

South African Early Childhood Review 2024



5. Income support and social services

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

Impact of the Child Support Grant (CSG)

- **Household Expenditure:** The CSG increases spending on food and reduces spending on tobacco and alcohol.
- **Child Hunger:** The CSG decreases reported child hunger, especially in the poorest households.
- **Nutritional Status:** Access to the CSG in the first two years of life improves children's nutritional status, reducing stunting rates compared to non-beneficiaries.
- **Health Outcomes:** Children receiving the CSG are more likely to have their growth monitored and experience fewer illnesses, particularly if they start receiving the grant early.
- **Early Learning:** Beneficiaries are more likely to attend early learning programmes or Grade R programs, reducing disparities in early educational access.
- **Birth Registration:** The CSG significantly increases birth registration rates, attributed to requirements for grant application and increased availability of registration desks in maternity wards.
- **Overall Impact:** While the CSG helps alleviate income poverty and reduces inequality, continuous access and possibly higher grant amounts are needed to fully realize benefits without compromising children's basic needs like nutrition.

Erosion of the Child Support Grant value

- Due to food inflation increases over the years, the **Child Support Grant has lost its value relative to the cost of basic food.**
- The value of the Child Support Grant is **33% below the food poverty line** and does not provide enough income to feed a child a basic diet that meets their minimum calorie needs.

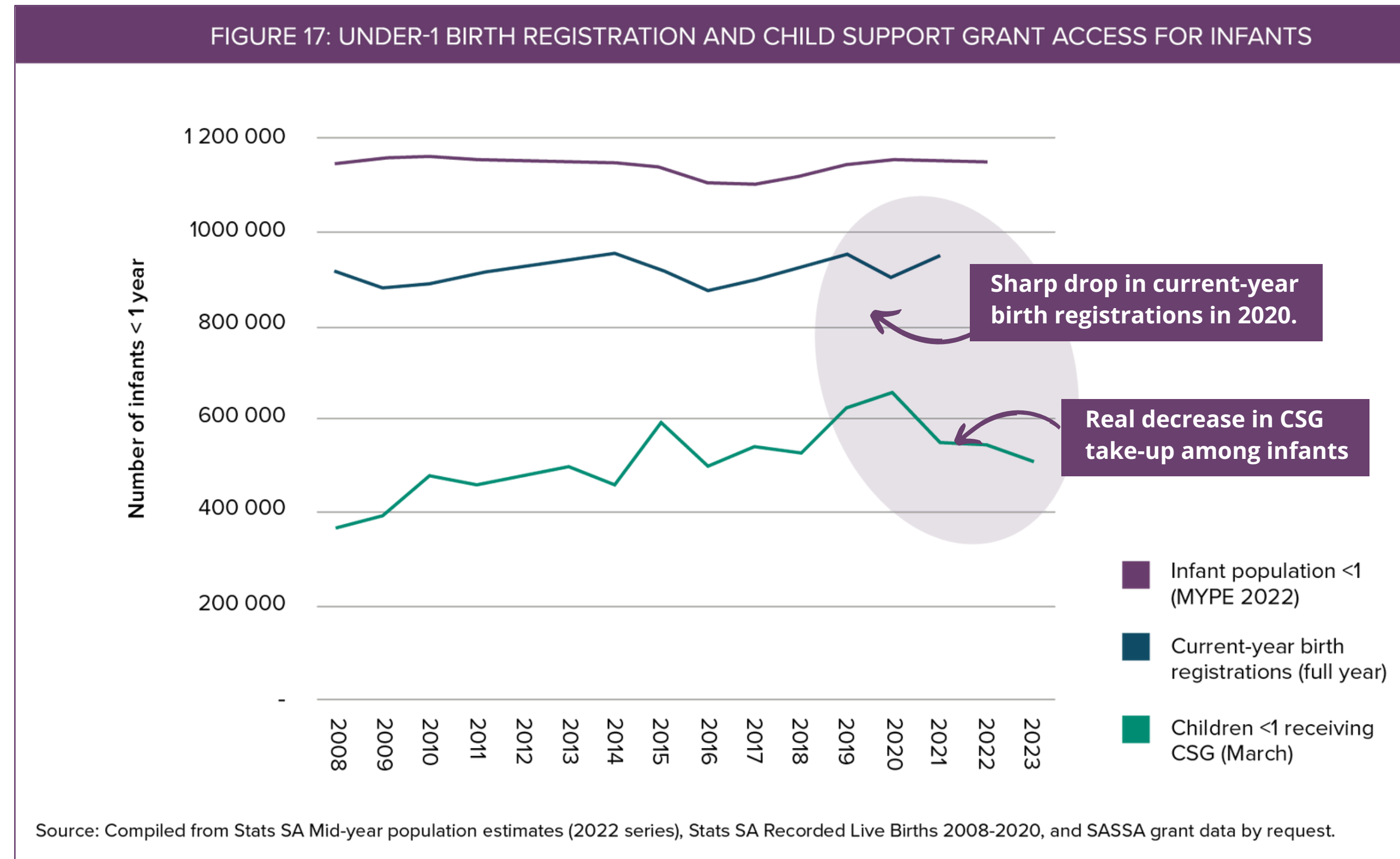
FIGURE 16: THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THE CSG AND THE FOOD POVERTY LINE



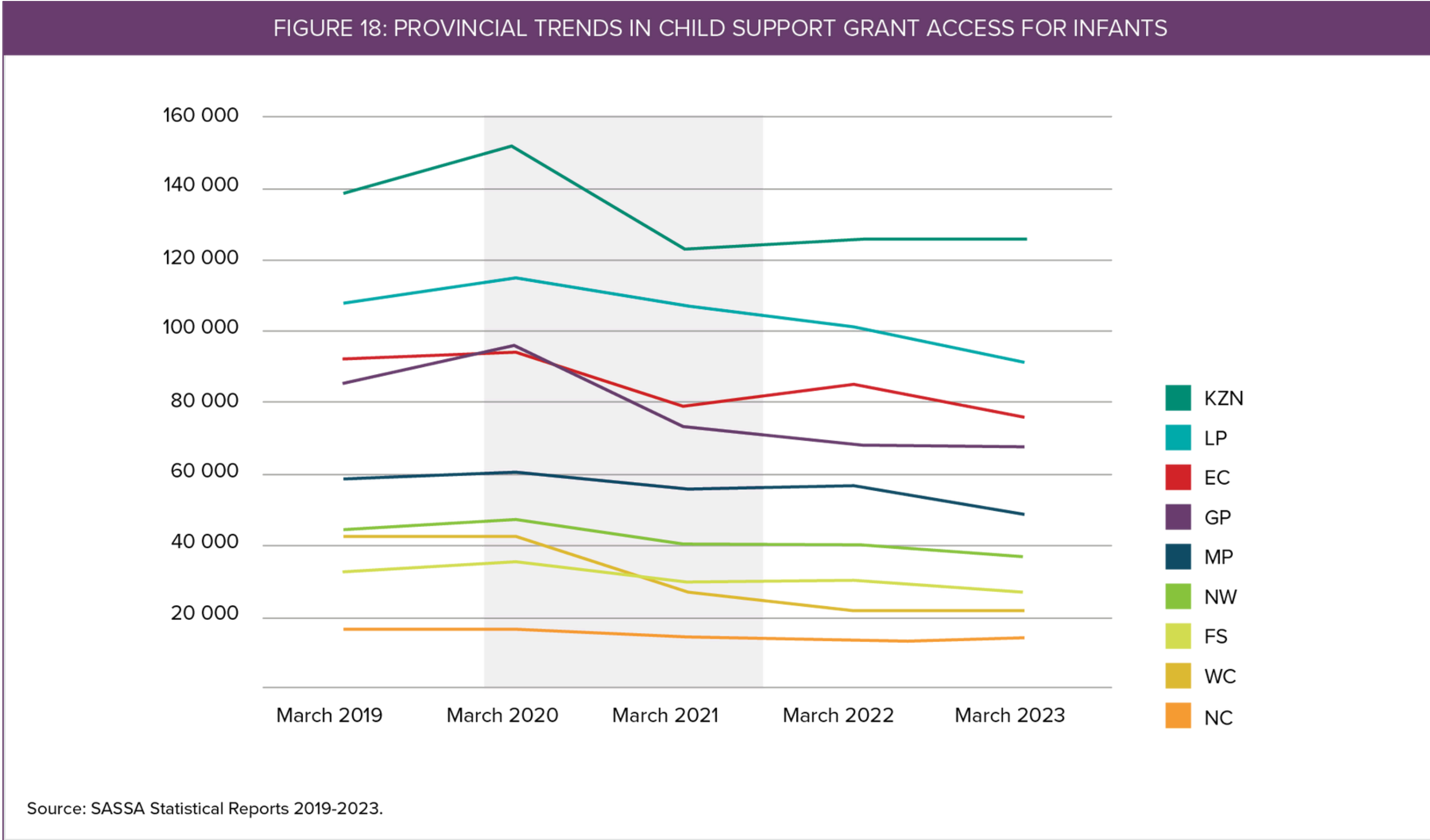
Source: Child Support Grant values as published in Estimates of National Expenditure for each year.⁷⁷
 The food poverty line, as published by Stats SA, was deflated for previous years by Consumer Inflation.

Real decrease in grant take-up among infants

- In March 2023, there were **40,000 fewer grant beneficiaries** under 6 years than in March 2020, when South Africa went into lockdown due to errors of exclusions.
- Delays in accessing the grant occur due to a **lack of identity documentation for mothers and birth registration delays for the baby.**
- **Child Support Grant access for infants has declined at the same time as poverty rates increased for infants**

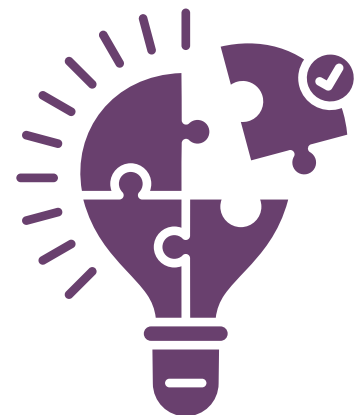


Decline in early CSG uptake occurred across all provinces



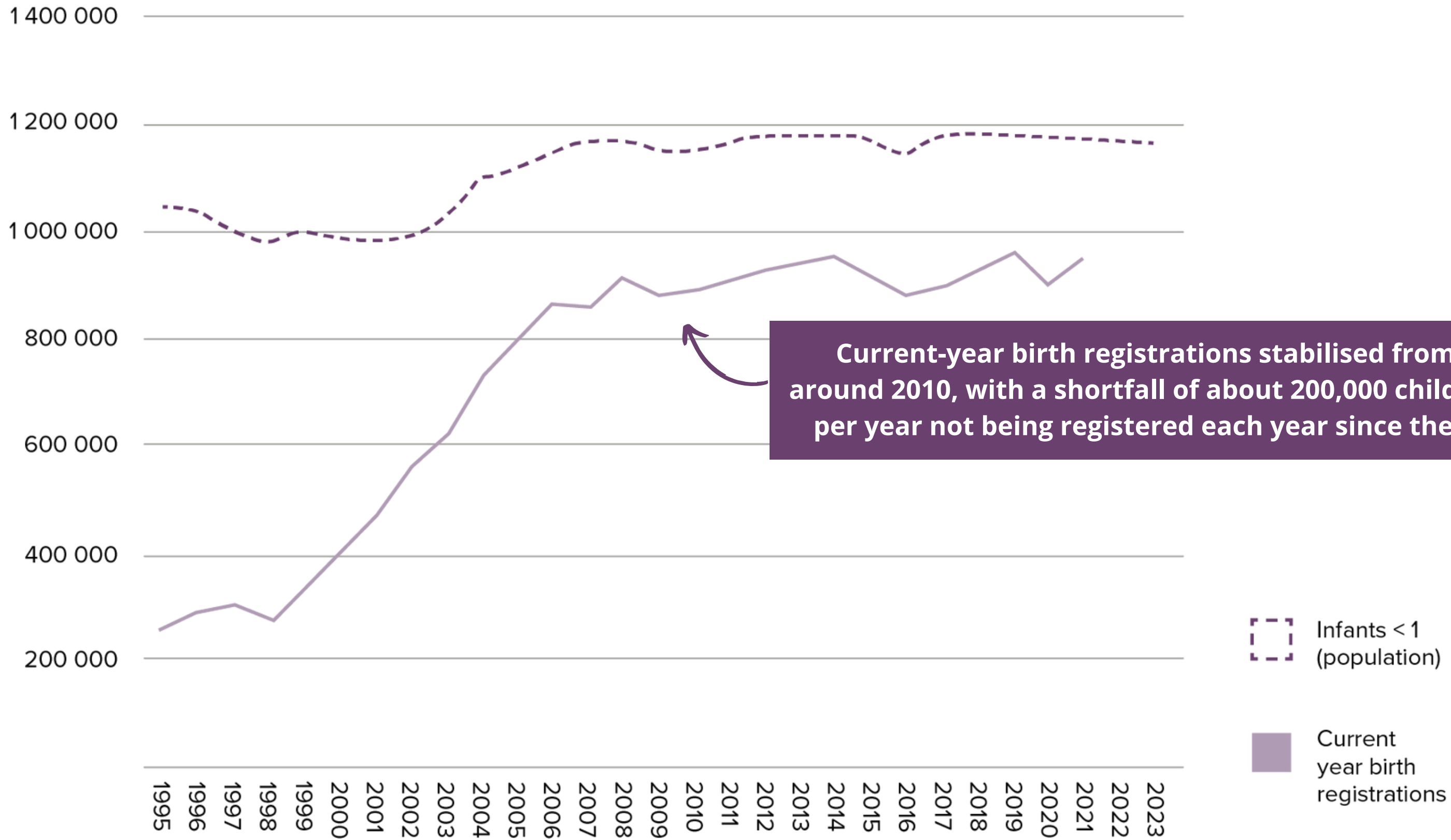
Birth registration trends and challenges

- Birth certificates are the **gateway to a range of critical services** for supporting children in reaching their developmental potential.
- Early birth registration (within 30 days of birth) has **improved as a percentage of current-year birth registrations from 55% in 2010/11 to 94% in 2019/2020.**
- Facility-based home affairs service points enable parents to apply for immediate birth registration of their newborn child. Of the 1,445 public health facilities where births occur, 322 had service points for birth registration by 2019.
- Current-year birth registrations stabilised from around 2010, with a **shortfall of about 200,000 children per year not being registered each year since then.**
- If a baby is not registered within 30 days, their caregiver needs to navigate the more complex process of “late registration of birth.” It is even **more difficult to register a birth after the child is a year old**, especially if over 7 years of age. Unregistered children are likely to live in **very poor households.**



Rather than being excluded from services, unregistered children should be fast-tracked into a responsive government service that proactively assists with their registration.

FIGURE 19: TRENDS IN THE UNDER-1 POPULATION AND CURRENT-YEAR BIRTH REGISTRATIONS



Source: Compiled from Stats SA Mid-year Population Estimates⁸⁷ and Recorded Live Births series.

Birth registration fell sharply during Covid-19



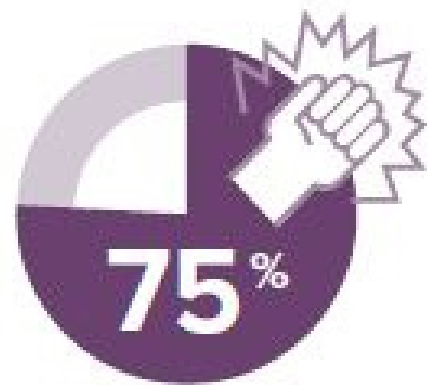
The number of unregistered infants, even after a year, leapt from 190,000 in 2019/20 to 255,000 in 2020/2021

- The number of unregistered infants, even after a year, **leapt from 190,000 in 2019/20 to 255,000 in 2020/2021.**
- The drop in birth registration was initially due to the initial **closure of Department of Home Affairs offices during the hard lockdown of 2020,** and then only limited services when they opened.
- A **substantial backlog in late registration applications had already started before COVID-19.** There was a backlog of 258,000 unprocessed applications for late registration of birth for applications lodged over the period January 2018 to December 2022.
- The number of unregistered children (under 18) in South Africa is estimated at around 500,000 in 2017. Since 2017, this may have increased substantially to over 1,000,000.

The need for social welfare and protection services



35% of South African children (reporting retrospectively at ages 15-17) had already experienced some form of sexual abuse during childhood



75% of homicides among young children (0-4 years) were the result of abuse by a caregiver in their own home.

- **Data on child abuse, neglect and related service responses remain very poor** – in part because child abuse and other crimes against children are underreported.
- The Department of Social Development recorded **17,488 cases of child abuse and neglect in 2022**, but it is unknown how many of these were investigated or referred to the police.
- Around **35% of children** (reporting retrospectively at ages 15-17) had already experienced some form of **sexual abuse during childhood**.
- In 2019, the **Constitutional Court effectively banned corporal punishment in the home**. Yet in 2019/20, one in ten households with children was unaware that corporal punishment was illegal.
- The National Child Care and Protection Policy 2019 acknowledges both the **inadequacy of monitoring systems**, and the **serious scale of the gaps in responsive service delivery for children**.
- South Africa still has a **severe shortfall of social workers** (around 22,000 in the public service according to recent estimates, against a target of 55,000).

TABLE 8: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND SOCIAL SERVICES ACCESS, BY PROVINCE

3 Year Change	Indicator	SA	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	Data Year	source
Service access / delivery	↔ Birth registration Birth registrations that are for current year births	1026200	123 666	49 756	215 422	215 528	132 364	100 894	59 942	27 078	101 549	2021	i
		94%	96%	95%	87%	96%	96%	97%	97%	97%	98%		
	↑ No birth certificate for infants - 2020 Estimated number of children under 1 not registered within first year	255 000	40 000	11 000	66 000	64 000	13 000	2 000	27 000	3 000	28 000	2020	a & i
		22%	28%	20%	25%	26%	10%	2%	34%	12%	24%		
	↓ No birth certificate for infants - 2021 Estimated number of children under 1 not registered within first year	127 000	20 000	4 000	45 000	29 000	2 000	-10 000	20 000	-2 000	18 000	2021	a & i
		11%	16%	7%	16%	12%	1%	-10%	26%	-7%	15%		
	↔ Access to Child Support Grant Number of children under-6 receiving the CSG	4 273 473	616 200	224 109	639 245	970 945	701 669	415 646	302 389	111 714	291 556	2023	j
	↑ Poor infants without grants Number and percentage of poor children < 1 year not receiving CSG or any grant	323 000	27 000	14 000	91 000	67 000	28 000	28 000	26 000	6 000	33 000	2022	a & b
		38%	23%	32%	61%	30%	26%	34%	39%	34%	59%		

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
 ? no discernible change due to lack of comparative data

Data gaps

- Regular national data on the **incidence and prevalence of child abuse** (including corporal punishment and sexual abuse) and neglect.
- Good administrative data on the **delivery of responsive child protection services and psychosocial support for children.**
- Nationally accepted tool for measuring the **prevalence of disability, especially in children.**