

Children's access to housing

Katharine Hall (Children's Institute, University of Cape Town)

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

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 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".²

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.

Location is one of the seven elements of adequate housing identified by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.³ Residential areas should ideally be situated 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, even in areas which are not densely populated. In South Africa, service provision and resources in rural areas lag far behind urban areas.

The General Household Survey captures information on all household members, making it possible to look at the distribution of children in urban and non-urban households and compare this to the adult distribution. Nearly half of South Africa's children (45%) lived in rural households in 2013 – equivalent to 8.4 million children. Looking back over a decade, there seems to be a slight shift in the distribution of children towards urban areas: in 2002, 47% of children were found in urban households, and this increased to 55% by 2013.

A consistent pattern over the years is that children are more likely than adults to live in rural areas: In 2013, 68% of the adult population were urban, compared with only 55% of children.

There are marked provincial differences in the rural and urban distribution of the child population. This is related to the distribution of cities in South Africa, and the legacy of apartheid spatial arrangements, where women, children and older people in particular were relegated to the former homelands. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces alone are home to about three-quarters (74%) of all rural children in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal has the largest child population and 2.5 million (61%) of its children are classified as rural. The province with the highest proportion of rural

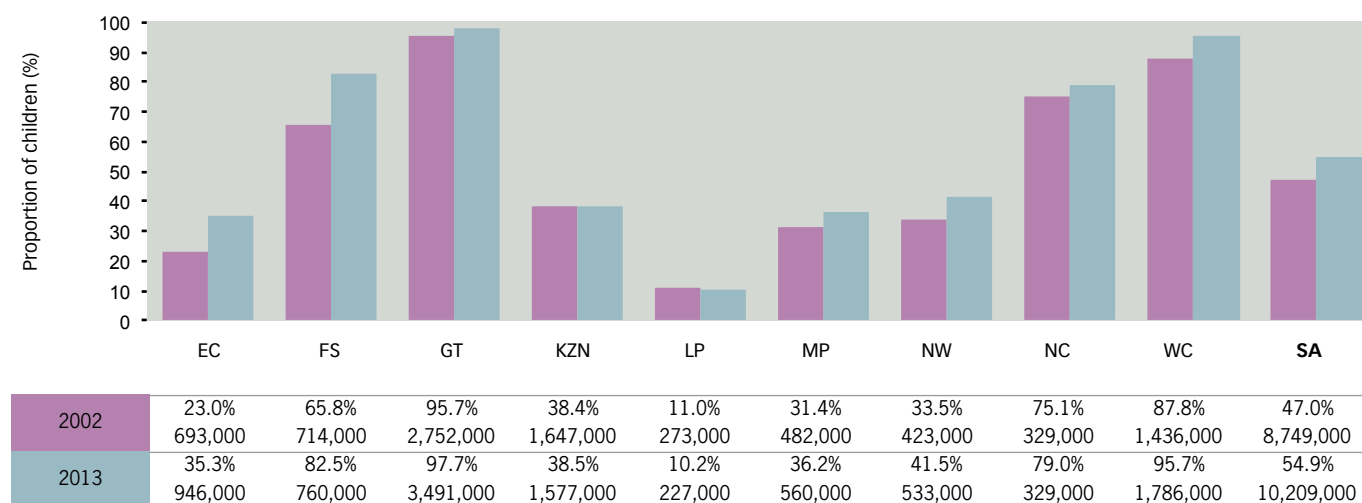
children is Limpopo, where only 10% of children live in urban areas. Proportionately more children (42%) live in the former homelands, compared with adults (29%), while 59% of adults live in urban formal areas, compared with 47% of children. Eight percent of children live in urban informal areas, and the remaining 3% live in "formal rural" areas – or mainly commercial farming areas. Over 99% of children living in the former homeland areas are African.

Children living in Gauteng and Western Cape are almost entirely urban-based (98% and 96% respectively). These provinces historically have large urban populations. The greatest provincial increase in the urban child population has been in the Free State, where the proportion of children living in urban areas increased from 66% of the child population in 2002 to 83% in 2013. In the Eastern Cape, the urban child population has increased by over 12 percentage points, signifying a possible urban trend.

Rural areas, and particularly the former homelands, are known to have much poorer populations. Children in the poorest income quintile are more likely to be living in rural areas (67%) than those in the richest quintile (8%). These inequalities also remain strongly racialised. Over 90% of White, Coloured and Indian children are urban, compared with 47% of African children.

Young people aged 20 – 24 are more urbanised than younger children, and more likely to live in urban informal settlements. Although the difference is only slight (10% of those in the 20 – 24-year-olds live in informal settlements, compared with 8% of those under 20 years) it is statistically significant. Fifty-four percent of children live in urban areas, while this increases to 64% in the 20 – 24-year age group. This is likely to be related to independent work-seeking or further education opportunities for young people over 20.

Figure 5a: Number and proportion of children living in urban areas, by province, 2002 & 2013



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2014) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

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.

Children’s right to adequate housing means that they should not have to live in informal dwellings. One of the seven elements of adequate housing identified by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is that it must be “habitable”.⁴ To be habitable, houses should have enough space to prevent overcrowding, and should be built in a way that ensures physical safety and protection from the weather.

Formal brick houses that meet the state’s standards for quality housing could be considered “habitable housing”, whereas informal dwellings such as shacks in informal settlements and backyards would not be considered habitable or adequate. Informal housing in backyards and informal settlements makes up the bulk of the housing backlog in South Africa. “Traditional” housing in rural areas is a third category, which is not necessarily adequate or inadequate. Some traditional dwellings are more habitable than new subsidy houses – they can be more spacious and better insulated, for example.

Access to services is another element of “adequate housing”. Children living in formal areas are more likely to have services on site and to live closer to facilities like schools, libraries, clinics and hospitals than those living in informal settlements or rural areas. Children living in informal settlements are also more exposed to hazards such as shack fires and paraffin poisoning.

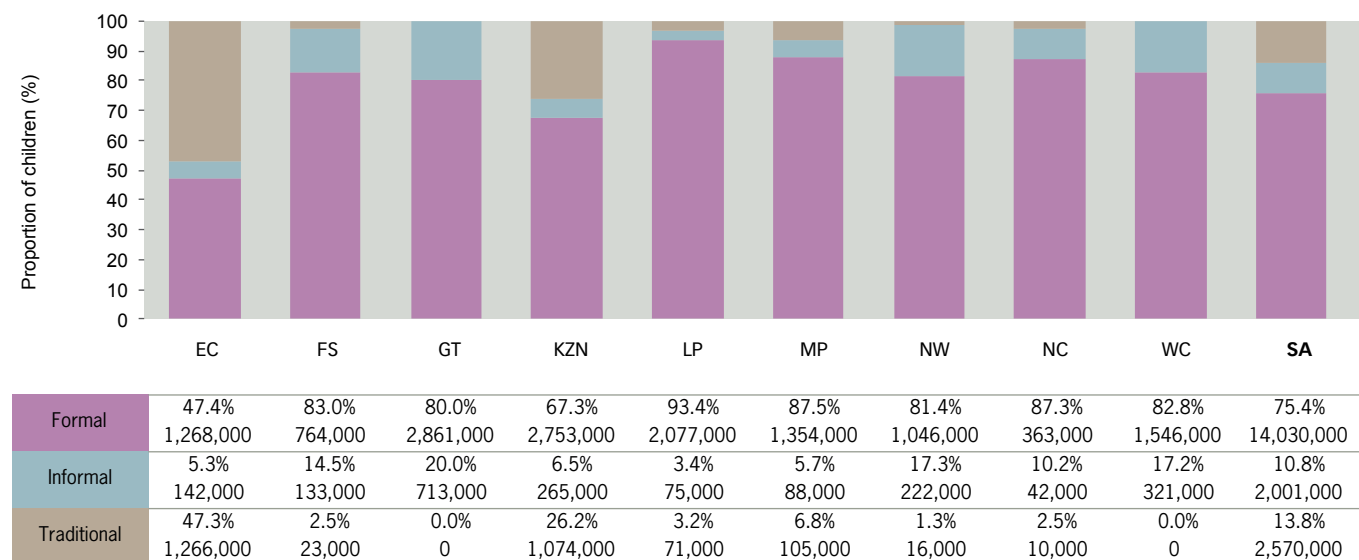
The environmental hazards associated with informal housing are exacerbated for very young children. The distribution of children in informal dwellings is slightly skewed towards younger children and babies: 42% of children in informal housing are in the 0 – 5-year age group. Of children under two years, 16% live in informal dwellings, after which the rate declines slightly with age. Nine percent of children over 10 years are informally housed. Given that this trend has remained consistent over a number of years, it seems likely that it is the result of child mobility or changing housing arrangements for children as they get older, rather than indicating an increase in informality over time.

In 2012, over two million children (11%) in South Africa lived in backyard dwellings or shacks in informal settlements. The number of children in informal housing has declined slightly from 2.3 million (12%) in 2002. The main provinces with informally-housed child populations are Gauteng (20% of children), North West (17%), and the Western Cape (17%). Limpopo has the lowest proportion (3%) of children in informal housing and the highest proportion (93%) in formal dwellings. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have by far the largest proportions of children living in traditional dwellings (47% and 26% respectively).

The distribution of children in formal, informal and traditional dwellings has remained fairly constant since 2002. But racial inequalities persist. Almost all White children (98%) live in formal housing, compared with only 74% of African children. Access to formal housing increases with income. Virtually all children in the wealthiest 20% of households live in formal dwellings, compared with only two-thirds (66%) of children in the poorest quintile.

There are slight differences in the distributions of the 20 – 24 age youth group and the younger age groups: young adults aged 20 – 24 years are less likely to be living in traditional dwellings, and more likely to live in informal dwellings. This makes sense given the similarly slight changes in area type distribution.

Figure 5b: Number and proportion of children living in formal, informal and traditional housing, by province, 2013



Source: Statistics South Africa (2014) *General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children’s Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of children living in overcrowded households

Children are defined as living in overcrowded dwellings when there is a ratio of more than two people per room (excluding bathrooms but including kitchen and living room). Thus, a dwelling with two bedrooms, a kitchen and sitting-room would be counted as overcrowded if there were more than eight household members.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines "habitability" as one of the criteria for adequate housing.⁵ Overcrowding is a problem because it can undermine children's needs and rights. For instance, it is difficult for school children to do homework if other household members want to sleep or watch television. Children's right to privacy can be infringed if they do not have space to wash or change in private. The right to health can be infringed as communicable diseases spread more easily in overcrowded conditions, and young children are particularly susceptible to the spread of disease. Overcrowding also places children at greater risk of sexual abuse, especially where boys and girls have to share beds, or children have to share with adults.

Overcrowding makes it difficult to target services and programmes to households effectively – for instance, urban households are entitled to six kilolitres of free water, but this household-level allocation discriminates against overcrowded households because it does not take account of household size.

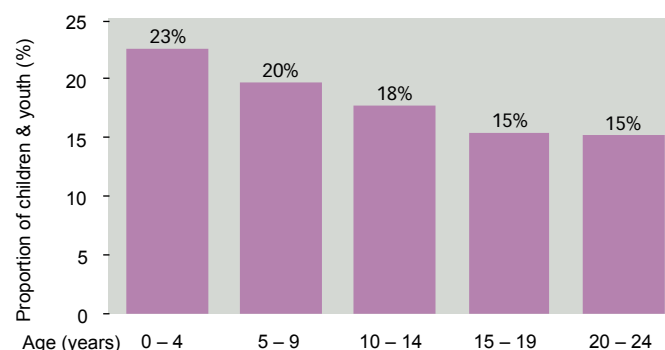
In 2012, 3.6 million children lived in overcrowded households. This represents 19% of the child population – much higher than the proportion of adults living in crowded conditions (11%).

Overcrowding is associated with housing type: 53% of children who stay in informal dwellings also live in overcrowded conditions, compared with 29% of children in traditional dwellings and 13% of children in formal housing.

There is a strong racial bias in children's housing conditions. While 21% of African and Coloured children live in crowded conditions, very few White and Indian children live in overcrowded households. Children in the poorest 20% of households are more likely to be living in overcrowded conditions (28%) than children in the richest 20% of households (1%).

Figure 5c: Proportion of children and youth living in overcrowded dwellings, by age group, 2013

(Y-axis reduced to 25%)



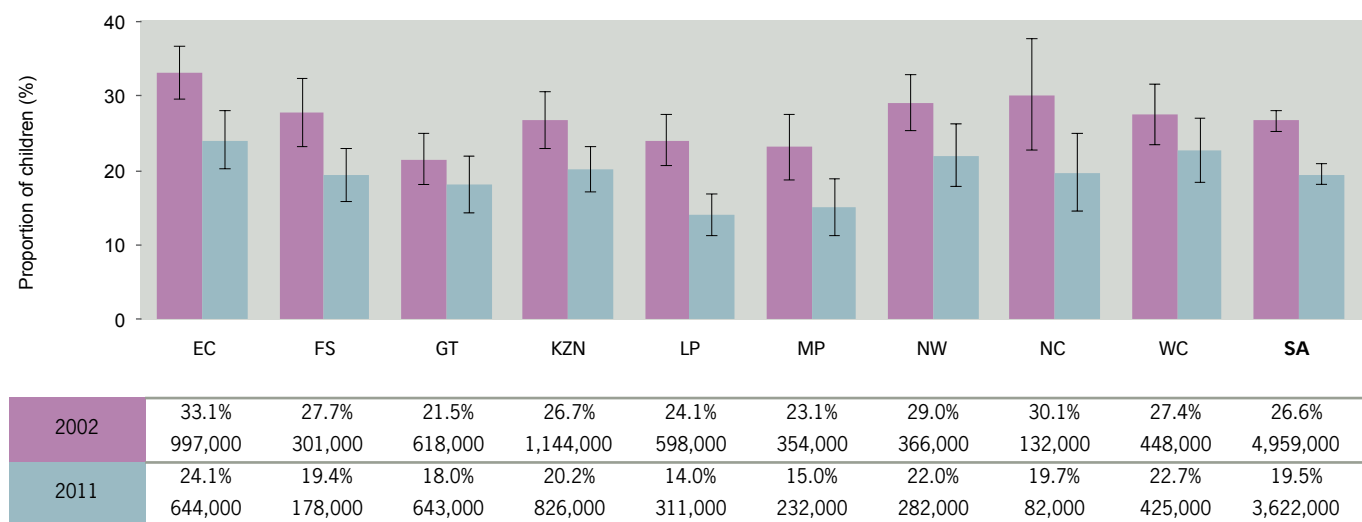
Source: Statistics South Africa (2014) *General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Young children are significantly more likely than older children to live in overcrowded conditions. Twenty-one percent of children below two years live in crowded households, compared to 17% of children over 10 years. Younger children are also more likely than youth over 15 to live in overcrowded dwellings. This may again be related to some independent movement by young people (for example, to smaller households in informal areas).

The average household size has gradually decreased from 4.5 at the time of the 1996 population census, to around 3.6 in 2012, indicating a trend towards smaller households, which may in turn be linked to the provision of small subsidy houses. Households in which children live are larger than the national average. The average household size for adult-only households is two people, while the average household size for mixed generation households (i.e. those that include children) is five members.⁶

Figure 5d: Number and proportion of children living in overcrowded households, by province, 2002 & 2013

(Y-axis reduced to 40%)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2014) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

References

- 1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 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 See no. 3 above.
- 5 See no. 3 above.
- 6 Statistics South Africa (2014) *General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by K Hall & W Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT]