# 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]**

## Number and proportion of children attending an educational institution

This indicator reflects the number and proportion of children aged 7 – 17 years who are reported to be attending a school or educational facility. This 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%) attended some form of educational facility in 2012. Since 2002, the national attendance rate has seen a 2.5 percentage point increase. Of a total of 11.2 million children aged 7 – 17 years, 290,000 are reported as not attending school in 2012.

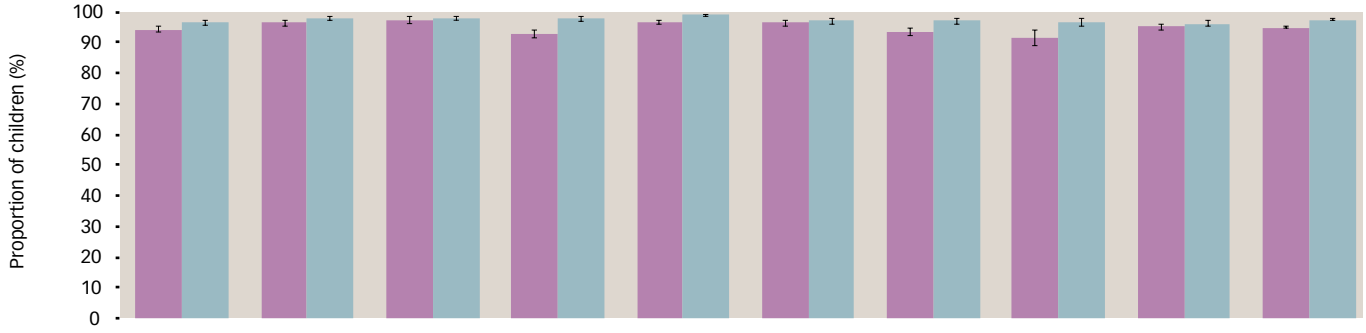
At a provincial level, the Northern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal have all seen significant increases in attendance rates. In the Northern Cape, attendance increased by five percentage points from 91% in 2002 to 96% in 2012. In KwaZulu-Natal, the attendance increased from 93% in 2002 to 98% in 2012, while in the North West, it increased by three percentage points in the same period. There has been a small but real increase in reported attendance rates for African and Coloured children over the 11-year period since 2002. Attendance rates for Coloured children remained slightly below the national average in 2012, at 95%.

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 99% of children in each age year from seven to 13 are reported to be attending an educational institution, the attendance rate drops to 98% and 97% for 14- and 15-year-olds respectively. 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, 89% of 17-year-olds, and 81% of 18-year-olds reported to be attending school (based on those who have not successfully completed grade 12).[4]

Although there are differences in school attendance rates between boys and girls in the upper teens, with boys more likely to be attending school, the difference is not significant if one excludes those who have successfully completed grade 12.

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 (18%), or

**Figure 4a: School-age children attending an educational institution, by province, 2002 & 2012**




| | 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 |
| 2012 | 96.5% | 97.9% | 97.9% | 97.5% | 98.9% | 96.9% | 97.0% | 96.4% | 96.2% | 97.4% |
| | 1,589,000 | 530,000 | 2,044,000 | 2,442,000 | 1,336,000 | 906,000 | 714,000 | 242,000 | 1,080,000 | 10,884,000 |

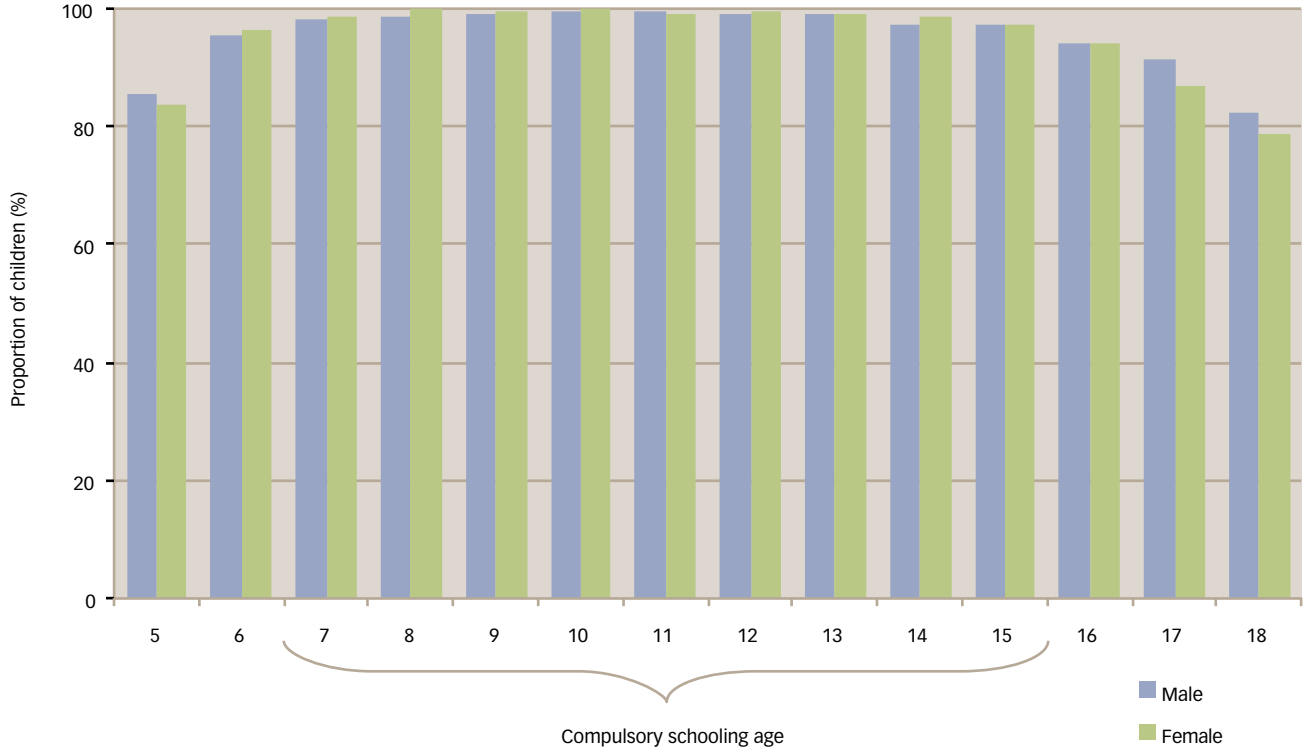
**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2003, 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

the opportunity costs of education, where children have family commitments such as child minding (9%) or are needed to work in a family business or elsewhere to support household income (3%). The second most common set of reasons is related to perceived learner or education system failures, such as a perception that "education is useless" (12%), feeling unable to perform at school (8%), or exam failure (4%). Other reasons for drop-out are illness (8%) and disability (9%). Pregnancy accounts for around 10% of drop-out amongst teenage girls not attending school (or 5% of all non-attendance).[5]

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 one or both parents – are indeed less likely to enrol in school and are more prone to dropping out or progressing more slowly than their more advantaged peers.[6] Racial inequalities in school advancement remain strong. Similarly, school attendance rates tell us nothing about the quality of teaching and learning.

There is little variation in school attendance rates across the income quintiles. Irrespective of whether children live in the poorest or wealthiest 20% of households, school attendance rates remain high – between 96% and 99%.

**Figure 4b: Reported attendance at an educational institution, by age and sex, 2012**




**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

## Access to early childhood learning programmes

This indicator reflects the number and proportion of children aged 5 – 6 years who are reported to be attending an early childhood development (ECD) centre or educational institution – in other words, those attending out-of-home care and learning centres. It includes those who attend ECD centres as well as those attending pre-grade R, grade R or grade 1 in ordinary schools. While all these facilities provide care and stimulation 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.[7] These inequalities are evident from the early years, even before entry into primary school. They are exacerbated by a very unequal schooling system,[8] 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.[9] 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 Action Plan[10] of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) includes a broad goal to "improve the access of children to quality early childhood development below Grade 1", and specifically to improve the quality and achieve universal access to grade R by 2014 (thus extending the original deadline of 2010). The plan does not mention pre-grade R learning programmes, but current evidence suggests that quality group learning programmes are beneficial for cognitive development from about three years of age.[11] The DBE funds and monitors thousands of community-based grade R centres in addition to the school-based grade R classes. The National Planning Commission has proposed the introduction of a second year of pre-school education, and that both years be made universally accessible to children.[12] It therefore makes sense to monitor enrolment in early learning programmes of children in the 5 – 6-year pre-school age group.

In 2012, there were 265,105 "learners" attending 3,961 ECD centres in South Africa, according to the DBE's administrative data. The number of learners in ECD centres dropped by 7% between 2011 and 2012. The DBE snap survey counts another 815, 935 learners attending grade R or pre-grade R at primary schools, of whom 94% were at public (government schools) while 6%, or 49,000, were at independent schools.[13]

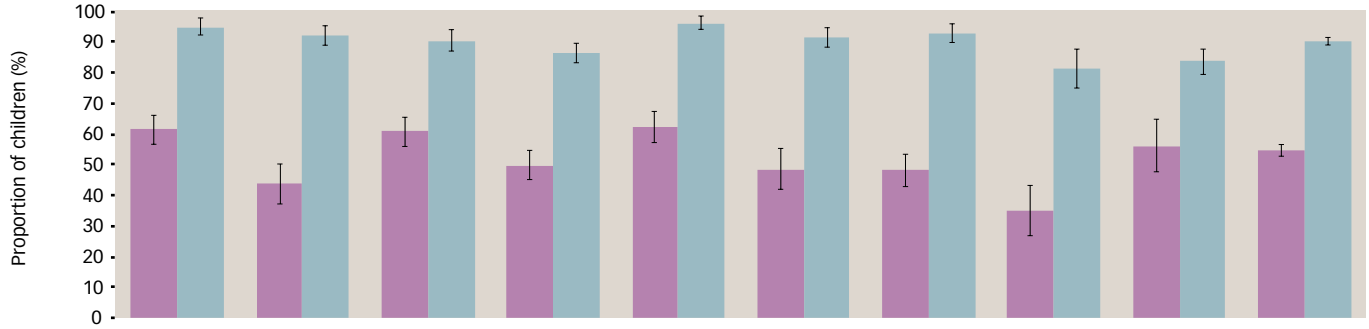
In 2012, 90% of children (1.9 million) in the pre-school age group (5 – 6-year-olds) were reported to be attending some kind of educational institution. This was an increase of 36 percentage points since 2002, when 1.1 million were reported to be attending an educational institution. Of the 1.9 million 5 – 6-year-olds attending an educational institution in 2012, 40% (or 740,000 children) were already in grade 1.

Attendance rates are high across all provinces. The highest attendance rates in 2012 were in Limpopo (96%), the Eastern Cape (95%) and North West (93%), and the lowest in the Western Cape (84%). 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 Survey.[14]

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 enrolment among Coloured and Indian children remain below the national average, at 83% and 84% respectively. It is also encouraging that, as with formal school attendance, there are no strong differences in pre-school enrolment across the income quintiles. As would be expected in the South African context, no gender differences in access to early learning are observed.

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.

**Figure 4c: School or ECD facility attendance among children aged 5 – 6 years only, by province, 2002 & 2012**




| | 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 |
| 2012 | 94.9% | 92.0% | 90.5% | 86.4% | 96.2% | 91.5% | 93.0% | 81.2% | 83.6% | 90.3% |
| | 296,000 | 95,000 | 362,000 | 411,000 | 226,000 | 162,000 | 128,000 | 36,000 | 181,000 | 1,898,000 |

**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2002; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: StatsSA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall and Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.
**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.ci.org.za.)

## Number and proportion of children living far from school

This indicator reflects the distance from a child's household to the school s/he attends. Distance is measured through a proxy indicator: length of time travelled to reach the school attended, which is not necessarily the school nearest to the child's household. 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.

Close to three-quarters (72%) of South Africa's learners walk to school, while 8% use public transport. Only 1% report using school buses or transport provided by the government. The vast majority (84%) of White children are driven to school in private cars, compared with only 11% of African children.[15] These figures illustrate pronounced disparity in child mobility and means of access to school.

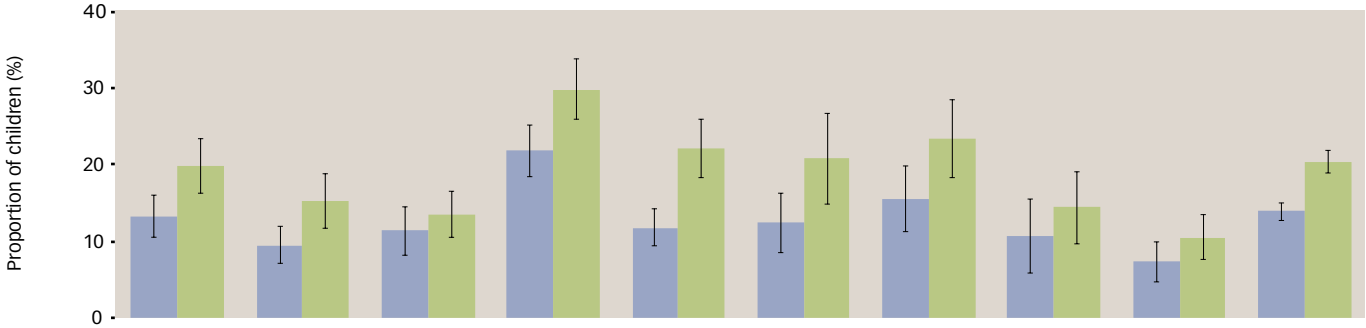
Assuming that schools primarily serve the children living in communities around them, the ideal indicator to measure physical access to school would be the distance from the child's household to the nearest school. This analysis is no longer possible due to question changes in the General Household Survey. Instead, the indicator shows the number and proportion 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. School-age children not attending school are therefore excluded from the analysis.

Overall, the vast majority (84%) of the 10.9 million children who attend school travel less than 30 minutes to reach school and most learners (83%) attend their nearest school. Children of secondary age are more likely than primary school learners to travel far to reach school. In mid-2012 there were over seven million children of primary school age (7 – 13 years) in South Africa. Close to one 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 four million children of secondary school age (14 – 17 years), 20% travel more than 30 minutes to reach school.

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.[16] A number of rural schools have closed since 2002, making the situation more difficult for children in these areas. Nationally, the number of public schools has dropped by 8% (over 2,000 schools) between 2002 and 2012, with the largest decreases in the Free State, North West and Limpopo. Over the same period, the number of independent schools has risen by 386 (33%).[17]

**Figure 4d: School-aged children living far from school, by province, 2012**

*(Y-axis reduced to 40%)*




| | EC | FS | GT | KZN | LP | MP | NW | NC | WC | **SA** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | 13.2% | 9.5% | 11.4% | 21.8% | 11.8% | 12.3% | 15.6% | 10.6% | 7.3% | 13.9% |
| | 131,000 | 32,000 | 157,000 | 347,000 | 93,000 | 74,000 | 73,000 | 17,000 | 52,000 | 976,000 |
| Secondary | 19.8% | 15.3% | 13.6% | 29.8% | 22.0% | 20.8% | 23.3% | 14.4% | 10.5% | 20.4% |
| | 130,000 | 31,000 | 96,000 | 272,000 | 124,000 | 69,000 | 63,000 | 13,000 | 43,000 | 845,000 |

**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012.* 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.[18] Despite measures to address the inherited inequities in the education system through revisions to the legislative and policy framework 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.[19]

Children are required to attend school from the year they turn seven, and to stay in school until they have completed grade 9 or reached the age of 15. School attendance rates are very high during this compulsory schooling phase. However, attendance tells us little about the quality of education that children receive, or how well they are progressing through the education system.

South Africa has poor educational outcomes by international standards and even within Africa[20] 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".[21] 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.[22]

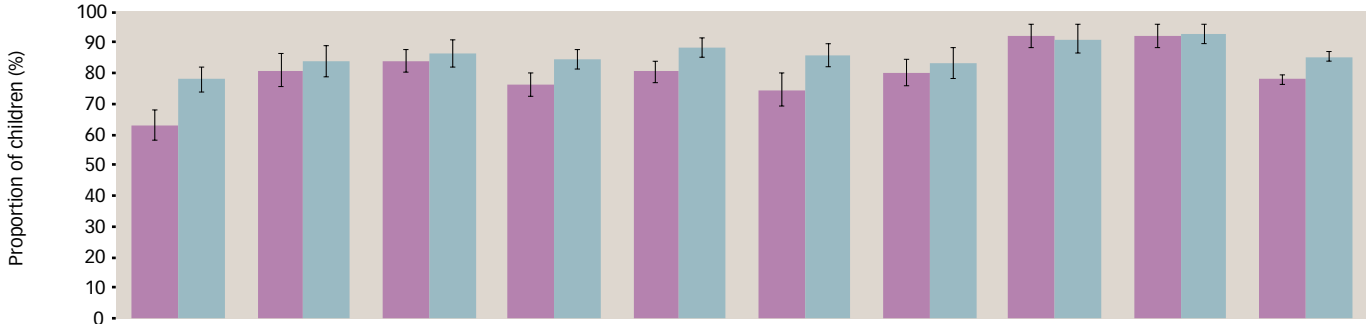
Assuming that children are enrolled in primary school at the prescribed age (by the year in which they turn seven) and assuming that they do not repeat a grade or drop out of school, they would be expected to have completed the foundation phase (grade 3) by the year that they turn nine, and the general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

In 2012, 85% 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 improvements in KwaZulu-Natal (from 76% to 84%) and Mpumalanga (from 75% to 86%). The best performing provinces in 2012 were Limpopo, Northern Cape and the Western Cape – although by 2012 provincial variation was not very pronounced. Only the Eastern Cape lagged behind, with 78% of its 270,000 children in this age group having completed the foundation phase.

As would be expected, the rate of progression through the entire general education and training band (grades 1 – 9) is lower, as there is more time for children to have repeated or dropped out by grade 9. Sixty-one percent of children aged 16 – 17 years had completed grade 9 in 2012. This represents an overall improvement of nearly 12 percentage points over the 10-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 (75%), followed by the Western Cape (70%). Progress was poorest in the Eastern Cape, where less than half (48%) of children had completed grade 9 by the expected age.

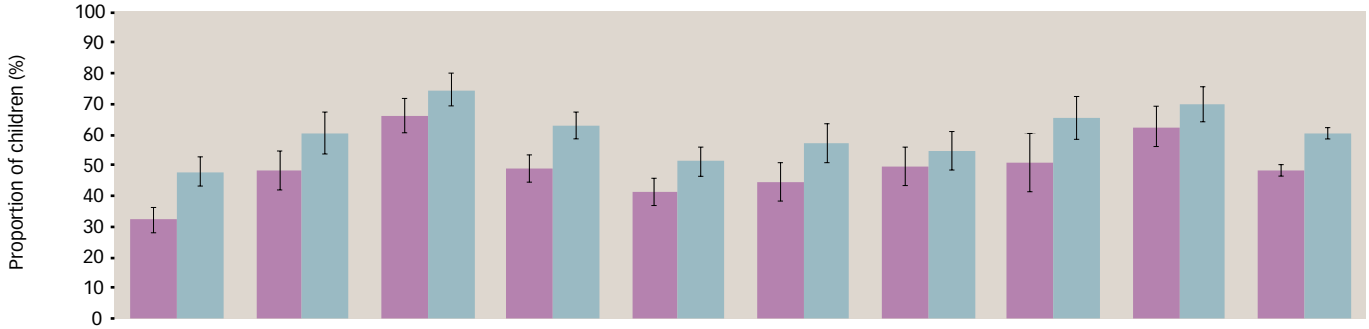
**Figure 4e: Children aged 10 – 11 years who have passed grade 3, by province, 2002 & 2012**




| | 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 |
| 2012 | 77.9% | 83.8% | 86.4% | 84.4% | 88.4% | 85.7% | 83.3% | 91.2% | 92.8% | 85.4% |
| | 211,000 | 88,000 | 332,000 | 343,000 | 212,000 | 151,000 | 110,000 | 41,000 | 181,000 | 1,669,000 |

**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

**Figure 4f: Children aged 16 – 17 who have passed grade 9, by province, 2002 & 2012**




| | 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 |
| 2012 | 48.0% | 60.5% | 74.6% | 62.9% | 51.2% | 57.2% | 54.8% | 65.4% | 69.9% | 60.5% |
| | 162,000 | 63,000 | 276,000 | 272,000 | 150,000 | 97,000 | 75,000 | 31,000 | 138,000 | 1,263,000 |

**Source**: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

As found in other analyses of transitions through school,[23] 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 2012, 88% of girls aged 10 – 11 had completed grade 3, compared with 82% of boys; in the same year, 67% of 16 – 17-year-old girls had completed grade 9, compared with only 54% of boys in the same age cohort. This finding is consistent with analyses elsewhere.[24]

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.[25] This in turn suggests that improved educational outcomes for children will have a cumulative positive effect for each subsequent generation.

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