Children's access to education

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Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution states that "everyone has the right to a basic education", and section 29(1)(b) says that "everyone has the right to further education", and that the state must make such education "progressively available and accessible".[1]

Article 11(3)(a) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child says "States Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realization of this right and shall in particular … provide free and compulsory basic education".[2]

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises "the right of the child to education" and also obliges the state to "make primary education compulsory and available free to all".[3]

Children attending an educational institution

This indicator shows the number and percentage of children aged 7 – 17 who are reported to be attending a school or educational facility. It is different from 'enrolment rate', which reflects the number of children enrolled in educational institutions, as reported by schools to the national Department of Basic Education (DBE) early in the school year.

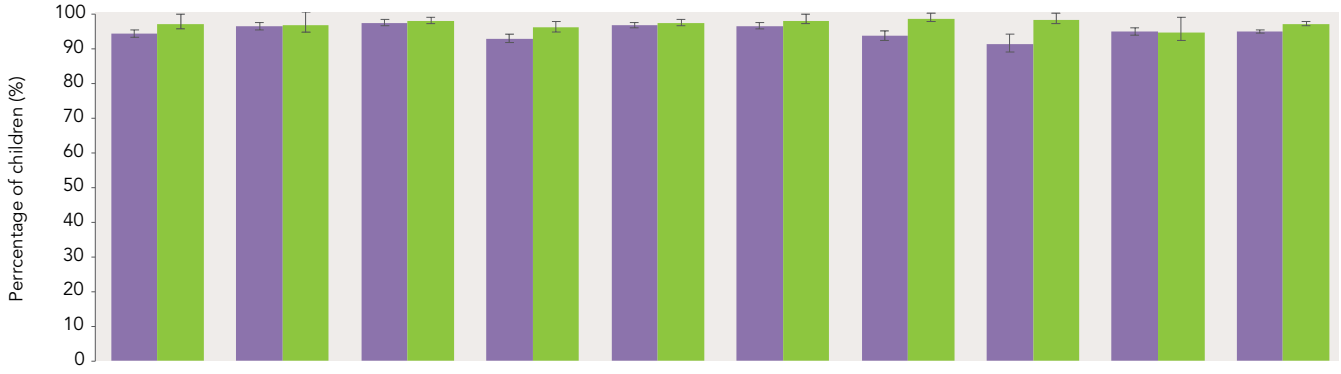
Education is a central socio-economic right that provides the foundation for lifelong learning and economic opportunity. Children have a right to basic education and are admitted into Grade 1 in the year they turn seven. Basic education is compulsory in Grades 1 – 9 or for children aged 7 – 15. Children who have completed basic education also have a right to further education (Grades 10 – 12), which the government must take reasonable measures to make available.

South Africa has high levels of school enrolment and attendance. Among children of school-going age (7 – 17 years), the vast majority are reported to attend some form of educational facility. There was a small but significant increase from 2002, when the reported attendance rate was 95%, to 2018, when reported attendance rates were 98%. The overall increase was mainly due to the growth in reported attendance rates for African and Coloured children, and in 2018, for the first time since this indicator was tracked, there were no significant differences in attendance rates across race groups.

School attendance in 2020 is expected to be different to previous years because of COVID-19 and lockdown. All schools were closed from 18 March 2020. From June, there was some partial reopening of schools, but only for specific grades. Schools re-opened for all grades from late August 2020, but even then they ran at reduced capacity, with rotational timetabling of classes.

Stats SA ran its General Household Survey from September to December 2020. The survey included the usual question about whether household members were attending an educational institution, but did not ask whether they were attending every day. Thus, reported attendance rates do not reflect the regularity of attendance, even at a time when it is known that learners were unlikely to be attending every day. Reported attendance rates in the last quarter of 2020 were at a similarly high level as

Figure 4a: School-age children (7 – 17-year-olds) attending an educational institution, by province, 2002 & 2020



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	94,2%	96,3%	97,4%	92,9%	96,6%	96,4%	93,6%	91,2%	94,8%	95,0%
	1,811,000	603,000	1,763,000	2,470,000	1,525,000	917,000	671,000	221,000	944,000	10,926,000
2020	97,1%	96,7%	97,9%	96,0%	97,4%	98,1%	98,5%	98,1%	94,6%	97,0%
	1,525,000	679,000	2,500,000	2,459,000	1,411,000	996,000	885,000	253,000	1,210,000	11,918,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003, 2021) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2020*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

previous years, with just a small decrease of one percentage point from 2019, to 97%. Of a total of 12.3 million children aged 7 – 17 years, 370,000 were reported as not attending school between September and December 2020. The lowest attendance rates were reported in the Western Cape, at 95%.

Wave 3 of the NIDS-CRAM survey, conducted in November 2020, asked whether children had attended school at any time in the last seven days. The overall estimate was 98%, a similar attendance rate to that reported in GHS. Attendance rates earlier in the year had been much lower, and varied substantially by grade, ranging from 88% for Grade 12 learners to as low as 11% for Grade 9 learners.[4] This was due to the staggered re-opening of grades and prioritisation of those approaching the end of the primary or secondary phase.

Overall attendance rates tend to mask drop-out among older children. Analysis of attendance among discrete age groups shows that although there is a slight drop in reported attendance among children beyond the compulsory schooling phase, attendance still remains in the high-90s for children aged 16 and 17. It is only at age 18 that there is a substantial drop: to around 90% for males and 80% for females who have not completed Grade 12. Differences in reported school attendance rates between boys and girls in the compulsory education phase are not statistically significant.

The 2020 General Household Survey included additional questions to gauge levels of access to education through remote learning (when children were not able to attend school in person due to lockdown and restrictions on school capacity). The responses to these questions suggest that South Africa was not well-prepared for remote schooling. For children aged 7 – 17 years, the following information was recorded:

- 10% were in schools that offered remote learning opportunities
- 6% participated in online learning
- 3% had access to a smartphone in the household that they could use for remote learning
- 1% had access to a computer (desktop or laptop) that they could use for remote learning during lockdown.

Thus, although, by the last quarter of 2020 when schools had reopened, school attendance rates had almost returned to 'normal' levels, this attendance rate overstates daily attendance or access to learning.

Usually, the General Household Survey asks about reasons for non-attendance for those who are not attending an educational institution. This question was not asked in 2020, as the questionnaire had to be amended and shortened. In 2019, as in previous years, the main set of reasons for non-attendance related to the quality of education or the learners ability to progress: 'Education is useless or not interesting' was the main reason given for 9% of children aged 7 – 17 who were not attending school. Another 9% were 'unable to perform at school' while 4% dropped out because they failed the exams and 6% were not accepted for enrolment, despite being in the age range 7 – 17 years. These signals of failures in the education system account for nearly 30% of all reported non-attendance.

The second main barrier to education is financial constraints. These include the cost of schooling (the reason given for 13% of children not attending schools in 2019) – which would also include related costs such as uniform and transport – and the opportunity costs of education where children have family commitments such as child minding (4%) or are needed to work in a family business or elsewhere to support household income (4%).

Disability is also an important reason, accounting for 10% of non-attendance in 2019, while illness accounted for an additional 6% of the non-attendance rate.

The main reasons for non-attendance can therefore be divided into three main categories: system failures (including exclusions and quality problems); financial barriers; and illness or disability. Together, these account for nearly 70% of non-attendance.

Pregnancy accounts for around 8% of drop-out amongst teenage girls not attending school, and only 3% of all non-attendance.[5-7]

Although the costs of education are cited as a barrier to attendance, the overall attendance rate for children in the lower income quintiles is not significantly lower than those in the wealthier quintiles.

Attendance rates alone do not capture the regularity of children's school attendance or their progress through school. Research has shown that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds – with limited economic resources, lower levels of parental education, or who have lost their mother – are more prone to dropping out or progressing more slowly than their more advantaged peers. Racial inequalities in school advancement remain strong.[8-10] Similarly, school attendance rates tell us nothing about the quality of teaching and learning.[11] Inequalities in learning outcomes are explored through standardised tests such as those used in the international SAQMEC,[12] TIMMS and PIRLS[13] studies. The DBE's Annual National Assessments[14] have been discontinued.

Access to early childhood learning programmes

This indicator shows the number and percentage of children aged 5 – 6 who are reported to be attending an early childhood development (ECD) programme or educational institution – in other words, those attending out-of-home group care and learning centres including ECD centres, pre-Grade R, Grade R or Grade 1 in ordinary schools. While all these facilities provide care and stimulation for early learning for young children, the emphasis on providing learning opportunities through structured learning programmes differs by facility type.

Educational inequalities are strongly associated with structural socio-economic (and therefore also racial) inequalities in South Africa.[10, 15] These inequalities are evident from the early years, even before entry into primary school.[16] They are exacerbated by an unequal schooling system,[17, 18] and are difficult to reverse. But early inequalities can be reduced through pre-school exposure to developmentally appropriate activities and programmes that stimulate cognitive development.[19, 20] Provided that they are of good quality, early learning programmes are an important mechanism to interrupt the cycle of inequality by reducing socio-economic differences in learning potential between children before they enter the foundation phase of schooling.

The Five-year Strategic Plan[21] of the DBE included a broad goal to improve the quality of ECD provisioning and specifically to improve access to grade R through the supply of learning

materials and improving the quality of Grade R educators. Evidence suggests that quality group learning programmes are beneficial for cognitive development from about three years of age[22] and the National Development Plan (NDP) priorities, cited in the DBE's strategic plan, include universal access to two years of early childhood development programmes.The DBE funds and monitors thousands of community-based Grade R centres in addition to the school-based Grade R classes. The NDP proposes the introduction of a second year of pre-school education, and that both years be made universally accessible to children.[23] It therefore makes sense to monitor enrolment in early learning programmes of children in the 5 – 6-year pre-school age group.

Preliminary numbers from the Department of Basic Education, show that, in addition to children in ECD centres, 822,000 learners were attending Grade R or pre-Grade R at ordinary primary schools in early 2020. Just over half (54%) of pre-Grade R learners were enrolled in independent schools, while 95% of Grade R learners were at public (government schools).[24]

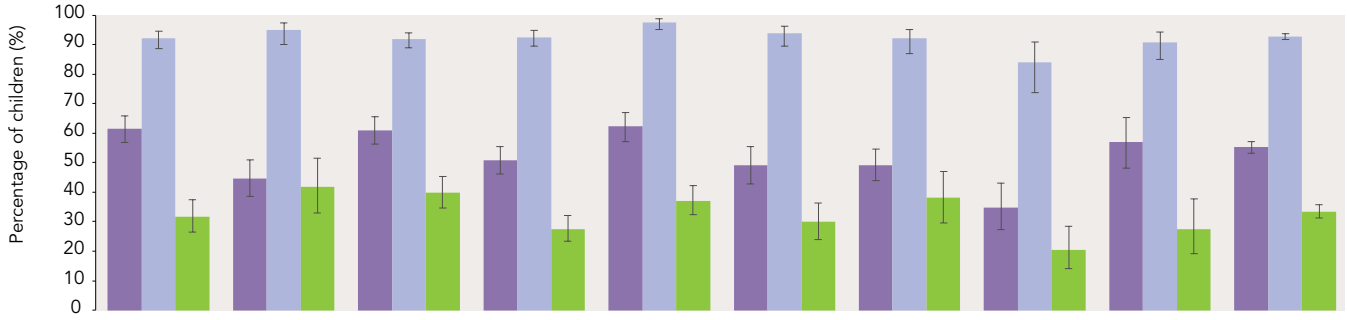
In 2019, 93% of children (nearly 2.2 million) in the pre-school age group (5 – 6-year-olds) were reported to be attending some kind of educational facility, mostly in Grade R or Grade 1. This was double the 2002 level, when slightly fewer than 1.1 million children in the same age group were reported to be attending an educational institution. Around 170,000 children in this age group were not attending any kind of educational facility in 2019.

Attendance rates were above 90% in all provinces except the Northern Cape (84%). This pattern differed from many other indicators, where the Western Cape often out-performs poorer and more rural provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Similar patterns were found in analyses of the 2007 Community Survey and the 2008 National Income Dynamics Study, which also did not find strong provincial disparities.[25] Given the inequalities in South Africa, it was also pleasing to see that as access to education increased among 5 – 6 year-olds so too did the disparities narrow across races and income quintiles. There were also no significant gender differences in access to pre-school.

The effect of COVID-19 and lockdown on early learning was dramatic. In late 2020, when the General Household Survey was conducted, only 33% of children aged 5 – 6 were attending any kind of educational centre. Of the 2.3 million children in this age group, 780,000 were reported to attend while 1.5 million were not attending. The highest reported attendance rates were in the Free State (42%). The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Western Cape all had attendance rates below the national average of 33%. Alongside the sharp fall in attendance was an apparent increase in racial inequality (60% of White children aged 5 – 6 years were reported to be accessing some kind of learning facility by late 2020, compared with 33% of African and 26% of Coloured children). Similarly, income inqualities became more pronounced, with attendance rates ranging from 28% in the poorest income quintile to 43% in the wealthiest quintile.

As with the indicator that monitors school attendance, it should be remembered that this indicator tells us nothing about the quality of care and education that young children receive at educational facilities or the resources available at those facilities. Attendance provides a unique opportunity because almost all children in an age cohort can be reached at a particularly important developmental stage; but this is a lost opportunity if the service is of poor quality. The year 2020 saw a rapid reversal of the gains made over nearly two decades in early learning access for 5 – 6 year olds. In 2020 there was further loss because of the closure of early learning programmes, difficulties in the registration procedures for re-opening, and delays and administrative obstacles in funding flows to early learning centres.

Figure 4b: Children aged 5 – 6 years attending school or ECD facility, by province, 2002, 2019 & 2020



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	61,4%	44,7%	61,0%	50,8%	62,2%	49,1%	49,1%	34,7%	56,9%	55,2%
	194,000	49,000	188,000	220,000	158,000	80,000	63,000	16,000	97,000	1,064,000
2019	92,1%	94,8%	91,8%	92,5%	97,4%	93,7%	92,0%	84,1%	90,6%	92,7%
	292,000	114,000	449,000	460,000	279,000	188,000	144,000	39,000	191,000	2,155,000
2020	31,7%	41,9%	39,9%	27,5%	37,1%	29,9%	38,0%	20,3%	27,6%	33,4%
	82,000	40,000	203,000	145,000	102,000	51,000	71,000	9,000	70,000	777,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2002; 2020, 2021) *General Household Survey 2002, 2019, 2020;* Pretoria: StatsSA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.
Note: Prior to 2009, enrolment in crèches, playgroups and ECD centres would have been under-reported as the survey only asked about attendance at "educational institutions". More specific questions about ECD facilities were introduced from the 2009 survey onwards and are likely to have resulted in higher attendance rates (for a more detailed technical explanation, see www.childrencount.uct.ac.za).

Children living far from school

This indicator monitors the share of school-going children who have to travel far to get to school. Distance is measured as the length of time travelled to reach school. The school the child attends is defined as 'far' if a child has to travel more than 30 minutes to reach it, irrespective of mode of transport. Children aged 7 – 13 are defined as primary school age, and children aged 14 – 17 are defined as secondary school age.

Access to schools and other educational facilities is a necessary condition for achieving the right to education. A school's location and distance from home can pose a barrier to education. Access to schools is also hampered by poor roads, transport that is unavailable or unaffordable, and danger along the way. Risks may be different for young children, for girls and boys, and are likely to be greater when children travel alone.

For children who do not have schools near to their homes, the cost, risk and effort of getting to school can influence decisions about regular attendance, as well as participation in extramural activities and after-school events. Those who travel long distances to reach school may wake very early and risk arriving late or physically exhausted, which may affect their ability to learn. Walking long distances to school may also lead to learners being excluded from class or make it difficult to attend school regularly.

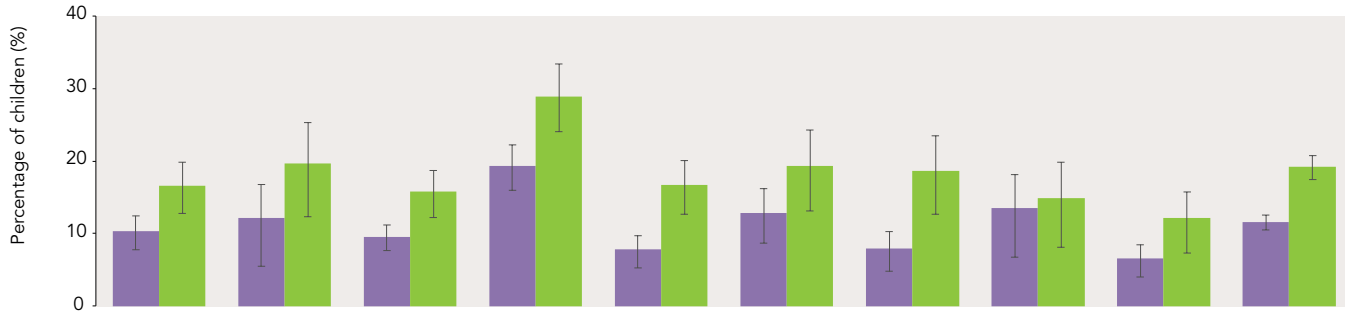
Questions about distance and means of travel to school were not asked in the 2020 General Household Survey. Of the 11.6 million children who were attending school in 2019, over 7 million (63%) walked to school, while 13% travelled in vehicles hired by a group of parents, 9% travelled in private cars and 9% used public transport (bus, minibus, taxi or train). Only 2% report using school buses or school transport provided by the government. The vast majority (81%) of White children were driven to school in private or hired cars, compared with only 17% of African children.[5] These figures illustrate pronounced disparity in child mobility and means of access to school.

Assuming that schools primarily serve the children living in communities around them, the ideal indicator to measure physical access to school would be the distance from the child's household to the nearest school. This analysis is no longer possible due to question changes in the General Household Survey. Instead, the indicator shows the number and percentage of children who travel far (more than 30 minutes) to reach the actual school that they attend, even if it is not the closest school. Eighty percent of school-going children attend their nearest school.

Overall, the vast majority (86%) of the 11.6 million children who attended school in 2019 travelled less than 30 minutes to reach school. Children of secondary school age are more likely than primary school learners to travel far to reach school. In 2019 there were 8.2 million children of primary school age (7 – 13 years) in South Africa. Nearly a million of these children (12%) travel more than 30 minutes to and from school every day. In KwaZulu-Natal, this percentage is significantly higher than the national average, at 19%. Of the 4 million children of secondary school age (14 – 17 years), 19% travel more than 30 minutes to reach school, and again it is children in KwaZulu-Natal who are most likely to travel far (29%). The majority of these children live in rural areas: 24% of secondary school age children in the former homelands travel far to school, compared to 15% of children living in urban areas.

Physical access to school remains a problem for many children in South Africa, particularly those living in more remote areas where public transport to schools is lacking or inadequate and where households are unable to afford private transport for children to get to school. There are 25,000 schools in South Africa, of which just over 23,000 are public and 2,000 are independent.[24] Over 3,000 government schools have closed since 2002 as the Department consolidates smaller schools and closes state-funded farm schools. The Eastern Cape has lost nearly a thousand public schools, while the Free State has lost over a thousand. Other provinces with substantial reductions in the number of schools are the North West and Limpopo. While the concentration of more children into fewer schools may be an advantage from a school management perspective, it may mean that children in remote areas have more difficulty in accessing school. Over the same period, the number of independent schools in the country has increased by 61% (an increase of over 700 schools).[26]

Figure 4c: School-aged children living far from school, by province, 2019



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
Primary	10,4%	12,2%	9,6%	19,3%	7,8%	12,9%	8,0%	13,5%	6,6%	11,6%
	108,000	57,000	158,000	335,000	76,000	87,000	50,000	22,000	57,000	953,000
Secondary	16,6%	19,6%	15,7%	28,9%	16,7%	19,3%	18,7%	14,9%	12,1%	19,2%
	87,000	47,000	141,000	238,000	78,000	65,000	51,000	14,000	51,000	782,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2020) *General Household Survey 2019*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Children's progress through school

We have already seen that school attendance rates are very high during the compulsory schooling phase (Grades 1 – 9). However, attendance tells us little about the quality of education that children receive, or their progress through the education system.

Systemic evaluations by the Department of Education have recorded very low pass rates in numeracy and literacy among both Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners,[27] and internationally comparative studies have repeatedly found South Africa's performance to be poor even when compared with other countries in the region. In the international PIRLS study, which assessed literacy amongst Grade 4 learners, South Africa was placed last out of 50 participating countries. Four out of five Grade 4 children in South Africa could not read for meaning in any language.[28] In the International TIMMS study, which assessed numeracy among Grade 5 learners, South Africa was placed second last out of 49 countries. Three out of five learners could not do basic arithmetic calculations like addition and subtraction.[29] Despite measures to address the inherited inequities in the education system through revisions to the legislative and policy frameworks and the school funding norms, continued disparities in the quality of education offered by schools reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities, limiting the future work opportunities and life chances of children who are born into poor households.[18, 30, 31]

High rates of grade repetition have been recorded in numerous studies. For example, a study of children's progress at school found that only about 44% of young adults (aged 21 – 29) had matriculated, and of these less than half had matriculated 'on time'.[32] This was based on 2008 data from the National Income Dynamics Study. In 2016, only 51% of young people aged 20 – 24 had completed a matric or matric equivalent.[33] In South Africa, the labour market returns to education only start kicking in on successful completion of matric, not before. However, it is important to monitor progress and grade repetition in the earlier grades as slow progress at school is a strong determinant of school drop-out.[6]

Assuming that children are enrolled in primary school at the prescribed age (by the year in which they turn seven) and assuming that they do not repeat a grade or drop out of school, they would be expected to have completed the foundation phase (Grade 3) by the year that they turn nine, and the general education phase (Grade 9) by the year they turn 15.

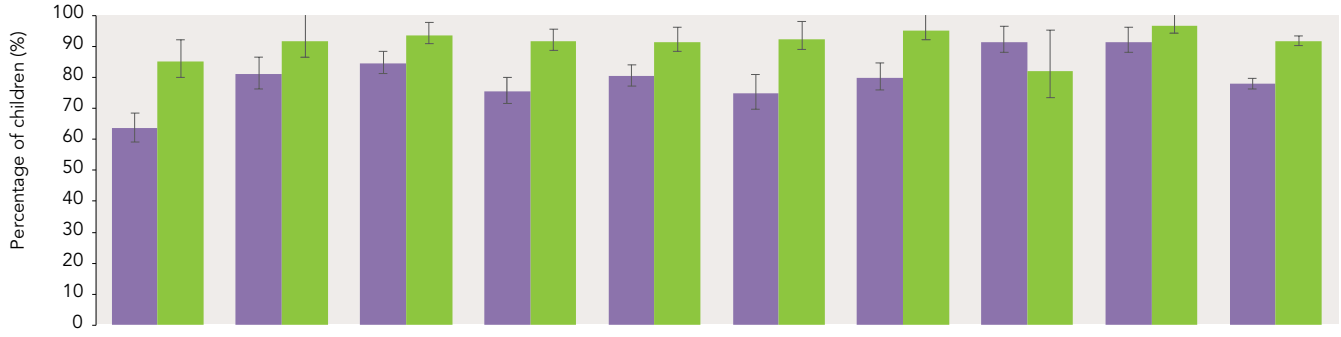
This indicator allows a little more leeway: it measures the number and percentage of children aged 10 and 11 who have completed a minimum of Grade 3, and the percentage of those aged 16 and 17 who have completed a minimum of Grade 9. In other words, it allows for the older cohort in each group to have repeated one grade.

In 2020, 92% of all children aged 10 and 11 were reported to have completed Grade 3. This was up from 78% in 2002. An improvement in progress through the foundation phase was evident across most of the provinces, with significant advances in the Eastern Cape (from 64% in 2002 to 85% in 2020), North West (from 80% to 95%), Mpumalanga (75% to 92%), Limpopo (80% to 91%) and KwaZulu-Natal (75% to 92%). These improvements have narrowed the gap between provinces.

As would be expected, the rate of progression through the entire general education and training band (Grades 1 – 9) is lower, as there is more time for children to have repeated or dropped out by Grade 9. Nearly seventy percent of children aged 16 – 17 years had completed Grade 9 in 2020. This represents an overall improvement of almost 20 percentage points over the 16-year period, from 50% in 2002. Provincial variation is slightly more pronounced than for progress through the foundation phase: Gauteng and Mpumalanga had the highest rate of grade 9 progression (75%), followed by the Western Cape (74%). Progress was poorest in the North West and Eastern Cape, where less than 60% (57% and 58% respectively) of children had completed Grade 9 by the expected age.

As found in other analyses of transitions through school,[10, 15, 34] educational attainment (measured by progress through school)

Figure 4d: Children aged 10 – 11 years who passed Grade 3, by province, 2002 & 2020



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	63,7%	81,0%	84,5%	75,4%	80,5%	74,8%	79,9%	91,5%	91,3%	77,9%
	215,000	94,000	272,000	374,000	223,000	136,000	108,000	46,000	169,000	1,637,000
2020	85,0%	91,5%	93,4%	91,5%	91,4%	92,3%	94,9%	82,0%	96,6%	91,7%
	261,000	117,000	426,000	479,000	220,000	192,000	149,000	40,000	232,000	2,117,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2021) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2020*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

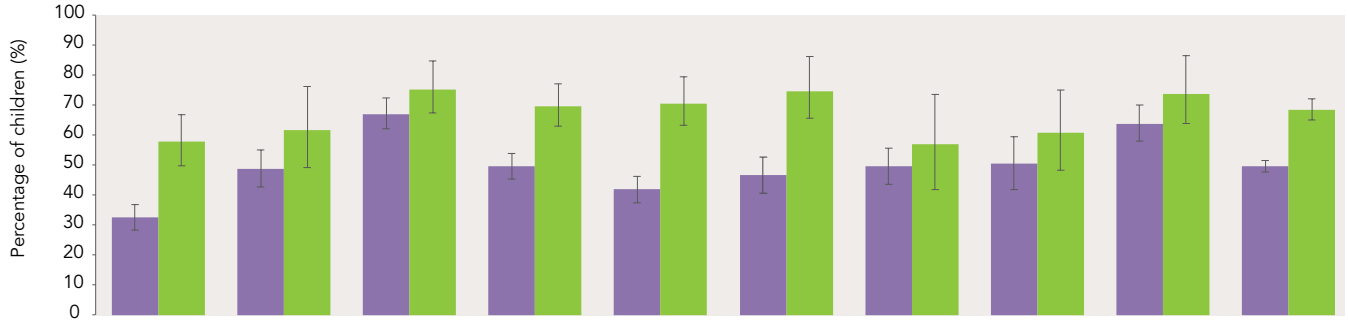
varies along socio-economic and racial lines. These differences become more pronounced as children advance through the grades. Gender differences in school progression, on the other hand, have remained consistent and even widened over the years: girls are more likely than boys to progress through school at the expected rate and the difference becomes more pronounced in the higher grades. In 2020, 94% of girls aged 10 – 11 had completed Grade 3, compared with 90% of boys; in the same year, 79% of 16 – 17-year-old girls had completed Grade 9, compared with only 59% of boys in the same age cohort. This finding is consistent with analyses elsewhere.[6, 35]

There are significant differences in grade completion across income quintiles, especially amongst children who have completed Grade 9: in 2020, 66% of 16 – 17-year-olds in the poorest 20% of households had completed Grade 9, compared to 79% in the richest 20% of households.

The most striking improvements in grade progression, at both Grade 3 and Grade 9 level, occurred through the years between 2002 and 2010. The rate of improvement has slowed and in some years remained stable since then.

Of course, grade progression and grade repetition are not easy to interpret. Prior to Grade 12, the promotion of a child to the next grade is based mainly on assessment by teachers, and the measure may be confounded by the teacher's competence to assess the performance of the child, as well as pressure on teachers and/or schools to promote children through the system. Analyses of the determinants of school progress and drop-out point to a range of factors, many of which are interrelated: there is huge variation in the quality of education offered by schools. These differences largely reflect the historic organisation of schools into racially defined and inequitably resourced education departments. Household-level characteristics and family background also account for some of the variation in grade progression. For example, the level of education achieved by a child's mother explains some of the difference in whether children are enrolled at an appropriate age and whether they go on to complete matric successfully.[32] This in turn suggests that improved educational outcomes for children will have a cumulative positive effect for each subsequent generation.

Figure 4e: Children aged 16 – 17 who passed grade 9, by province, 2002 & 2020



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	32,7%	48,9%	67,1%	49,6%	41,9%	46,8%	49,7%	50,7%	63,8%	49,6%
	113,000	55,000	225,000	238,000	122,000	80,000	64,000	21,000	120,000	1,037,000
2020	58,0%	61,8%	75,1%	69,7%	70,7%	74,7%	57,0%	61,0%	73,7%	68,6%
	152,000	69,000	317,000	268,000	139,000	109,000	85,000	27,000	165,000	1,329,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2021) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2020.* Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

'NEET' is a term used to describe young people who are not in employment, education or training. The definition used here includes youth aged 15 – 24 who are not attending any educational institution and who are not employed or self-employed.[36]

Widespread concerns about the large numbers of youth in this situation centre on two main issues: the perpetuation of poverty and inequality, including intergenerational poverty; and the possible implications of a large 'idle' youth population for risk behaviour, social cohesion and the safety of communities.

Little is known about what NEETs actually do with their time. Young people who are neither learning nor engaged in income-generating activities may neverthless be "productive" within their households, for example by helping to maintain the home or looking after children and others in need of care. However, in the absence of income, NEETs remain dependent on the earnings of other household members, and on grants that are directed to children and the elderly. The Old Age Pension in particular has been found to support job-seeking activities for young people[37] and it has been argued that this unenvisaged expenditure of the grant could be addressed by extending social security to unemployed youth.[38]

The large number of NEETs in South Africa is linked to underlying problems in the education system and the labour market. Young people in South Africa have very high participation rates in education, including at secondary level. Enrolment rates

for Grades 11 and 12 have increased in recent years and more young people attain Grade 12 (and at an earlier age).[39] But there is still a sharp drop-off in enrolment numbers after Grade 10 and only about half of young people in their early twenties have successfully completed Grade 12.[33, 39] This reduces prospects for further study or employment.[40] Low quality and incomplete education represent what are termed the 'supply-side' drivers of youth unemployment, where young people do not have the appropriate skills or work-related capabilities to be employable or to set up successful enterprises of their own, and so struggle to make the transition from education to work.[41, 42] The 'demand-side' driver relates to a shortage of jobs or self-employment opportunities for those who are available to work.

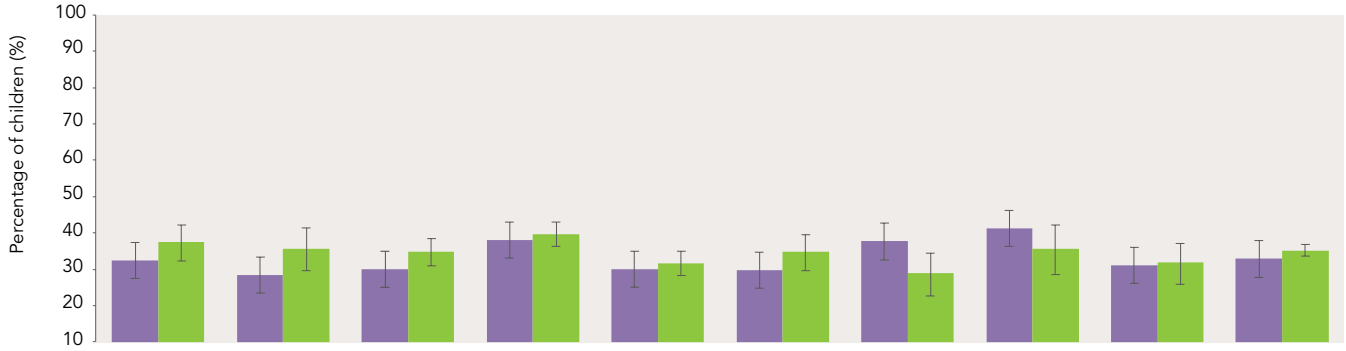
In 2020, there were 9.6 million young people aged 15 – 24 in South Africa. Of these, 35% (3.4 million) were neither working nor enrolled in any education institution such as a school, university or college. The number of young people nationally who are not in education, training or employment has remained remarkably consistent over the last decade, but has increased over the two decades since 1996 when only two million NEETs were recorded.[43] South Africa has made no progress towards what is now an explicit target of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training by 2020.[44] If anything, the number of NEETs has increased marginally.

The NEET rates are fairly even across the provinces. This is hard to interpret without further analysis. Limpopo, for example, is a very poor and largely rural province. It is possible that the slightly lower-than-average percentage of NEETs in that province is partly the result of many young people migrating to cities in search of work and they are therefore counted among the NEETs in more urban provinces. It is possible that young people who are not employed in the labour market may nevertheless be employed in small-scale agriculture if their household has access to land, and this could also help to smooth the provincial inequalities that are characteristic of many other indicators.

There is enormous variation within the broad youth group of 15 – 24 years. Only 4% of children aged 15 – 17 are classified as NEET because the majority are attending school. Within the 18 – 20 age band, 32% are NEETs, and nearly two thirdsf (63%) of those in the 21 – 24 age band are neither working nor in education or training.

While education attendance rates are fairly even for males and females, the gender disparity among NEETs is more pronounced. Thirty-seven percent of young women are not in employment, education or training – compared with 33% of young men.

Figure 4f: Youth (15 – 24 years) not in employment, education or training (NEETs), by province, 2002 & 2020



	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	**SA**
2002	32,4%	28,5%	30,0%	38,1%	30,1%	29,7%	37,6%	41,3%	31,1%	32,8%
	436,000	150,000	568,000	783,000	338,000	213,000	229,000	76,000	294,000	3,086,000
2020	37,4%	35,7%	34,8%	39,7%	31,7%	34,8%	28,9%	35,7%	31,8%	35,1%
	394,000	175,000	801,000	807,000	317,000	271,000	190,000	79,000	342,000	3,377,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2021) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2020*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

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