



Children's Institute, University of Cape Town

UPDATE on Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

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Paula Proudlock & Dr Katharine Hall
paula.proudlock@uct.ac.za & kath.hall@uct.ac.za

Introduction

The Children's Institute submitted a complementary report to the UNCRC in August 2023. The report drew attention to the high (and rising) levels of child poverty, and the low value of the Child Support Grant. It also highlighted serious challenges with birth registration, which results in the exclusion of the most vulnerable children from social grants and other essential entitlements under the Constitution and international law.

Since our submission, new data have become available. In this short update we describe an increase in poverty levels since lockdown ended, and report on the latest official poverty lines which result in further widening between the minimum food poverty line and the value of the Child Support Grant.

1. Child poverty rates continue to rise

In our report to the CRC, we noted that the share of children living in food poverty had risen from 33% of all children in South Africa to 37% in 2021. The subsequent release of the 2022 General Household Survey data provided an additional time point for analysis. From these data, we estimate that in 2022 the food poverty rate among children, instead of declining after lockdown had ended, increased to 38%.

Rising food poverty rate and headcount for children, 2018 – 2022

	Year	Child food-poverty rate	Number of children below food poverty line
Pre-COVID	2018	32.5%	6.4 million
	2019	32.9%	6.6 million
Lockdown years	2020	33.6%	6.9 million
	2021	37.1%	7.7 million
Post-lockdown	2022	37.9%	7.9 million

Source: Children's Institute analysis of GHS 2018-2022

The General Household Survey is not an official poverty survey in that it does not have a detailed income-expenditure module. However, it is an official nationally representative household survey run by the national statistics agency and, as explained in our previous report, our child poverty estimates derived from the GHS correspond closely with those derived from the last official poverty survey for the same period (Living Conditions Survey of 2014/5).

Our analysis of the annual GHS shows a substantial increase in child poverty. This was expected during lockdown because of job loss. The fact that this higher poverty rate has continued and even increased after lockdown ended shows that this is not an acute short-term phenomenon, but a worrying trend. Children who live below the food poverty line are, by definition, not getting the minimum number of calories necessary for survival and development and are at high risk of malnutrition and the accompanying morbidity and mortality risks.

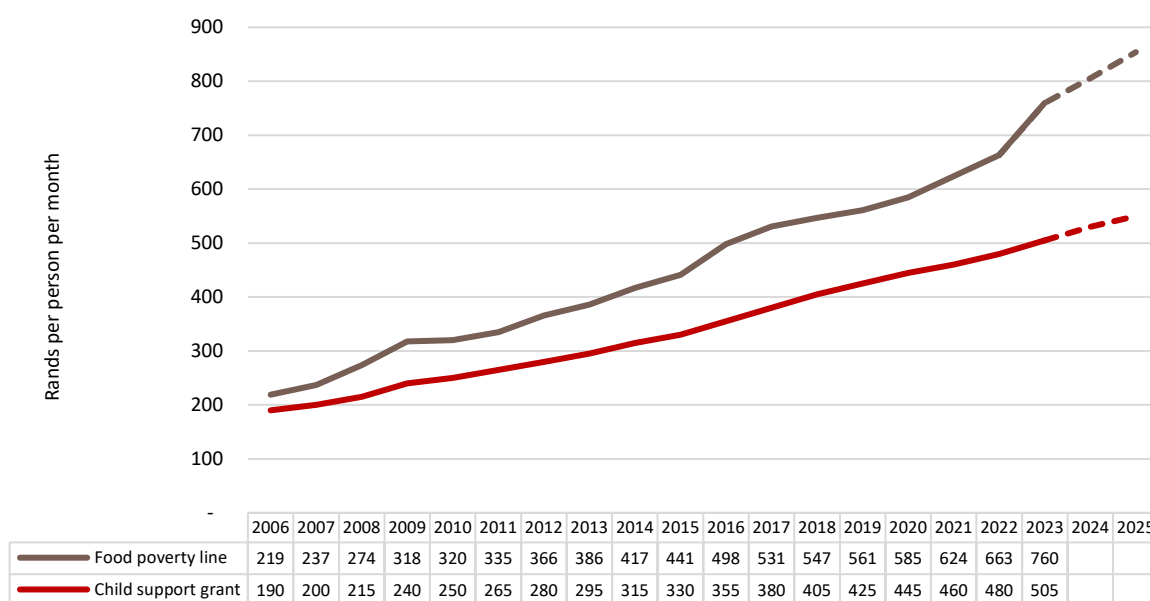
2. Widening gap between the CSG value and the food poverty line

Our report illustrated the widening gap between the monthly value of the CSG and the monetary value of the official food poverty line over time. While the CSG was initially designed to cover the food costs of a child, it quickly fell below that level because the annual increase adjustments to the grant value did not keep pace with food inflation.

South Africa has experienced particularly high food inflation in recent years. In September 2023 Statistics SA published the official poverty lines for 2023. The value of the food poverty line is even higher than previously projected, resulting in a dramatic widening of the gap between the CSG value and the food poverty line.

In September 2023, the value of the CSG is R500 per child per month. The food poverty line is R760 per person per month. The CSG, which should at the very least cover the basic food costs of a child, now only covers two thirds of that cost, according to the State's own calculations of the minimum cost of living.

Widening gap between the CSG and the food poverty line (updated)



The table below provides the three official poverty line values for 2023, with US dollar conversion in purchasing power parity. Our calculations of the 2022 child poverty headcount rate are provided for each line.

Updated poverty line values and headcounts

Poverty line	2023 value of poverty line in ZAR	2023 value of poverty line in US\$	Child poverty rate (2022)
Upper-bound poverty	1,558	221	69.9%
Lower-bound poverty	1,058	150	53.2%
Food poverty	760	108	37.9%

Source: Stats SA 2023 (poverty line values); converted to US dollars using purchasing power parity rates from the IMF's World Economic Outlook database 2023. Poverty rates calculated by Children's Institute from GHS 2022.

It is clear that child poverty rates are dangerously high and continue to escalate in the context of persistent unemployment and high food inflation. We urge the Committee to ask the South African government to outline its plans to address child poverty and ensure that all children are able to receive the daily nutrition needed for their survival and development.

The Committee, in its 2016 concluding observations on the second period report of South Africa, noted that the amount of the Child Support Grant should be *“based on an objective assessment of the actual cost of meeting the needs of children living in poverty”* [Para 56(c)].

The official food poverty line is the State's own assessment of the absolute minimum cost of meeting daily nutritional needs. It excludes other basic needs such as clothing and shelter and is arguably the lowest possible cost of meeting the needs of children living in poverty.