

# Demography of South Africa's children

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The UN General Guidelines for Periodic Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>, paragraph 7, says that reports made by states should be accompanied by “detailed statistical information ... Quantitative information should indicate variations between various areas of the country ... and between groups of children ...”.

## The number and proportion of children living in South Africa

In mid-2009, South Africa's total population was estimated at 49.4 million people, of whom 18.6 million were children (under 18 years). Children therefore constitute 38% of the total population. The child population has grown by about 6% (1.1 million) from 2002 to 2009.

Exactly half of all children live in three of the nine provinces: KwaZulu-Natal (23%), Eastern Cape (15%) and Limpopo (12%). A further 17% of children live in Gauteng, a mainly metropolitan province, and 10% in the Western Cape. It is not uncommon for children to live separately from their biological parents, due to labour migration and care arrangements that involve extended families.

The distribution of children across provinces is slightly different to that of adults, with a greater proportion of

children living in provinces with large rural populations (Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal) and with greater proportions of adults in the largely metropolitan provinces. Despite being the smallest province in the country, Gauteng accommodates nearly a quarter (24%) of all adults, and 25% of households, but only 17% of children. This is because of the relatively large number of adult-only households in that province.

Children are fairly equally distributed across the age groups, with roughly one million children in each age year under 18. The gender split is fairly equal too – 51% boys and 49% girls – while the adult population is slightly skewed towards women (54%).

**Table 1a: Distribution of households, adults and children in South Africa, 2009**

Province	Households		Adults		Children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Eastern Cape	1,691,000	13	3,886,000	13	2,763,000	15
Free State	826,000	6	1,838,000	6	1,067,000	6
Gauteng	3,279,000	25	7,318,000	24	3,238,000	17
KwaZulu-Natal	2,488,000	19	6,184,000	20	4,277,000	23
Limpopo	1,284,000	10	2,917,000	9	2,313,000	12
Mpumalanga	933,000	7	2,136,000	7	1,474,000	8
North West	993,000	7	2,177,000	7	1,277,000	7
Northern Cape	300,000	2	713,000	2	435,000	2
Western Cape	1,513,000	11	3,606,000	12	1,764,000	9
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>13,308,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30,774,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>18,607,000</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2010) *General Household Survey 2009*. Pretoria: Stats SA.  
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Andile Mayekiso, Children's Institute, UCT.

**Notes:** ① Children are defined as people 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. 104 – 106. ④ See [www.childrencount.ci.org.za](http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za) for more information.

## The number and proportion of children living with their biological parents

South Africa has a long history of children not living consistently with their biological parents as a result of poverty, labour migration, educational opportunities or cultural practice. Many children experience a sequence of different caregivers or are raised without fathers.

This indicator shows the number and proportion of children in South Africa who are living in the same household as both their biological parents; their mother only; their father only; or who are not living with either of their biological parents.

The General Household Survey 2009 indicates that 34% of children in South Africa live with both their biological parents. Thirty-nine percent of all children – more than seven million children – live with their mothers but without their fathers. Only 3% of children live in households where their fathers are present and their mothers absent. Twenty-four percent of children live with neither biological parent. This does not necessarily mean that they are orphaned: In most cases (78%) at least one parent is still alive, and half of all children who live without co-resident parents have both parents living elsewhere.

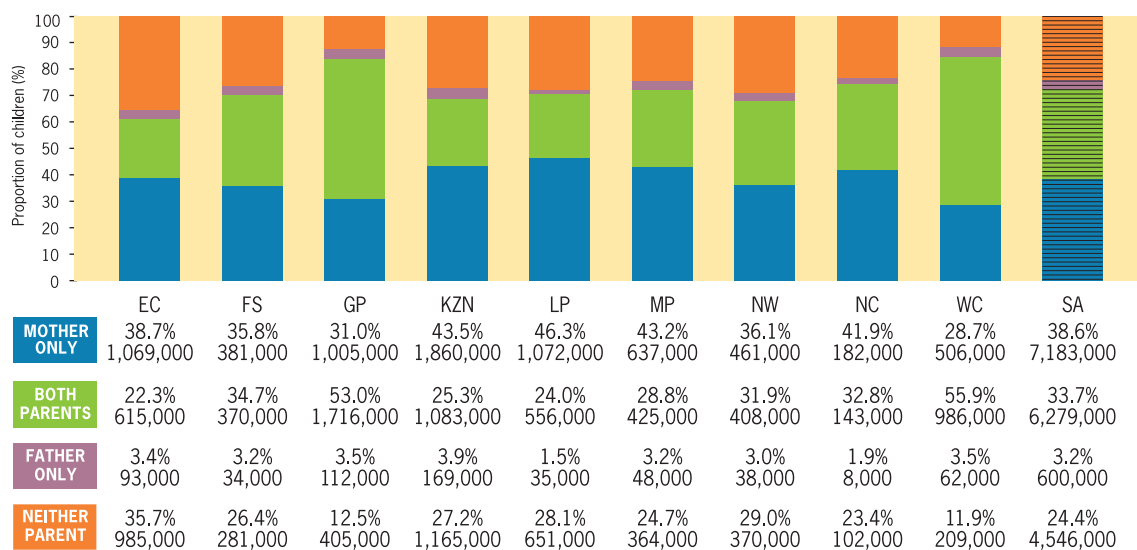
In both the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces, the proportion of children living with both parents is significantly

higher than the national average, with more than half of children resident with both parents (56% and 53% respectively). Similarly, the number of children living with neither parent is low in these two provinces (12% and 13%). In contrast, over a third of children (36%) in the Eastern Cape live with neither parent. These patterns are consistent from 2002 to 2009.

Less than one third (28%) of African children live with both their parents, while the vast majority of Indian and White children (84% and 85% respectively) are resident with both biological parents. Just over one quarter (27%) of all African children do not live with either parent, and a further 42% of African children live with their mothers and without their fathers. These figures indicate an absence of fathers in the domestic lives of large numbers of African children.

Younger children (0 – 5-year-olds) are more likely to be living with their mothers (whether or not their fathers are present) than older children (6 – 17 years), who are more likely than younger children to be living with neither parent. While 15% of children aged 0 – 5 years were not resident with either parent in 2009, this situation applied to 29% of children aged 6 – 17 years.

**Table 1b: Number and proportion of children living with biological parents, 2009**



**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2010) *General Household Survey 2009*. Pretoria: Stats SA.  
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Andile Mayekiso, Children's Institute, UCT.

**Notes:** ① Children are defined as people 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. 104 – 106. ④ See [www.childrencount.ci.org.za](http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za) for more information.

## The number and proportion of orphans living in South Africa

An orphan is defined as a child under the age of 18 years whose mother, father, or both biological parents have died (including those whose living status is reported as unknown, but excluding those whose living status is unspecified). For the purpose of this indicator, orphans are defined in three mutually exclusive categories:

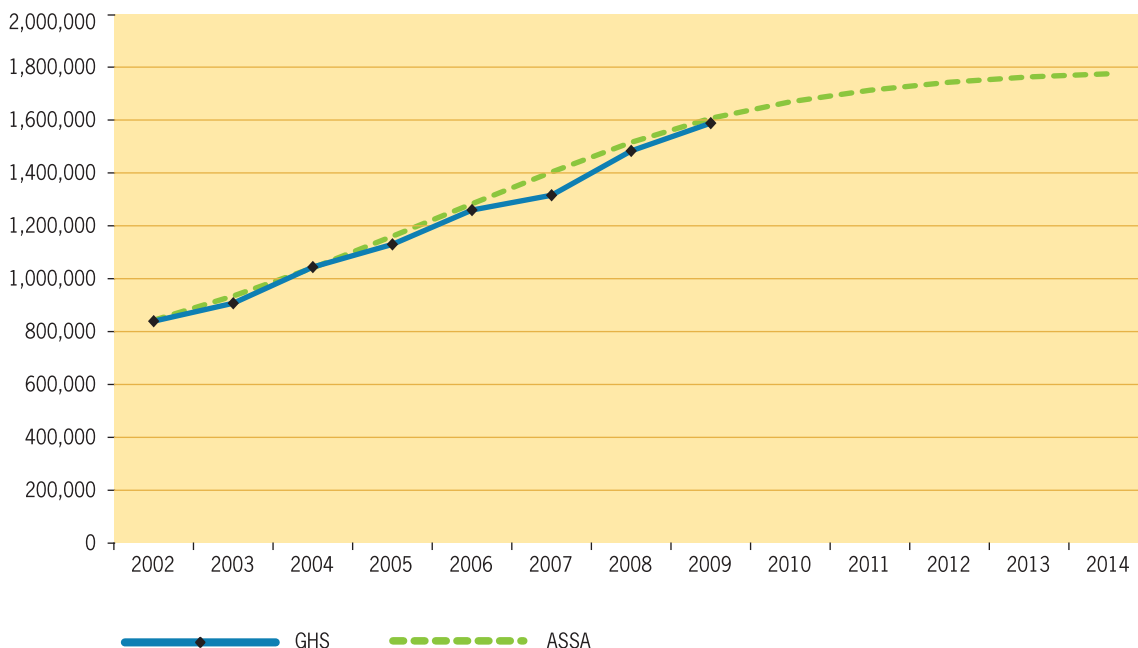
- A maternal orphan is a child whose mother has died but whose father is alive.
- A paternal orphan is a child whose father has died but whose mother is alive.
- A double orphan is a child whose mother and father have both died.

The total number of orphans is the sum of maternal, paternal and double orphans. This definition differs from those commonly used by United Nations agencies and the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA), where the definition of maternal and paternal orphans includes children who are double orphans. As the orphan definitions used here are mutually exclusive and additive, the figures differ from orphan estimates provided by the ASSA models.

The 2009 General Household Survey (GHS) indicates that there were approximately 4.3 million orphans in South Africa. This includes children without a living biological mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 23% of all children in South Africa. The total number of orphans has increased substantially, with over one million more orphaned children in 2009 than in 2002. This is equivalent to an increase of almost six percentage points in the total orphan population since 2002.

Importantly, the total number of children whose mothers are deceased or whose vital status is unknown (maternal and double orphans) has almost doubled between 2002 and 2009. The estimated number of children without living mothers is shown below for each year, comparing weighted numbers from the GHS and estimates from the newly-released ASSA2008 model. The GHS figures are very similar to the ASSA estimates for all years except 2007. Maternal orphaning rates are expected to start declining from 2010, and should level out by 2015. However, it is not until 2025 that they will fall to 2009 levels, according to ASSA projections.

**Figure 1a: Actual and projected number of children without living mothers (maternal & double orphans), by year**



**Sources:** Statistics South Africa (2003 – 2010) *General Household Surveys 2002 – 2009*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Actuarial Society of South Africa (2011) *ASSA2008 AIDS and Demographic Model*. Available: [www.actuarialsociety.org.za](http://www.actuarialsociety.org.za).

Orphan numbers are not necessarily a good indicator of the nature or extent of care that children are receiving: While only 30% of maternal orphans are resident with their father, 68% of paternal orphans have a living co-resident mother. Child-rearing in South Africa has long been characterised by the presence of multiple caregivers and the involvement of broad kinship networks in the lives of children with and without living parents. The vast majority of double orphans in South Africa (and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa) live with relatives.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to disaggregate the total orphan figures because the death of one parent may have different implications for children than the death of both parents, and the death of a mother is likely to have a greater impact on children's lives than the absence of a father.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, 14% of children (2,655,000) were paternal orphans (whose mothers were still alive), 3% (approximately 622,000 children) were documented as "maternal orphans" (with living fathers); and a further 5% (966,000) were recorded as double orphans. In other words, the majority (63%) of all orphans in South Africa are paternal orphans. The

numbers of paternal orphans are high because of the higher mortality rates of men in South Africa, as well as the frequent absence of fathers in children's lives (4% of paternal orphans – or 750,000 children – have fathers whose vital status is reported to be "unknown").

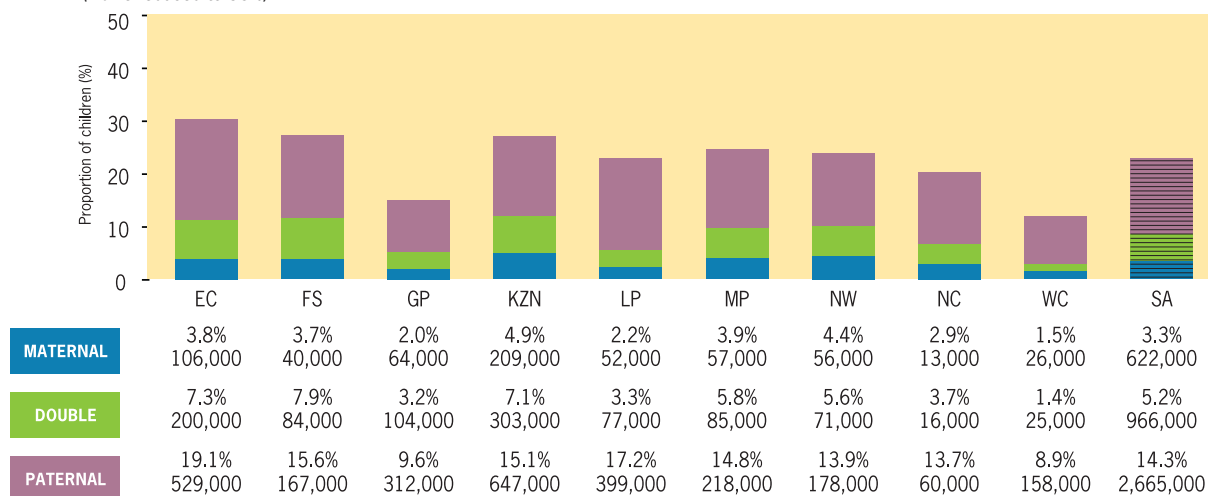
The figures illustrate notable increases in the number and proportion of double orphans over an eight-year period: The number of children who have lost both a mother and a father has more than doubled since 2002 (from approximately 352,000 to 966,000), indicating an increase of three percentage points in double orphans as a proportion of all children in South Africa (2002: 2%; 2009: 5%). These increases are likely to be driven primarily by the AIDS pandemic.

Roughly half of all orphans in South Africa are resident in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. These orphans account for 27% and 30% of the child population in each province respectively.

In 2009, 77% of all child orphans were of school-going age (between seven and 17-years-old) and half (49%) were 12 years or older.

**Table 1c: Number and proportion of orphans, 2009**

(Y-axis reduced to 50%)



**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2010) General Household Survey 2009. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

**Notes:** ① Children are defined as people aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand.

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## The number and proportion of children living in child-only households

A child-only household is defined as a household in which all members are younger than 18 years. These households are also commonly known as “child-headed households”.

There is widespread concern that the number of children living in child-only households is escalating as the numbers of orphaned children increase due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many argue that kinship networks are stretched to their limits and are struggling to support orphaned children.

An analysis of the 2009 General Household Survey (GHS) indicates that there were 95,000 children living in a total of 49,000 child-only households across South Africa. This equates to 0.5% of all children and 0.4% of all households. While this is a very small proportion of children in South Africa, the number is nonetheless cause for concern: A recent analysis of South African survey data reveals that children in child-only households are at risk of poorer living conditions, less – and less reliable – income, and worse access to services than other children.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, there has been no significant change in the proportion of children living in child-only households from 2002 to 2009. This is despite a marked increase in

orphans in South Africa: Research indicates that contrary to common perception, the vast majority of children living in child-headed households have a living parent.<sup>5</sup>

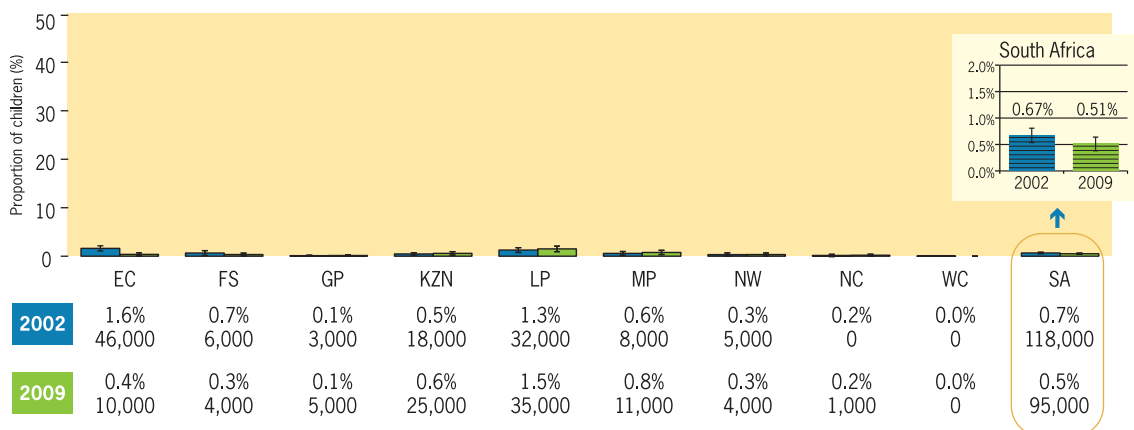
While it is not ideal for any child to live without an adult present, it is positive that half (50%) of all children living in child-only households in 2009 were over 14 years, and 83% were over 10 years. Almost two-thirds of children in child-only households live in two provinces: Limpopo (37%), and KwaZulu-Natal (26%). The only real change in the prevalence of child-headed households appears to be in the Eastern Cape, where the proportion of children living in these circumstances has dropped since 2002.

Research suggests that child-only households often exist for a short period, for example after the death of an adult and prior to other child care arrangements being made.<sup>6</sup>

There has been very little robust data on child-only (or “child-headed”) households in South Africa to date. The figures should be treated with caution as the number of child-only households forms just a very small sub-sample of the GHS. In particular, we caution against reading too much into the provincial breakdowns, or into apparent differences between the 2002 and 2009 estimates.

**Table 1d: Number and proportion of children living in child-headed households, 2002 & 2009**

(Y-axis reduced to 50%)



**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2010) *General Household Survey 2009*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

**Notes:** ① Children are defined as people 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. 104 – 106. 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. 77 for more details on confidence intervals.

⑤ See [www.childrencount.ci.org.za](http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za) for more information.

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- See no. 4 above.
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- See no. 2 above (Hill et al).