

CHILD GAUGE 2015

Grants help support half a million more kids

There has been a surge in children getting state aid, according to the Child Gauge launched today, but large numbers still live in extreme poverty, writes **Kerry Cullinan**

MUCH has improved over the past year for children, with an astounding 580 000 more getting child support grants in a single year.

By the end of March, 11.7 million children were getting the R330 grant, described by the Child Gauge as the "single biggest programme for alleviating child poverty in South Africa".

As there are slightly more than 18 million children in South Africa, this means almost two-thirds are on child support grants.

"Income poverty rates have fallen consistently since 2003. This poverty reduction is largely the result of a massive expansion in the reach of the grant over the same period," reports the Gauge, which is produced by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town.

"There is substantial evidence that grants are being spent on food, education and basic goods and services.

"This evidence shows that the grant not only helps to realise children's right to social assistance, but is also associated with improved nutritional, health and education outcomes."

But large numbers of children still live in extreme poverty. In 2013 (latest year for figures), over 10 million children lived below the "lower bound" poverty line of R671 a person per month.

Poverty still has a distinct racial and geographic profile. While 61 percent of African children lived in poor households in 2013, only 3 percent of white children and 6 percent of Indian children did.

Poverty was highest in the more rural provinces. Over two-thirds of children in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape are poor. Around one-third of Gauteng's children and a quarter of those in the Western Cape are poor.

About 35 percent of African children have no working adult at home, while this is the case for 12 percent of coloured children, 6 percent of Indian children and only 2 percent of white children. Family statis-



REALISING RIGHTS: More children in South Africa are receiving social grants, the South African Child Gauge, annual research on children's status, shows. PICTURE: HENK KRUGER/CAPE ARGUS

tics show an absence of fathers across all race groups.

By 2013, slightly more than one-third of children lived with both their biological parents. This is a decrease of 4 percent over the past decade. While 39 percent of children lived with their mothers, only 3 percent lived just with their fathers.

Over one-fifth of children lived with neither parents. This was most common in the Eastern Cape, where about one-third of kids are living

with neither parent.

Poor and African children were least likely to live with their parents. One-fifth of children from the poorest households lived with neither parent.

Fewer than one-third of African children lived with both their parents.

In contrast, the vast majority of Indian (84 percent) and white children (77 percent) did.

Teen pregnancy has been reducing steadily since 1984, when 42 percent of girls under the age of 20 had given birth.

By 2011, 30 percent of girls under 20 had given birth. Babies born to teen moms have poorer developmental outcomes while pregnancy is dangerous for very young mothers as their bodies are not ready to carry babies.

But teen pregnancy also affects the teen mother's educational prospects.

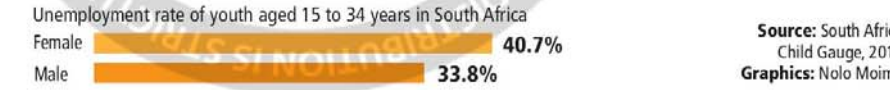
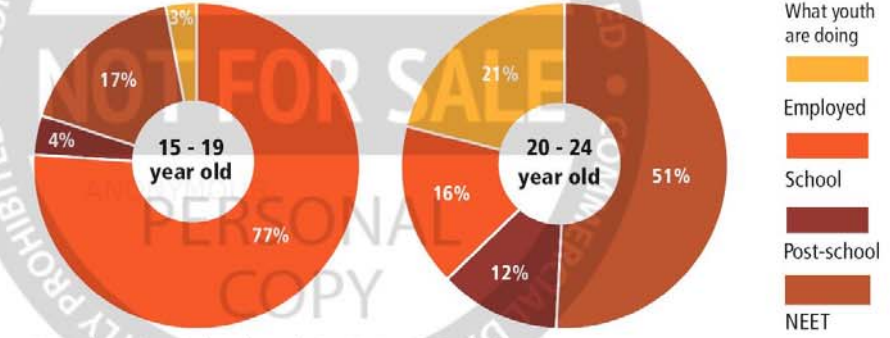
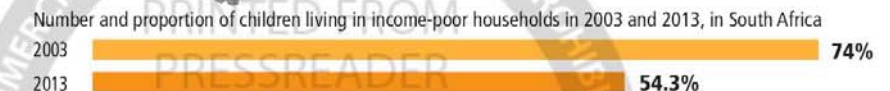
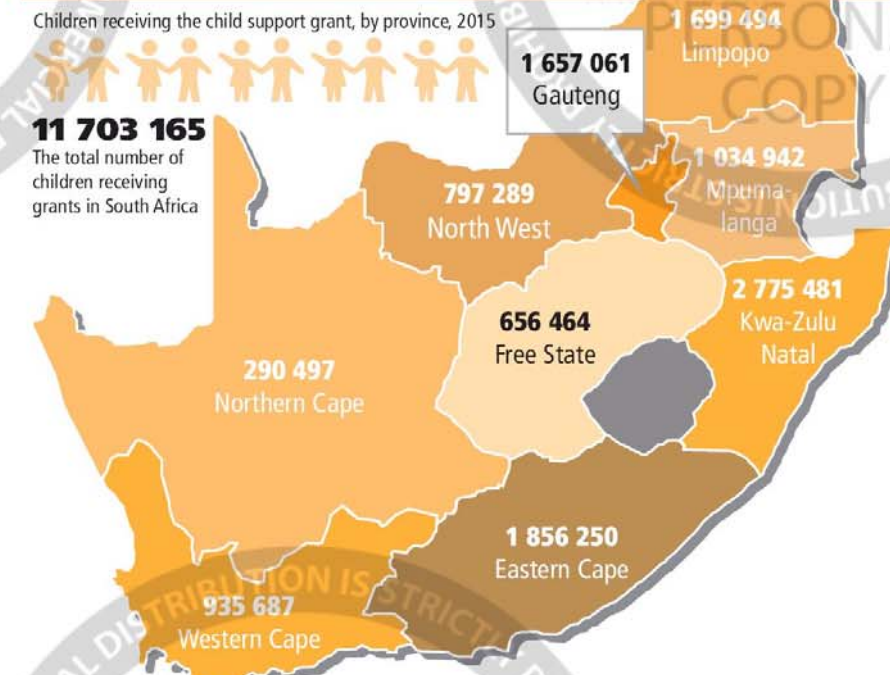
In 2010, there were 480 157 girls attending in Grade 8 in the country but last year, there were only 289 795. This means that 190 362 had dropped out,

and the gauge estimates that a third of the drop-outs were because of pregnancies.

There have been some changes to the law to the benefit of children. The biggest change has been amendments to the Sexual Offences Act to decriminalise sexual acts between consenting teenagers aged between 12 and 15, as long as the age gap is not more than two years.

In the past, these children were automatically guilty of statutory rape.

AT A GLANCE



Source: South Africa Child Gauge, 2015
Graphics: Nolo Moima

However, 16 remains the age of consent for sex with an adult aged 18 years and above.

While the gauge welcomes the National Youth Policy 2015 to 2020, adopted by cabinet in May, it warns that it won't be able to meet many of its targets without "clear lines of accountability, and strong leadership".

The policy recommends setting up a youth presidential working group comprising all deputy ministers to mainstream youth across the gov-

ernment, but relies for implementation on "youth desks" that have never been able to deliver. "The new policy's engagement with non-governmental organisations relies on, and seeks to strengthen, the South African Youth Council (SAYC). The SAYC has a very poor reach and is generally unresponsive and perceived to be politically aligned. The singular reliance on the SAYC as a voice for the youth in the policy is extremely worrying," notes the gauge.

Meanwhile, Buti Manamela, deputy minister in the Presidency, has welcomed the gauge: "The research presented will help us to better understand the situation of youth in present-day South Africa so that our policies and programmes can be relevant to their needs and aspirations. "I urge policy-makers and youth development practitioners to read this publication for a better grasp on our work with young people across South Africa." - Health-e News