 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1991) *The Right to Adequate Housing (Art.11 (1)): 13/12/91. CESCR General Comment 4*. Geneva: United Nations.
- 4 National Income Dynamics Survey Wave 1 (2008) Available: www.nids.uct.ac.za. Calculations by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.
- 5 See no. 3 above.