

Children's access to housing

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Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa provides that "everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing", and section 28(1)(c) gives children "the right to ... shelter".

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his/her development" and obliges the State "in cases of need" to "provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to ... housing".

The number and proportion of children living in adequate housing

This indicator shows the number and proportion of children living in formal housing, which is used as a proxy for 'adequate' housing. For the purposes of the indicator, 'formal' housing consists of: dwellings or brick structures on separate stands; flats or apartments; town/cluster/semi-detached houses; units in retirement villages; and rooms or flatlets on larger properties. 'Informal' housing consists of: informal dwellings or shacks in backyards or informal settlements; dwellings or houses/flats/rooms in backyards; and caravans or tents. 'Traditional dwelling' is defined as a 'traditional dwelling/hut/structure made of traditional materials'. These dwelling types are listed in the General Household Survey (2002 – 2007), which is the data source for this indicator.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) identifies "access to services" as one of the key elements of adequate housing. Children living in formal areas are more likely to have services on site than those living in informal or traditional dwellings. They are also more likely to be close to facilities like schools, libraries, clinics and hospitals.

Adequate housing must also be 'habitable' (provide physical safety, protect from the elements, not be over-crowded). Informal housing in backyards and informal settlements makes up the bulk of the housing backlog in South Africa and is generally not habitable in these terms.

In 2007, just over 2.6 million children in South Africa lived in backyard dwellings or shacks in informal settlements. While there has been an increase of nearly 300,000 children in informal households since 2002, the distribution of children in

formal, informal and traditional dwellings has remained fairly constant over the six-year period. This is surprising, given the delivery of over 2.5 million houses since 1994.

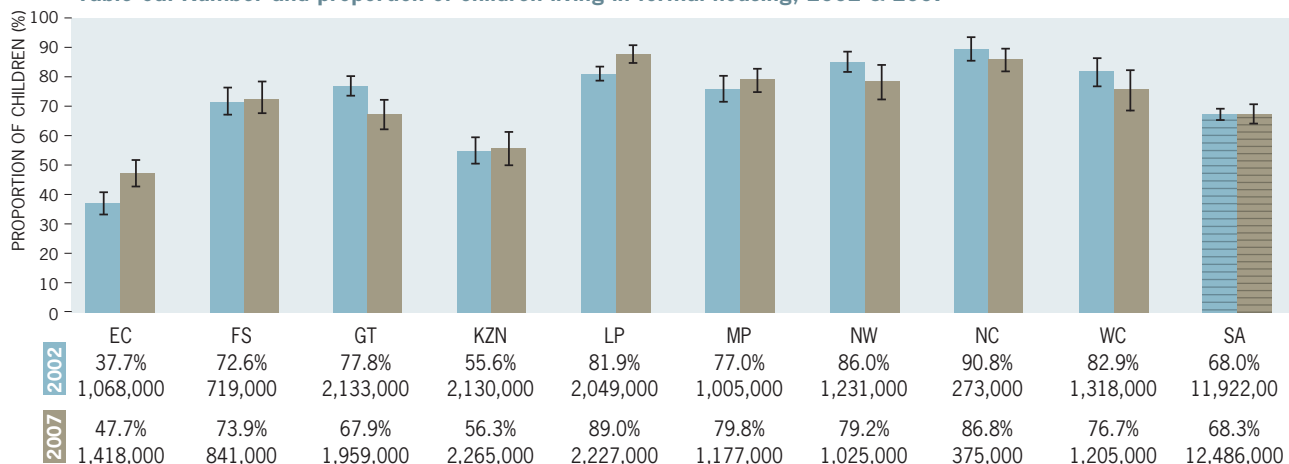
The greatest proportions of inadequately housed children are in provinces with large metropolitan centres and small rural populations. Forty-two percent of children in informal housing are 0 – 5 years old. These children are more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards such as shack fires and paraffin poisoning than those in formal housing.

The proportion of children in informal dwellings in Gauteng has increased from 22% to 32% between 2002 and 2007, despite the fact that over a quarter of all subsidy-linked houses have been delivered in this province. Limpopo has the lowest proportion (3%) of children in informal housing and the highest proportion in formal dwellings. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal also have low proportions of children (less than 10%) in informal housing — and have the largest proportions of children living in traditional dwellings (44% and 36% respectively).

The General Household Survey shows persistent racial inequalities. Ninety-eight percent of White children live in formal housing, compared with only 63% of African children.

Housing provides the context for family life. Many children live apart from their biological parents due to adult mobility and migrant labour (see *Demography* on pp. 71 – 78). It is possible that increased delivery and the prioritisation of women in the urban housing process would enable more children to live with one or both parents.

Table 6a: Number and proportion of children living in formal housing, 2002 & 2007



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2008) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2007*. Pretoria, Cape Town: StatsSA. Analysis by Double-Hugh Marera & Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as persons aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 103 – 104. ④ The confidence intervals, shown on the graph as a vertical line at the top of each bar, represent the range into which the true value may fall. See p. 69 for more details on confidence intervals. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

The number and proportion of children living in over-crowded households

Children are defined as living in over-crowded households when there is a ratio of more than two people per room (excluding bathrooms but including kitchen and living room).

The UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights defines ‘habitability’ as one of the criteria for adequate housing. Over-crowding is a problem because it can undermine children’s needs and rights. For instance, it is difficult for school children to do homework if other household members want to sleep or watch television. Children’s right to privacy can be infringed if they do not have space to wash or change in private. The right to health can be infringed as communicable diseases spread more easily in over-crowded conditions. Over-crowding also places children at greater risk of sexual abuse, especially where boys and girls have to share beds, or children have to sleep with adults. Analyses of the General Household Survey (2002 – 2007) show that children under the age of six years are more likely than older children to live in over-crowded households.

Over-crowding makes it difficult to target services and programmes to households effectively. For instance, urban households are entitled to six kilolitres of free water, but this household-level allocation discriminates against over-crowded households because it does not take household size into account.

Nearly 4.8 million children lived in over-crowded households in 2007. This represents a quarter (26%) of the child population

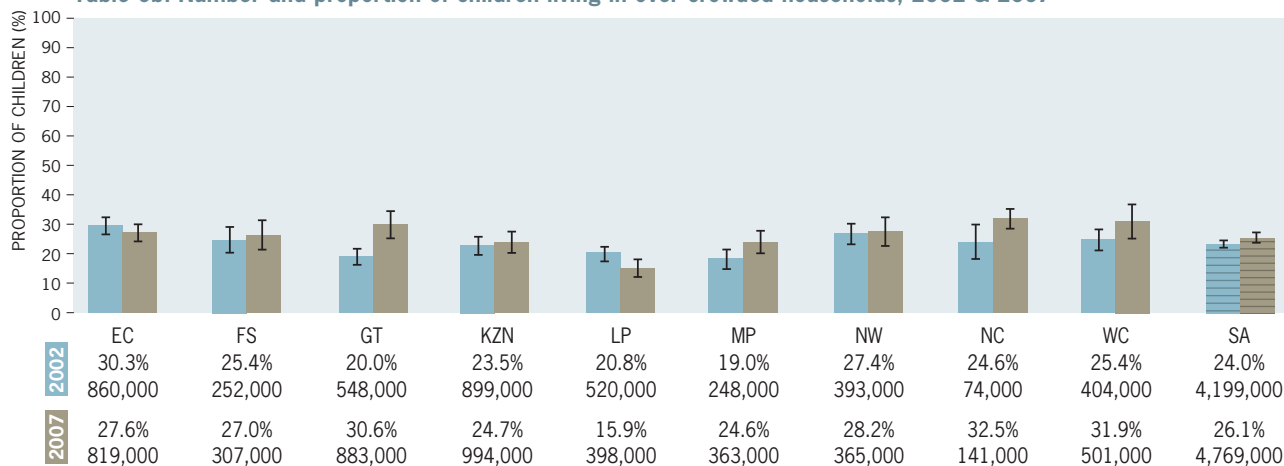
— much higher than the proportion of adults living in crowded conditions (16%). Over-crowding is associated with housing type: 54% of children who stay in informal dwellings also live in over-crowded conditions, compared with 28% of children in traditional dwellings and 19% of children in formal housing.

Provincial trends in over-crowding parallel trends in housing type. In Gauteng there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children living in over-crowded and informal households between 2002 and 2007 — despite the massive roll-out of subsidy housing in the province. Small but steady increases in over-crowding are found in the Northern and Western Cape (from 25% to 33% of children in each province), while Limpopo shows a slight drop in over-crowding.

There is a strong racial bias in children’s housing conditions. Coloured children (33%) and African children (27%) are significantly more likely to live in crowded conditions than Indian and White children (8% and 1% respectively).

The average household size has gradually decreased from 4.5 in 1996 to 3.8 in 2007, indicating a trend towards smaller households, which may in turn be linked to the provision of small subsidy houses. Households in which children live are much larger than the national average. The median household size for adult-only households is one person, while the median for households with children is five members.

Table 6b: Number and proportion of children living in over-crowded households, 2002 & 2007



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2008) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2007*. Pretoria, Cape Town: StatsSA. Analysis by Double-Hugh Marera & Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as persons aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 103 – 104. ④ The confidence intervals, shown on the graph as a vertical line at the top of each bar, represent the range into which the true value may fall. See p. 69 for more details on confidence intervals. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

Additional sources for housing

- *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996.*
- Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25*. Geneva: United Nations.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1991) *The Right to Adequate Housing (Art.11 (1)): 13/12/91. CESCR General comment 4. (General Comments)*. Geneva: United Nations.