

Children's access to education

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Section 29 (1) (a) of the Constitution of South Africa states that "everyone has the right to a basic education".

Article 28 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that States Parties should recognise "the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity ...".

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for children enrolled in ordinary schools in South Africa in 2001

Education is a critical socio-economic right that provides the foundation for children's lifelong learning and work opportunities. On the whole, the Gross Enrolment Ratio¹ indicates that children's participation levels in the South African schooling system are high. However, children may be enrolled in school but not necessarily attending regularly.

In 2001, the national GER for primary and secondary school stood at 103%. It was lower for secondary schools (86%) but the ratio remained high for primary schools, at 117%. Rates of over 100% indicate the proportions of under- and over-aged children

enrolled in the school system. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER)² tells us about the proportion of age-appropriate children that are enrolled in a particular school phase, e.g. primary school phase. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the NER in South Africa in 2002/03 was 89% for the primary school phase, and an estimated 66% for the secondary school phase. It is concerning that an estimated one-third of the population of secondary school-aged children was not enrolled in secondary school in 2002/03. (For more details about this indicator refer to page 69.)

Table 19: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for children enrolled in ordinary schools in South Africa in 2001

Province	Primary school		Secondary school		Total	
	Number of learners	Ratio	Number of learners	Ratio	Number of learners	Ratio
Eastern Cape	1,421,752	125	585,998	67	2,007,750	100
Free State	433,142	117	260,474	89	693,616	105
Gauteng	963,633	112	568,178	96	1,531,811	106
KwaZulu-Natal	1,685,113	122	931,615	91	2,616,728	109
Limpopo	1,063,960	110	647,917	90	1,711,877	101
Mpumalanga	564,205	122	331,829	97	896,034	111
Northern Cape	128,277	100	63,448	66	191,725	86
North West	567,973	108	321,995	85	889,968	98
Western Cape	585,361	111	317,820	82	903,181	99
South Africa	7,413,416	117	4,029,282³	86	11,442,698⁴	103

Source: Department of Education (2003) *Education statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2001*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

¹ The GER is defined as the number of learners enrolled in a school phase regardless of age, as a proportion of the appropriate age group in the population (e.g. 7-year-olds to 18-year-olds) and is expressed as a percentage.

² This indicator is defined as the enrolment of the school age group for a level of education (e.g. primary), expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group. See: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2005) *UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Glossary*. Viewed: 21 September 2005: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/glossary/Term.aspx?name=Net+enrolment+rate&lang=en>.

³ This figure does not reflect the exact sum of the provincial figures.

⁴ This figure does not reflect the exact sum of the provincial figures.

The learner-to-educator ratio for children enrolled in ordinary schools in South Africa in 2001

Educators and classroom assistants are a key resource requirement that aid in the learning process. The number of children per educator in a classroom setting is an important indicator of the individual attention a child receives from the educator. In the context of HIV/AIDS, it is necessary for educators to be in touch with individual children's circumstances and to offer care and support to children in need of assistance. This becomes increasingly difficult if an educator has large numbers of children to attend to.

South Africa has seen a gradual reduction in the learner-to-educator ratio. There are huge differences in the learner-to-educator ratio between public and independent schools. Primary school ratios tend to be higher than secondary school ratios. Provincial analyses show that only the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Limpopo provinces experienced a decrease in the ratio, while the remaining provinces showed an incline between 1999 and 2001 (Department of Education 2001; Department of Education 2003). The differences between provincial ratios indicate that inequity among provinces is still cause for concern. (For more details about this indicator refer to page 69.)

Table 20: The learner-to-educator ratio for children enrolled in ordinary schools in South Africa in 2001

Province	Public and independent schools	
	Number of learners	Ratio
Eastern Cape	2,033,832	33.2
Free State	716,021	31.2
Gauteng	1,561,359	30.7
KwaZulu-Natal	2,698,453	36.3
Limpopo	1,816,189	31.6
Mpumalanga	903,997	36.9
Northern Cape	197,101	31.0
North West	893,144	30.6
Western Cape	918,030	33.7
South Africa	11,738,126	33.1

Source: Department of Education (2003) *Education statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2001*. Pretoria: Department of Education

The number and proportion of children relative to the distance travelled to school⁵ in South Africa in 2004

Access to education is essential to ensure that children are given the opportunity to develop their full potential. It is also a key socio-economic right. The location of a child's school in relation to his or her home can pose a barrier to accessing education. Influencing factors include the availability of transport, community safety and environmental factors. Young children are most vulnerable and in danger of falling victim to foul play if travelling to school by themselves. Children are also likely to be physically tired from their long journey, which has a number of effects on their ability to learn.

According to Budlender's analysis of the *General Household Survey 2004*, of the 7.4 million children of primary school-age living

in South Africa, 1.3 million attend schools that are far from their homes. The majority of these children live in the KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces. Slightly fewer than 5 million children in South Africa are of secondary school-age. Exactly one-third of these children (33%) attend schools that are situated far from their homes. On the whole, one-quarter (25%) of South African school-aged children travel far distances to reach their schools. Of the nine provinces, the Eastern Cape (33%), KwaZulu-Natal (35%), North West (25%), Mpumalanga (29%) and Limpopo (25%) provinces have one-quarter or more of their children attending far-away schools. (For more details about this indicator refer to page 69.)

Table 21: The number and proportion of children relative to the distance travelled to school⁵ in South Africa in 2004

Province	School is not far from home		School is far from home		Total Number
	Number	%	Number	%	
Eastern Cape	1,482,819	67	716,455	33	2,199,274
Free State	564,293	81	129,876	19	694,169
Gauteng	1,476,898	88	198,374	12	1,675,272
KwaZulu-Natal	1,676,442	65	903,824	35	2,580,266
Limpopo	1,374,965	75	446,368	25	1,821,333
Mpumalanga	609,158	71	251,597	29	860,755
Northern Cape	164,924	80	41,469	20	206,393
North West	736,544	75	249,390	25	985,934
Western Cape	951,655	91	96,922	9	1,048,577
South Africa	9,037,698	75	3,034,275	25	12,071,973

Source: Statistics South Africa (2005) *General Household Survey 2004*. Pretoria, Cape Town: Statistics South Africa. Analysis by Debbie Budlender, Centre for Actuarial Research, UCT.

Sources

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⁵ These figures refer to children travelling to primary and secondary schools.