

South African Early Childhood Review 2024



Children under 6 years in South Africa

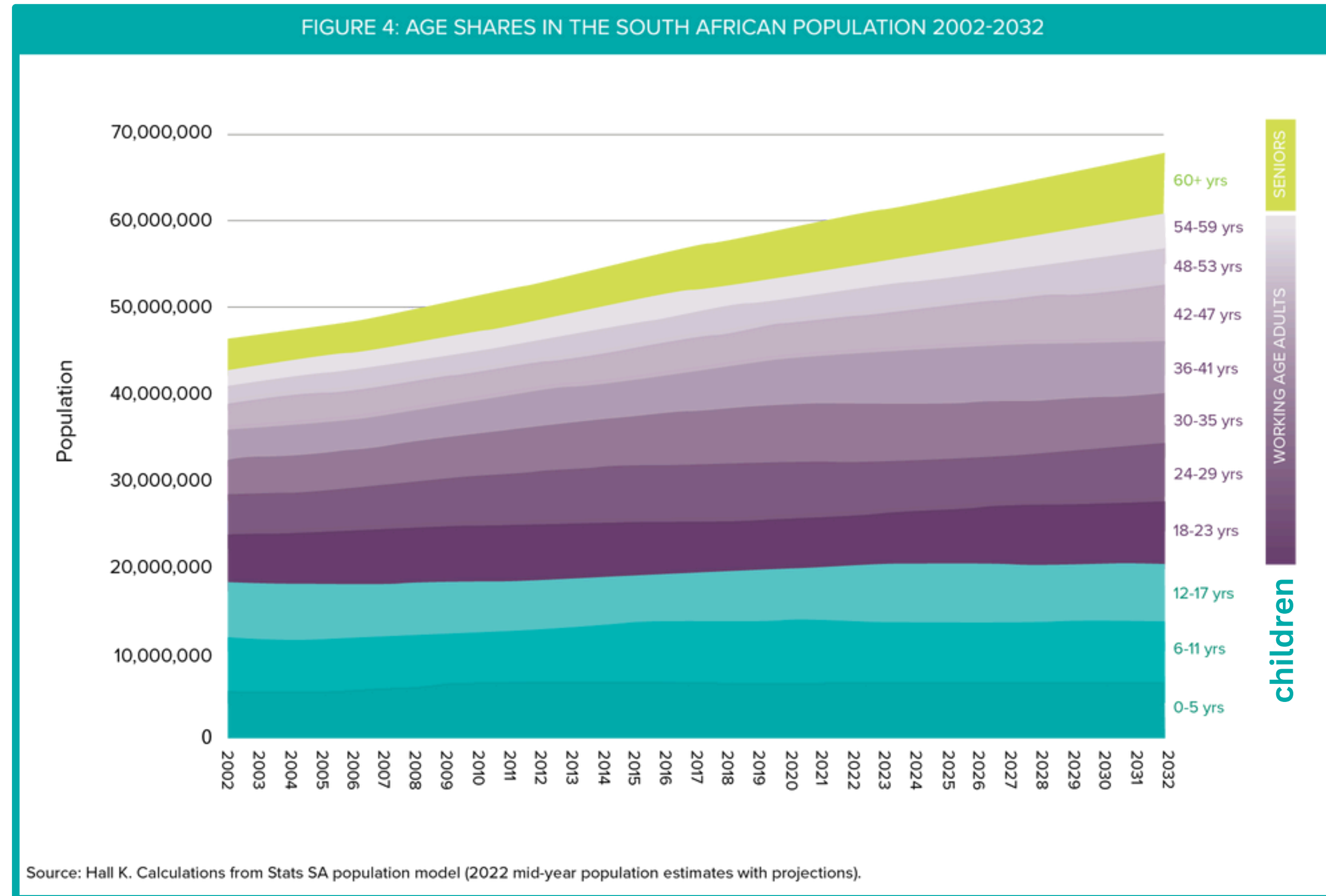
Hall K, Almeleh C, Giese S, Mphaphuli E, Slemming W, Mathys R, Droomer L, Proudlock P, Kotze J, and Sadan M. South African Early Childhood Review 2024.
Cape Town: Children's Institute University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana

The South African population is getting older

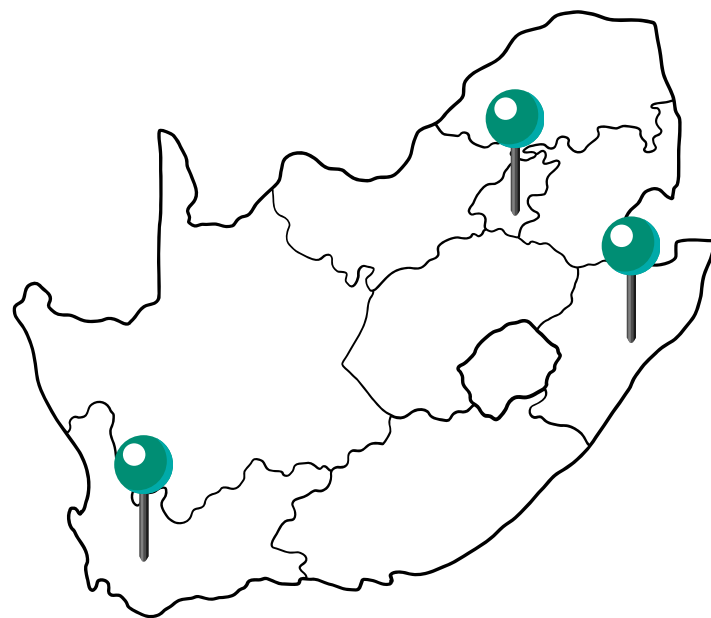
- The South African population is projected to reach nearly **70 million by 2032, 50 million of who will be adults.**
- A growing adult population means that the number of **children born each year will remain stable** or even rise, even though fertility rates continue to fall.

Investing in children is investing in the future

- The South African population is getting older. It is projected to reach nearly **70 million by 2032**, 50 million of whom will be adults.
- A growing adult population means that the number of **children born each year will remain stable** or even rise, even though fertility rates continue to fall.



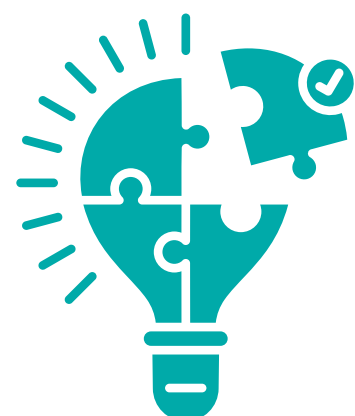
Trends in the young child population



There are approximately **1.1 million births in South Africa annually** - an average rate of about 3,000 babies born every day.

4 out of 10 young children live in rural settings, mainly in the former homelands. KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and the Eastern Cape previously held the largest share of children under 6. **Gauteng has surpassed KwaZulu-Natal and has the largest under-6 population in the country.**

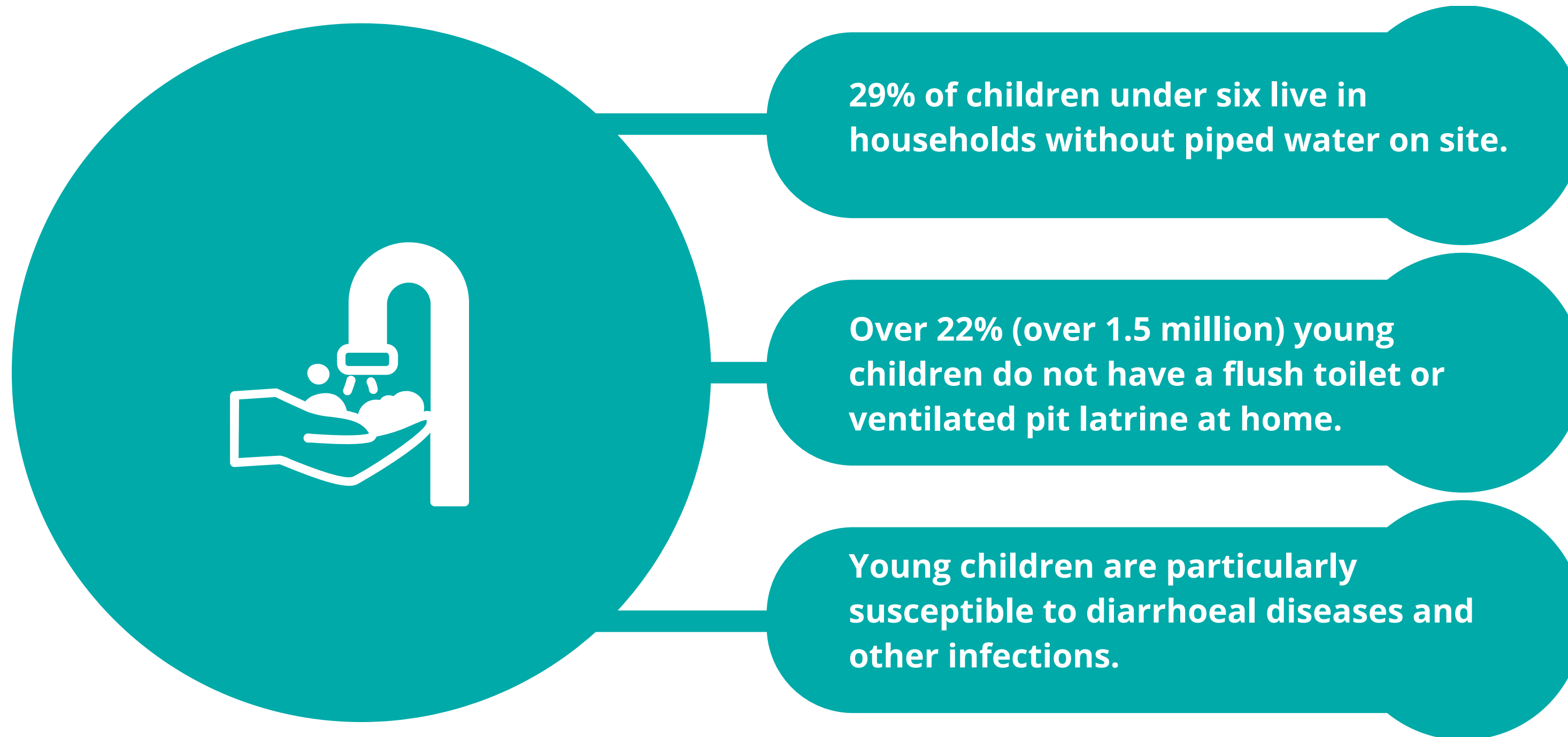
Although the South African population is gradually urbanising, **the young child population remains less urban** than the adult population. Rural households, and rural women mainly, carry a **significant burden of unpaid care work.**



Government should take account of the expanding child urban populations in its planning and budgeting processes.

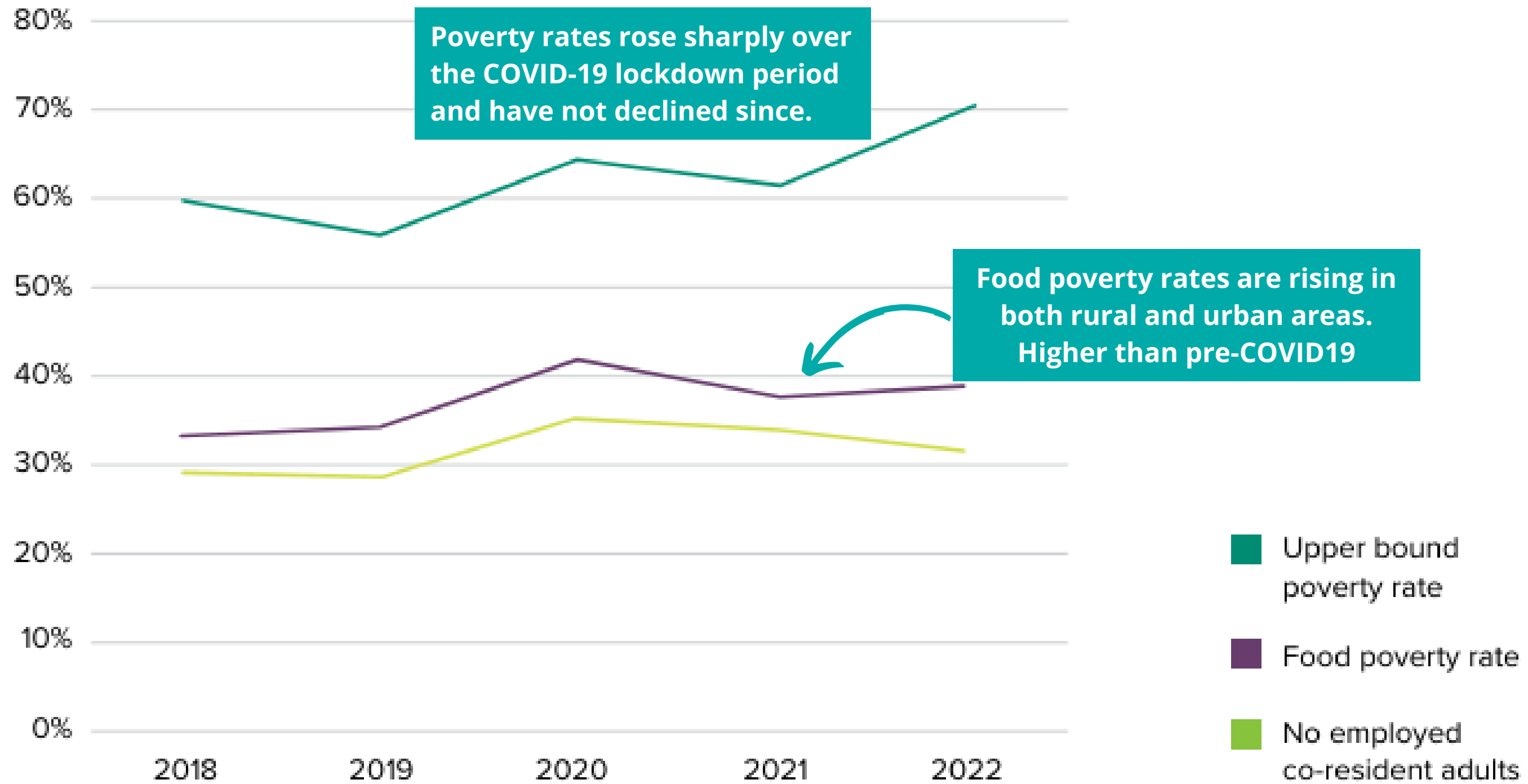
Basic services: water and sanitation

There have been **no significant improvements** in access to adequate water or sanitation among children under six over the past five years.



Poverty rates

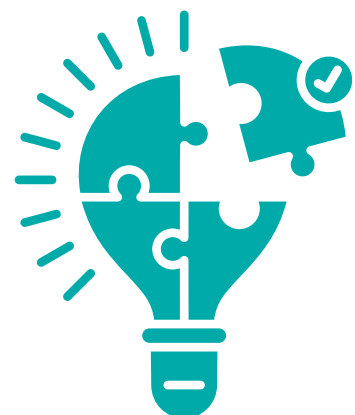
FIGURE 5: TRENDS IN UNDER-6 POVERTY RATES OVER THE LOCKDOWN AND POST-LOCKDOWN PERIOD



Source: K Hall analysis of Stats SA General Household Survey 2018-2022.

Poverty rates

- In 2022, the **highest under-6 poverty rates** were in the **Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal**, and the **lowest were in Gauteng and the Western Cape**.
- Over **2.7 million children under six live below the food poverty line (in households that are poor too meet their basic nutritional needs)**. Food poverty for children under 6 years is no longer primarily a rural challenge, food poverty rates are **rising in urban areas too**. Poverty rates are likely to be reflected in **nutritional deficits in the future**.
- In **2019, 650,000 children under 1 year under one were in households below the national upper-bound poverty line**. The poverty headcount for infants **increased each subsequent year to 850,000 in 2022**. Adult unemployment rates spiked in 2020. Although there was some recovery, the household-level unemployment rates, when viewed from the perspective of young children, had still not returned to their pre-COVID levels by 2022.



It is essential and urgent to ensure that current and future cohorts of young children can develop healthily and thrive. Failure to make these investments would lead to the continued erosion of the human capital of future generations.

TABLE 1: THE STATUS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA, BY PROVINCE

3 year change		Indicator	SA	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	data year	source
Population	↔	Number of children under 6 years	6 976 000	797 000	337 000	1 573 000	1 402 000	855 000	617 000	523 000	156 000	716 000	2022	a
	↔	Households with children under 6 years	4 950 000 27%	480 000 28%	248 000 25%	1 368 000 24%	861 000 27%	553 000 32%	457 000 32%	376 000 28%	112 000 30%	494 000 24%	2022	b
Area type	↔	Urban Children under 6 living in urban areas (formal / informal)	3 963 000 57%	304 000 38%	292 000 87%	1 522 000 97%	486 000 35%	135 000 16%	223 000 36%	219 000 42%	106 000 68%	676 000 94%	2022	b
	↔	Rural - traditional Children under 6 living in former homeland areas	2 725 000 39%	483 000 61%	31 000 9%	37 000 2%	809 000 58%	710 000 83%	365 000 59%	264 000 50%	26 000 17%	- 0%		
	↔	Rural - farms Children < 6 living in commercial farming areas (i.e. old “white” SA)	288 000 4%	10 000 1%	13 000 4%	15 000 1%	107 000 8%	11 000 1%	29 000 5%	40 000 8%	23 000 15%	40 000 6%		
Services	↔	Inadequate water Children < 6 without piped water to their home	2 053 000 29%	487 000 61%	45 000 13%	74 000 5%	578 000 41%	405 000 47%	155 000 25%	205 000 39%	33 000 21%	71 000 10%	2022	b
	↔	Inadequate sanitation Children < 6 without a flush toilet or ventilated pit latrine on site	1 538 000 22%	100 000 13%	55 000 16%	169 000 11%	339 000 24%	345 000 40%	248 000 40%	163 000 31%	36 000 23%	82 000 11%		

TABLE 1: THE STATUS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA, BY PROVINCE

3 year change		Indicator	SA	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	data year	source
Poverty	↑	Children living in poverty Children below upper bound poverty line (R1417 pp/mth)	4 915 000 70%	661 000 83%	262 000 78%	889 000 57%	1 142 000 81%	667 000 78%	462 000 75%	419 000 80%	104 000 67%	309 000 43%	2022	b
	↑	Food Poverty Children under 6 living in food poor households (R663 pp/mth)	2 748 000 39%	412 000 52%	126 000 37%	386 000 25%	690 000 49%	410 000 48%	266 000 43%	278 000 53%	45 000 29%	134 000 19%		
	↑	Household unemployment Children under-6 living in households where no adults are employed	2 231 000 32%	360 000 45%	134 000 40%	308 000 20%	538 000 38%	335 000 39%	203 000 33%	223 000 43%	43 000 28%	85 000 12%		


 numbers have increased or decreased since the pre-COVID baseline
  no significant change between pre-COVID baseline and most recent data

 worsening / negative
  improving / positive
  no significant change

Data gaps

- The 2022 population census was done just after the lockdown and produced a substantial undercount rate of around 30%. Children under 5 years had one of the **highest undercount rates at 35%**.
- When comparing the child population estimates from the 2022 population census with those of StatsSA's 2022 mid-year population estimate model for the same year, there is **considerable variation at the provincial level**.
- There is also **uncertainty around the statistics derived from the General Household Survey during the lockdown years**, which may affect the trends described.