

# Income poverty, unemployment and social grants

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The Constitution of South Africa, section 27 (1)(c), says that “everyone has the right to have access to ... social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance”.<sup>1</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 27, states that every child has the right “to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” and obliges the state “in case of need” to “provide material assistance”. Article 26 guarantees “every child the right to benefit from social security”.<sup>2</sup>

## Children living in income poverty

This indicator shows the number and share of children living in households that are income-poor. Because money is needed to access a range of goods and services, income poverty is often closely related to poor health and nutrition, reduced access to education and early learning programmes, and physical living environments that compromise health and personal safety.

International law and the Constitution recognise the link between income and the realisation of basic human rights and acknowledge that children have the right to social assistance (social grants) when families cannot meet children’s basic needs. Income poverty measures are therefore important for determining how many people need social assistance, and for evaluating the state’s progress in realising the right to social assistance.

No poverty line is perfect. Using a single income measure tells us nothing about how resources are distributed between family members, or how money is spent. But this measure does give some indication of how many children are living in households with severely constrained resources.

The poverty threshold used is the Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) ‘upper bound’ poverty line that was set at R779 per person per month in 2011 prices. The poverty lines increase with inflation and in 2023 the real value of the upper bound line was R1,558.<sup>3</sup> Per capita income is calculated by adding all reported earnings for household members older than 15 years, adding the value of social grants received by anyone in the household, and dividing the total household income by the number of household members.

Stats SA publishes two other poverty lines:

- A ‘lower bound’ poverty line is calculated by adding to the food poverty line the average expenditure on essential non-food items by households whose food expenditure is below but close to the food poverty line. The value of the lower bound poverty line in 2011 prices was R501 per person per month (R1,058 in 2023 prices). *Those living below this line would not be able to pay for the minimum non-food expenses or would be sacrificing their basic nutrition to pay for non-food expenses.*
- A ‘food’ poverty line is based on the cost of the minimum nutritional requirement of 2,100 kilocalories per person per

day, without any allowance for other basic necessities. The value of the food poverty line in 2011 prices was R335 per person per month (R760 in 2023 values). *Anyone living below this line will be malnourished and their health and survival may be at risk.*

We use the upper bound poverty line as our main indicator for tracking child poverty, as this is linked to the minimum requirement for basic nutrition and other basic needs such as clothing and shelter. In other words, the upper bound line is the only poverty line that meets the minimum requirement for children’s basic needs.

South Africa has very high rates of child poverty and, although poverty rates have reduced substantially over the last two decades, a large number of children remain in poverty. In 2019, 56% of children (11.2 million) lived below the upper bound poverty line and 33% were below the food poverty line. Income poverty rates had fallen substantially since 2003, when 78% of children (14.1 million) were defined as ‘poor’ at the upper bound threshold and 53% were below the food poverty line. The reduction in the child poverty headcount over this period was mainly the result of a massive expansion in the reach of the Child Support Grant (CSG).

Child poverty rates increased in the lockdown year of 2020, with the upper-bound poverty rate rising by seven percentage points to 63%, and the child food poverty rate rising by six percentage points to 39%. Average poverty rates levelled off in 2021, although they did not decline. Poverty rates then increased again in most provinces in 2022. Across all the poverty measures, poverty rates were higher in 2022 than they were in the pre-lockdown year of 2019. In terms of population numbers, this translates as an additional 1.3 million children below the food poverty line, and an additional 3.4 million children below the upper-bound poverty line, compared with 2019. Given that the child population has grown over the past two decades, there were more children living in poverty in 2022 than there had been in 2003.

There are substantial differences in poverty rates across the provinces. Using the upper bound poverty line, nearly 80% of children in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga are poor. Gauteng and the Western

Cape have the lowest child poverty rates, although there was a substantial increase in poverty in these provinces – from 35% in 2019 to 59% in 2022 in Gauteng, and from 27% to 44% in the Western Cape. Child poverty remains most prominent in the rural areas of the former homelands, where 87% of children were below the poverty line in 2022. However, poverty rates have also risen sharply among urban children, with the upper-bound poverty rate in urban areas standing at 60% in 2022 (up from 41% in 2019), and the food poverty rate at 28% (up from 21%).

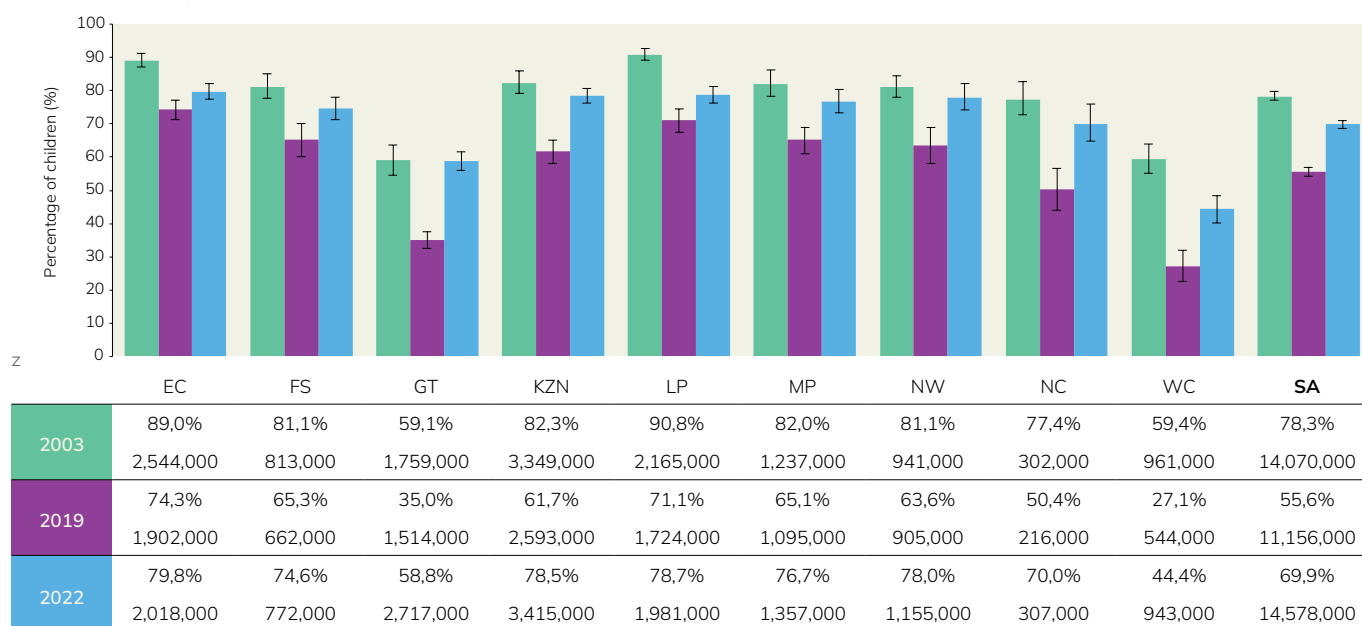
There are glaring racial disparities in income poverty: 75% of African children lived in households below the upper bound poverty line in 2022 (up from 61% in 2019). Although poverty rates among Coloured children are consistently lower than for African children, the increase in poverty was even more pronounced in the Coloured population over the period, with upper bound poverty rates rising from 33% in 2019 to 49% in 2022. There are no significant differences in child poverty levels across gender or between different age groups in the child

population. Using Stats SA's lower bound poverty line (which only provides for basic essentials if people make food sacrifices), 53% of children (11.1 million) were poor in 2022 (up from 44% in 2019), and 38% (7.9 million children) were below the food poverty line, meaning that they were not getting enough nutrition.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and set a global agenda for development by 2030. Target 1.1 is to eradicate extreme poverty using the international poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day (equivalent to R403 per person per month in 2022, using the International Monetary Fund purchasing power parity conversion).<sup>4</sup> This poverty line is extremely low – below survival level – and is not appropriate for South Africa. No child should be below it. In 2003, 52% of children (9.3 million) lived below the equivalent of the SDG poverty line. By 2019, this had decreased to 22% (4.3 million), but in 2020 the ultra-low 'SDG poverty rate' spiked to 28% before settling back to 21% (4.4 million children) in 2022.

**Figure 2a: Children living in income poverty, by province, 2003, 2019 & 2022**

(Upper bound poverty line: Households with monthly per capita income less than R1,558, in 2023 Rands)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2020; 2023) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2019*; *General Household Survey 2022*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall and Neo Segoneco, Children's Institute, UCT.

### Impact of disaster relief grants and grant top-ups on child poverty

The poverty rates presented above are based on reported income and the normal grant amounts – in other words, it reflects poverty rates in the absence of disaster relief.

There was a sharp rise in unemployment in the lockdown with three million jobs lost between February and April 2020. Two million of those who lost employment were women.<sup>5</sup> This had a direct effect on child poverty, especially as children in South Africa are more likely to be co-resident with women than with men.

The South African government introduced disaster relief grants and top-ups to existing grants, starting in May 2020 and

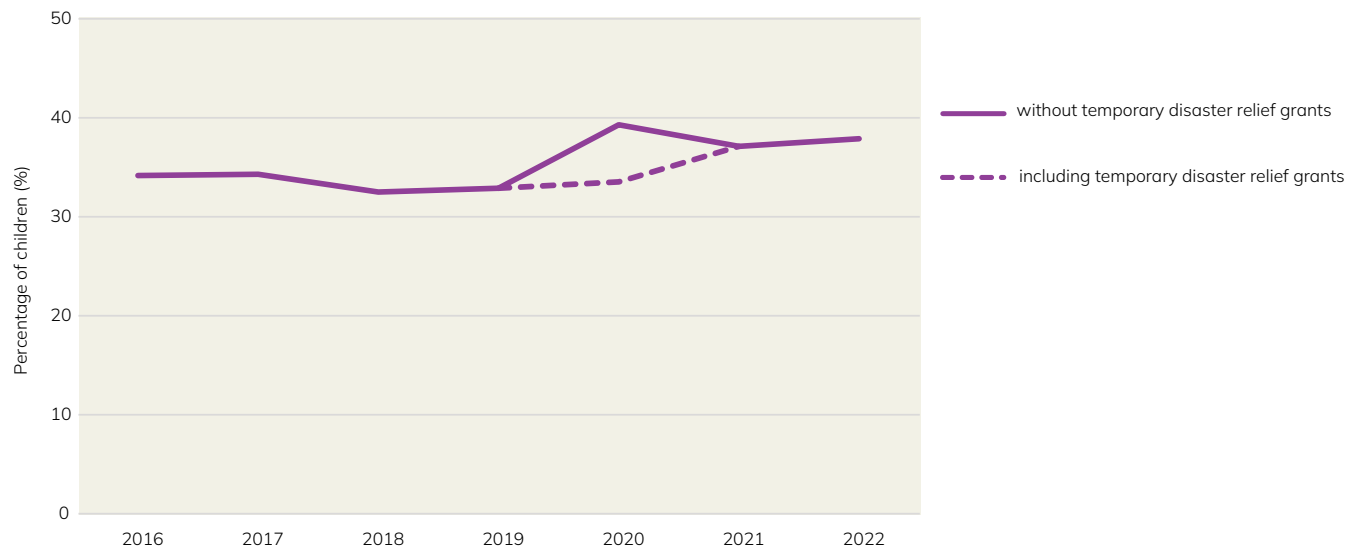
ending in October. Only the newly introduced R350 COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant for unemployed adults (SRD) continued into 2021 and beyond.

The General Household Survey, on which the analysis for this indicator is based, took place telephonically between September and December 2020. The survey therefore spans two months when grant top-ups were in place, and two months after they had been terminated. For this reason, the child poverty rates for 2020 have been estimated in two ways:

- First, the poverty rates are calculated in a scenario without the disaster relief grants and top-ups (i.e., including existing

**Figure 2b: Child food poverty and impact of COVID-19 disaster relief, 2016 – 2022**

(Food poverty line: Households with monthly per capita income less than R760, in 2023 rands)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2017 – 2023) *General Household Survey 2016 – 2022*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

grants but excluding disaster relief) as presented above; and

- Second, the poverty rates are calculated in a scenario that includes the R250 top-ups to existing grants, the temporary caregiver grant (R500 per month per caregiver who receives a CSG for one or more children) and the R350 COVID-19 SRD. The CSG received a top-up for only one month, in May 2020, and this has not been included in the poverty calculations as it was a once-off top-up that preceded the survey.

The disaster relief grants and top-ups had a small impact on child poverty at the upper bound poverty line, reducing

the poverty rate from 63% (without disaster relief) to 60% (including disaster relief). The impact of disaster relief was more pronounced at the food poverty line: during the months where grant top-ups and the caregiver grant were active, the food poverty rate for children would have decreased from 39% (8 million children) to 34% (6.9 million children).

As shown in the trend graph below, the disaster relief grants and top-ups had a strong protective effect, counteracting rising poverty in the context of lockdown. This protective effect would have ended when the top-ups and caregiver grant were withdrawn.

### Children living in households without an employed adult

This indicator measures unemployment from a children’s perspective and gives the number and proportion of children who live in households where no adults are employed in either the formal or informal sector. It therefore shows the proportion of children living in ‘unemployed’ households where it is unlikely that any household members derive income from labour or income-generating activities.

Unemployment in South Africa continues to be a serious problem, and the situation worsened during lockdown. In the second quarter of 2020, the expanded unemployment rate breached the 40% mark for the first time since the Quarterly Labour Force Survey was introduced in 2008, and it remained above 40% for the rest of the year.<sup>6</sup>

Although there was some clawback of jobs, in the last quarter of 2020 Stats SA still recorded a net decrease of 1.4 million (8.5%) in total employment numbers, compared with the same period the previous year. By the end of 2020, 39% of men and 46.3% of women in the labour force were unemployed.<sup>7</sup>

The official national unemployment rate was 29.1% in the fourth quarter of 2019 and 32.5% in the fourth quarter of 2020.<sup>8</sup> In the fourth quarter of 2021 it had risen to 35.3%, and then

dropped slightly to 32.7% in the fourth quarter of 2022. This official rate is based on a narrow definition of unemployment that includes only those adults who are defined as economically active (i.e. they are not studying or retired or voluntarily staying at home) and who had actively looked but failed to find work in the four weeks preceding the survey.

An expanded definition of unemployment, which includes ‘discouraged work-seekers’ who were unemployed but not actively looking for work in the month preceding the survey, gives a higher, and more accurate, indication of unemployment. The expanded unemployment rate (which includes those who are not actively looking for work) was 38.7% in the fourth quarter of 2019 and 42.6% a year later at the end of 2020. It rose further, reaching 46.2% in 2021 and then settled back to 42.6% in the last quarter of 2022.

Gender differences in employment rates are relevant for children, as it is mainly women who provide for children’s care and material needs. Unemployment rates are consistently higher for women than for men. At the end of 2019, 42.4% of women were unemployed by the expanded definition (compared with 35.5% of men) and this increased to 44.5% for

women at the end of 2022 (compared with 38.1% of men).<sup>8</sup> Of the 12.5 million women who were available and willing to work, 5.6 million could not find work or had given up trying to do so.

Apart from providing regular income, an employed adult may bring other benefits to the household, including health insurance, unemployment insurance and parental leave that can contribute to children’s health, development and education. The definition of ‘employment’ is derived from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey and includes regular or irregular work for wages or salary, as well as various forms of self-employment, including unpaid work in a family business.

In 2019, before lockdown, 70% of children in South Africa lived in households with at least one working adult. The other 30% lived in households where no adults were working. The number of children living in workless households had decreased by 1.4 million since 2003, when 41% of children lived in households where there was no employment. But by late 2020, the share of children in workless households had increased again to 36% (7.3 million). By 2022, despite slight declines in adult unemployment, the 2019 levels had still not been regained. Nearly 6.7 million children (32%) lived in households where no adults were earning income from employment.

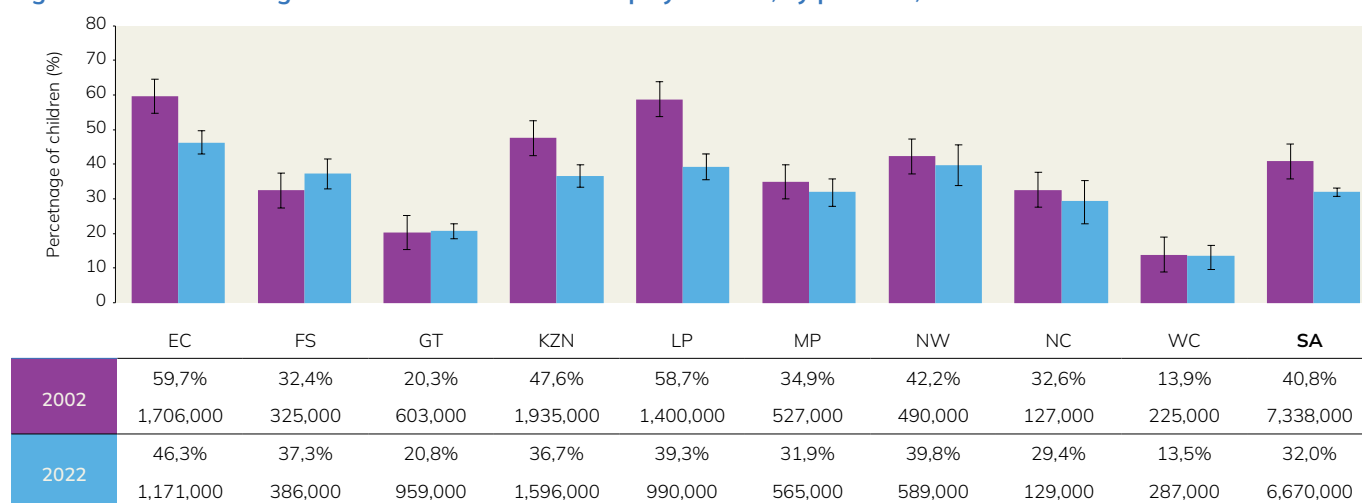
This indicator is very closely related to the income poverty indicator in that provinces with relatively high proportions of children living in unemployed households also have high rates

of child poverty. In 2022, nearly 50% of children in the Eastern Cape lived in households without any employed adults, and nearly 40% of those in North West, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Free State were in workless households. These provinces are home to large numbers of children and also have relatively high rates of child poverty. In contrast, Gauteng and the Western Cape have the lowest poverty rates, and the lowest unemployment rates, although the effects of job loss were also evident in these provinces in 2020. In the Western Cape, 22% of children lived in households where nobody was working in 2020 (up from 12% in 2019), and in Gauteng the rate was 23% in 2020 (up from 14% in 2019). By 2022 the Western Cape rates had dropped again to 13% but the Gauteng rate remained persistently high at 21%.

Racial inequalities are striking: 35% of African children had no working adult at home in 2022, while 19% of Coloured children and less than 4% of Indian and White children lived in these circumstances. There are no significant differences in child-centred unemployment measures when comparing girls and boys or different age groups. In the rural former homelands, 48% of children lived in workless households in 2022, while the rate was 22% among children in urban areas.

Income inequality is clearly associated with unemployment. Over 70% of children in the poorest income quintile live in households where no adults are employed.

**Figure 2c: Children living in households without an employed adult, by province, 2003 & 2022**



Source: Statistics South Africa (2004; 2023) *General Household Survey 2003; General Household Survey 2022*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall and Neo Segoneco, Children’s Institute, UCT.

### Children receiving the Child Support Grant

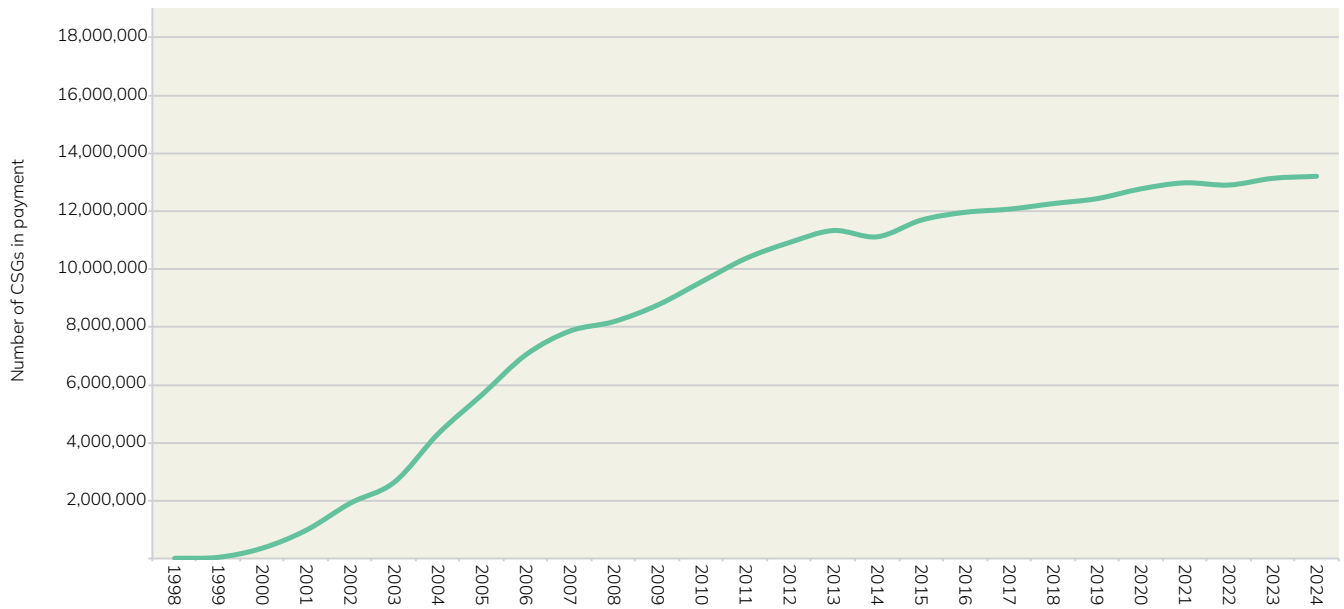
This indicator shows the number of children receiving the Child Support Grant (CSG), as reported by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) which disburses social grants on behalf of the Department of Social Development.

The right to social assistance is designed to ensure that people living in poverty can meet basic subsistence needs. Government is obliged to support children directly when their parents or caregivers are too poor to do so. Income support for poor children is provided through the CSG, which is an

unconditional cash grant paid to the caregivers of eligible children.

Introduced in 1998 with an initial value of R100, the CSG has become the single biggest programme for alleviating child poverty in South Africa. The grant amount was originally linked to the minimum cost of feeding and clothing a child. Its monthly value is increased slightly each year, more or less keeping pace with headline inflation although it has fallen behind food inflation. As a result, the value of the CSG has been eroded

**Figure 2d: Children receiving the Child Support Grant, 1998 – 2024**



Sources: 1998 – 2007: National Treasury Intergovernmental Fiscal Reviews. 2008 – 2024: South African Social Security Agency SOCPEN monthly statistical reports.

relative to the food poverty line, and the CSG no longer covers the cost of providing for a child's minimum nutritional needs.

At the end of March 2023, a monthly CSG of R480 was paid to just over 13 million children aged 0 – 17 years. The value of the CSG increased to R500 per month from the beginning of April 2023, and to R510 from October 2023. From April 2024, the value of the CSG was R530 per month.

Because the CSG is targeted to poor children, a simple means test is used to determine eligibility. The income threshold is set at 10 times the amount of the grant. This means that every time the grant is increased, the means test also increases. From April 2024, the income threshold was R5,300 per month for a single caregiver and double that if the caregiver is married (R10,600 per month for the joint income of the caregiver and spouse).

Initially the CSG was only available for children younger than seven years. From 2003 it was gradually extended to older children up to the age of 14. Since January 2012, eligible children can receive the grant until they turn 18. Take-up of the CSG increased dramatically over the first 15 years, after which the numbers started levelling off.

A slight dip in grant access in 2014 was probably the result of the introduction of a biometric system which led to the identification and suspension of grants to beneficiaries who were not verified biometrically. Most of them were reinstated the following year, although without back-pay. From 2014, the numbers increased again gradually, only tapering off in 2021 and 2022.

In March 2022, fewer CSGs were in payment than in March the previous year – the number of CSGs had decreased by nearly 80,000, from 13 million in 2021. Although the overall numbers have picked up again subsequently, it is worrying that the number of infants (under one year of age) receiving the CSG has continued to fall each year, while at the same time poverty rates have risen. In March 2020, just before

lockdown, 658,000 infants were receiving the CSG. This number dropped by over 100,000 to 550,000 in March 2021. The substantial drop between 2020 and 2021 was almost certainly the result of delays in birth registration and grant applications in the context of lockdown. Although birth registration rates recovered after 2021, the number of infants receiving the CSG continued to fall – to 543,000 in 2022 then to 509,000 in 2023 and to 468,645 in 2024. This has reversed improvements in uptake by caregivers of infants by 10 years, taking us back to 2014 levels. It is not clear what is causing the further decline in CSG access for infants. Possible reasons

**Table 2a: Children receiving the Child Support Grant, by province and age group, 2024**

Province	Number of child beneficiaries at end March 2024			
	0 – 5 years	6 – 11 years	12 – 17 years	TOTAL
Eastern Cape	614,091	660,416	681,611	1,956,118
Free State	222,726	239,559	247,038	709,323
Gauteng	637,591	720,601	688,020	2,046,212
KwaZulu-Natal	989,991	1,012,185	1,005,231	3,007,407
Limpopo	691,891	686,133	624,500	2,002,524
Mpumalanga	415,821	406,742	384,288	1,206,851
North West	303,454	312,722	301,217	917,393
Northern Cape	112,256	116,633	107,457	336,346
Western Cape	283,856	374,526	378,168	1,036,550
South Africa	4,271,677	4,529,517	4,417,530	13,218,724

Source: South African Social Security Agency (2024) Twelfth Statistical Report: Social Assistance: Period April 2023 – March 2024. Pretoria: SASSA.

may include staff shortages, the introduction of rotating days for grant applications, and the impacts of load-shedding on the systems at SASSA offices.

There is substantial evidence that social grants, including the CSG, are being spent on food, education and basic goods and services. The evidence shows that the CSG not only helps to alleviate income poverty and realise children's right to social assistance, but is also associated with improved nutritional, health and education outcomes, especially if the grant is accessed soon after birth and received continuously.<sup>9-18</sup>

Given the positive and cumulative effects of the grant, it is important that caregivers can access it for their children as early as possible. One of the main concerns is the slow take-up by caregivers of young children. An analysis of exclusions from

the CSG found that exclusion rates for eligible infants were as high as 43% in 2014. The total rate of exclusion for all ages was estimated at 17.5% (more than 1.8 million children).<sup>19</sup> A subsequent analysis found that infant exclusion rates dropped to 35% in 2017 – 2019, but increased again to 48% in 2020.<sup>20</sup> Exclusion rates are consistently found to be highest in the Western Cape and Gauteng. Barriers to take-up include confusion about eligibility requirements and the means test in particular; lack of documentation (mainly identity books or birth certificates, and proof of school enrolment, although the latter is not an eligibility requirement); and problems of institutional access (including the time and cost of reaching SASSA offices, long queues and lack of baby-friendly facilities).

## Children receiving the Foster Child Grant

This indicator shows the number of children who are accessing the Foster Child Grant (FCG) in South Africa, as recorded in SASSA's administrative data.

The FCG is available to foster parents who have a child placed in their care by an order of the court. Foster care was designed for children who are placed with another family because they are in need of care and protection due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Unlike the CSG, the FCG is not means-tested but is automatically paid to the foster parents of children who have been placed in their care. The monthly value of the grant was R1,120 in April 2023, and R1,180 from April 2024.

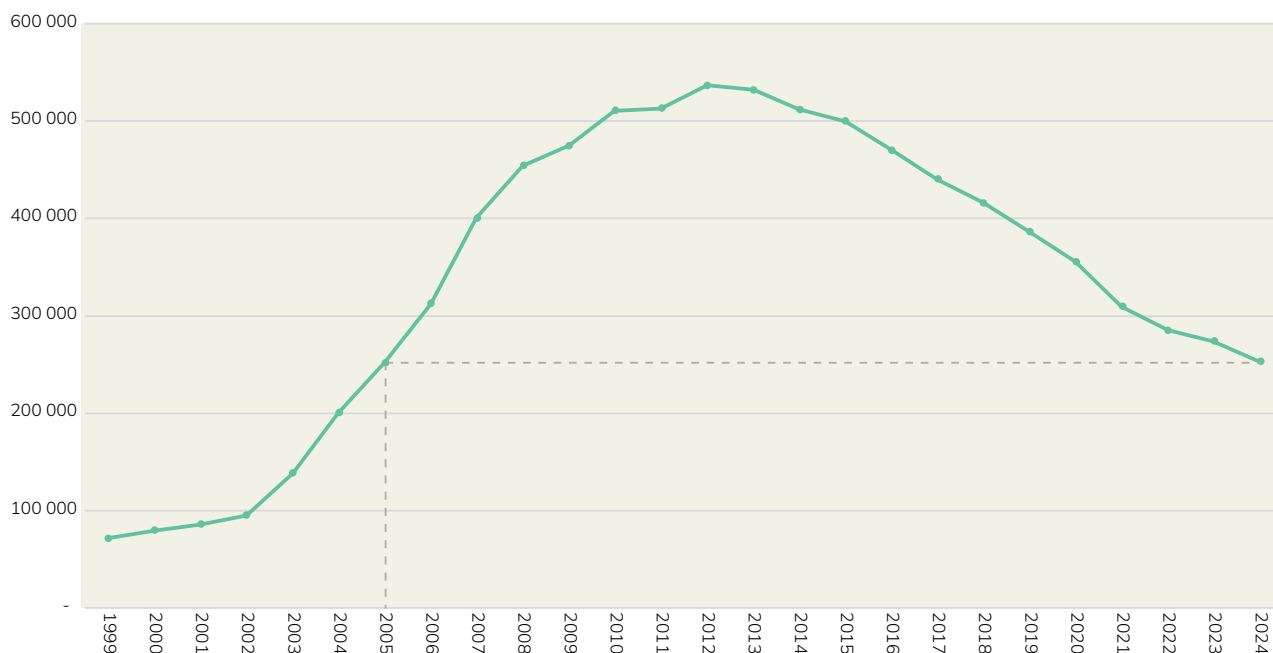
The absence of a means test and the relatively large value of the grant compared to the CSG is justified on the basis that the child is a ward of the state because a court has placed them in alternative care, and the state is therefore directly responsible for ensuring that all the child's needs are provided for.

The number of children in foster care remained stable at

around 50,000 nationally for many years when foster care was used primarily for children who were in need of care and protection or were awaiting adoption. However, from 2003, as HIV-related orphan rates rose sharply, the Department of Social Development and its social workers started encouraging family members to apply for foster care placements. They particularly encouraged grandmothers who were caring for orphaned children to apply for foster care placements because the value of the FCG was nearly three times that of the CSG.

Over the next decade, the FCG was increasingly used to provide poverty alleviation for orphaned children in kinship care. The appropriateness and effectiveness of this approach was questioned as far back as 2003, particularly because many children live with grandparents, aunts or other relatives anyway, whether or not their parents are alive. In 2022, for example, four million children – a fifth of the child population – did not live with either of their parents. Of these, 97% lived with

Figure 2e: Children receiving the Foster Child Grant, 1999 – 2024



Sources: 1999 – 2007: National Treasury Intergovernmental Fiscal Reviews. 2008 – 2024: South African Social Security Agency monthly statistical reports



relatives, mainly in households that included a grandparent. Less than one third were orphans. Nevertheless, with over half a million double orphans living with relatives, there were concerns that increasing demand for foster care placements would overwhelm the child protection system, which was not designed or resourced to process such large numbers.<sup>21 22</sup>

By 2010, more than 500,000 FCGs were in payment and the foster care system was struggling to keep pace with the numbers due to the strict checks and balances required by law. These included initial investigations and reports by social workers, newspaper adverts, court-ordered placements, and additional two-yearly social worker reviews and court-ordered extensions of placements. SASSA is not allowed to pay the FCG without a valid court order or extension order, and it stopped paying more than 110,000 FCGs between April 2009 and March 2011 because of backlogs in the extensions of court orders.<sup>23-25</sup>

In 2011, a High Court-ordered settlement stipulated that the foster care court orders that had expired – or that were going to expire in the following two years – must be deemed to have been extended until 8 June 2013. This effectively placed a moratorium on the lapsing of these FCGs. As a temporary solution, social workers could extend orders administratively (without having to go to court) until December 2014, by which date a comprehensive legal solution should have been found to prevent qualifying families from losing their grants in future.<sup>26</sup> No legal policy solution had been developed by the 2014 cut-off date. The Department of Social Development sought (and received) an urgent High Court order extending the date to the end of 2017, which was then extended until the end of November 2019, then to November 2020, then November 2022, and finally to November 2023.

Two laws needed to be amended to enable a comprehensive legal solution. This process took over a decade to be completed. An amendment to the Social Assistance Act was passed by Parliament in 2020 to provide for a new CSG Top-Up (instead of the FCG) for orphaned children living with relatives.

The CSG Top-Up is more easily accessible than the FCG because the caregiver can apply directly at SASSA without first having to go through a social worker investigation and court placement. It also gives access to a grant that, although lower than the FCG, is close to the food poverty line – enough to cover the basic food needs for a child. Importantly, it is not at risk of being stopped every two years. The CSG Top-Up is set at one-and-a-half times the value of the CSG, so that for example when the CSG is R500 per month, the CSG with top-up is R750. Implementation of the top-up started in mid-2022. By March 2023 there were 37,000 children receiving the top-up, and by February 2024 the number had increased to 65,000.<sup>27</sup> Although uptake of the CSG Top-Up has been substantial, it has not been fast enough to offset the declining numbers of FCGs, and it is likely that many more orphans are excluded from these higher value grant amounts.

The Children’s Act also needed to be amended to clarify that orphaned children in the care of relatives should be referred to the CSG Top-Up, and that only those who are in need of supervised care and protection should be placed in foster care. After much debate, the Children’s Amendment Bill was finally passed by Parliament and signed by the President at the end

of 2022.<sup>28</sup> Regulations were published in the government gazette and the Amendment Act came into effect a year later in December 2023. It clarifies that an orphaned child who is in the care of family members is not a child in need of state care and protection simply due to being orphaned. This means that all new cases of orphans in the care of relatives should go directly to SASSA to apply for the CSG Top-Up and do not need to go via social workers or the courts to access an adequate grant. Orphans in the care of relatives who were already in foster care and receiving the FCG in December 2023 are exempted from the effect of this change and should remain on the FCG until they turn 18 (or 21 if still in education). The Amendment Act also devolves jurisdiction for guardianship orders to the Children’s Court (previously only accessible at the High Court) to make it easier for relatives caring for orphans to secure parental responsibilities and rights orders.

Since its height in 2012, when nearly 540,000 FCGs were paid each month, the number of FCGs has declined year-on-year. At the end of 2014, 300,000 court orders had expired, representing more than 60% of all foster care placements.<sup>29</sup> Those grants remained in payment only because the High Court order mentioned above prevented them from lapsing. In March 2024, 253,000 FCGs were paid to caregivers of children in foster care, a 53% reduction since 2012. The most dramatic drop has been in KwaZulu-Natal, where the number of FCGs fell by 70%, from 142,000 to 42,000. Over the same period, the number of children receiving FCGs fell by 62% in the Free State and was more than halved in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and North West.

The rapid decline over the past decade cannot be attributed to the introduction of the comprehensive legal solution described above, as it was only partially in place by mid-2022 and fully in place from December 2023. Rather, declining numbers were due to lower rates of foster care placement and enrolment onto the grant, along with an increase in the numbers of grants

**Table 2b: Children receiving the Foster Child Grant, by province, 2012 & 2024**

Province	2012	2024	Difference	% difference
Eastern Cape	116,826	54,799	-62,027	-53%
Free State	43,311	16,374	-26,937	-62%
Gauteng	56,451	33,962	-22,489	-40%
KwaZulu-Natal	142,114	42,120	-99,994	-70%
Limpopo	56,066	31,648	-24,418	-44%
Mpumalanga	32,886	14,387	-18,499	-56%
North West	45,634	19,880	-25,754	-56%
Northern Cape	14,456	8,392	-6,064	-42%
Western Cape	29,003	31,697	2,694	9%
South Africa	536,747	253,259	-283,488	-53%
FCG amount	R 770	R 1 180		

Source: South African Social Security Agency (2012; 2024) social grant statistics.

terminating at the end of each year when children turn 18. This is because the beneficiaries of the FCG are still mainly orphans, who are typically older children.

In 2022, only 14% of FCGs went to children who were not orphaned, while approximately 5% went to paternal orphans, 11% to maternal orphans and 69% to double orphans.<sup>30</sup> The Western Cape is the only province that has not experienced a drop in the number of FCGs, probably because it is also the only province where foster care is used mainly for its original purpose, rather than to supplement grant income for orphans living with relatives. Rural provinces have tended to bear the main burden of caring for orphans so, for example, many children who are orphaned in the Western Cape may be sent to live with families in Eastern Cape.

## Children receiving the Care Dependency Grant

This indicator shows the number of children who are accessing the Care Dependency Grant (CDG) in South Africa, as recorded in the SOCPEN administrative data system of the SASSA.

The CDG is a non-contributory monthly cash transfer to caregivers of children with disabilities who require permanent care or support services. It excludes those children who are cared for in state institutions because the purpose of the grant is to cover the additional costs (including opportunity costs) that the parent or caregiver might incur as a result of the child's disability. The child needs to undergo a medical assessment to determine eligibility and the parent must pass an income or 'means' test.

Although the CDG targets children with disabilities, children with chronic illnesses are eligible for the grant once the illness becomes disabling, for example, children who are very sick with

It is not possible to calculate a take-up rate for the FCG as there is no accurate record of how many children are eligible for placement in foster care because they are abused or neglected and in need of care and protection. Until the Children's Amendment Act was put into effect in December 2023, the majority of orphans in the care of relatives were legally eligible to be placed in foster care and receive the FCG,<sup>i</sup> but only a small portion of these children were accessing it.

The introduction of the CSG Top-Up in June 2022 has helped reverse this trend with 67,000 orphans accessing the CSG Top-Up by March 2024. More attention needs to be paid to promoting awareness about the availability of the CSG Top-Up among the public and government personnel at SASSA, the Department of Social Development, and the Children's Court.

AIDS-related illnesses. Children with disabilities and chronic illnesses need substantial care and attention, and parents may need to stay at home or employ a caregiver to tend to the child. Children with health conditions may need medication, equipment or to attend hospital often. These extra costs can put strain on families that are already struggling to make ends meet. Poverty and chronic health conditions are therefore strongly related.

It is not possible to calculate a take-up rate for the CDG because there are no reliable data on the number of children with disabilities or who are chronically ill, and in need of permanent care or support services. At the end of March 2024, nearly 168,000 children were receiving the CDG, and from the beginning of April 2024, the grant was valued at R2,180 per month.

The provincial distribution of CDGs is fairly consistent with the distribution of children. The provinces with the largest numbers of children – KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo – receive the largest share of CDGs, though the number of CDG recipients has also increased in the Western Cape. There has been a gradual but consistent increase in access to the CDG each year since 1998, when only 8,000 CDGs were disbursed.

**Table 2c: Children receiving the Care Dependency Grant, by province, 2012 & 2024**

Province	2012	2024	Difference	% difference
Eastern Cape	18,235	24,625	6,390	35%
Free State	5,419	9,834	4,415	81%
Gauteng	14,170	24,057	9,887	70%
KwaZulu-Natal	34,969	41,144	6,175	18%
Limpopo	11,318	18,440	7,122	63%
Mpumalanga	7,950	12,685	4,735	60%
North West	8,736	10,967	2,231	26%
Northern Cape	4,236	6,102	1,866	44%
Western Cape	9,960	17,912	7,952	80%
South Africa	114,993	167,790	50,773	44%
CDG amount	R 1 200	R 2 180		

Source: South African Social Security Agency (2012; 2024) social grant statistics.

i In terms of section 150 (1)(a) of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005.



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