

Children's access to education

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Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution¹ states that “everyone has the right to a basic education”, and section 29(1)(b) states that “everyone has the right to further education” and that the State must make such education “progressively available and accessible.”

Article 11(3)(a) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child² says “States Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realisation of this right and shall in particular ... provide free and compulsory basic education”.

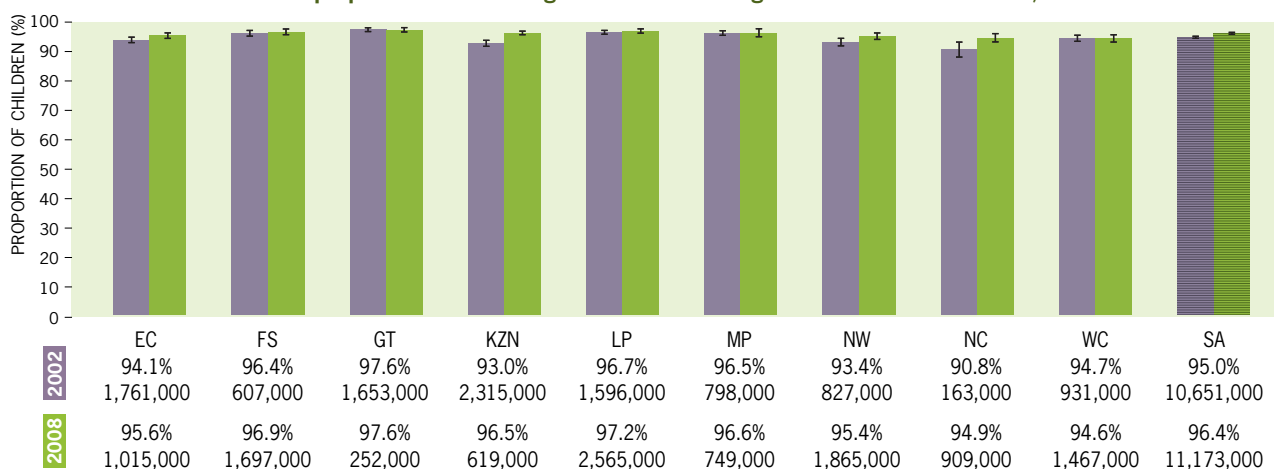
Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³ recognises “the right of the child to education” and also obliges the State to “make primary education compulsory and available free to all”.

Number and proportion of children attending an educational institution

This indicator reflects the number and proportion of children aged 7 – 17 years who are reported to be attending a school or educational facility. This is different from ‘enrolment rate’, which reflects the number of children enrolled in educational institutions, as reported by schools to the national department early in the school year.

Education is a central socio-economic right that provides the foundation for lifelong learning and economic opportunities. In South Africa, 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 government must take reasonable measures to make available.

Table 6a: Number and proportion of school-age children attending an educational institution, 2002 & 2008



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2009) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Double-Hugh Marera, Children's Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① School-age children are defined as people aged 7 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 132 – 134. 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. 97 for more details on confidence intervals. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

South Africa has high levels of school enrolment and attendance. Amongst children of school-going age (7 – 17 years) the vast majority (96.4%) attended some form of educational facility in 2008. Since 2002, the national attendance rate has seen a one percentage point increase. Of a total of 11.6 million children aged 7 – 17 years, just over 400,000 are reported as not attending school in 2008.

At a provincial level, the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have all seen significant increases in attendance rates. In the Northern Cape, attendance increased by four percentage points from 91% in 2002 to 95% in 2008, while attendance in KwaZulu-Natal increased by over three percentage points and attendance in the Eastern Cape by nearly two percentage points. In July 2008, four provinces had attendance rates that were slightly lower than the national average: North West and the Eastern, Northern and Western Cape provinces.

There has been a small but real increase in reported attendance rates for African and Coloured children over the seven-year period from 2002, and by 2008 there were no significant differences between attendance rates for African and White children. Attendance rates for Coloured children remained slightly below the national average, while those for Asian children were slightly higher.

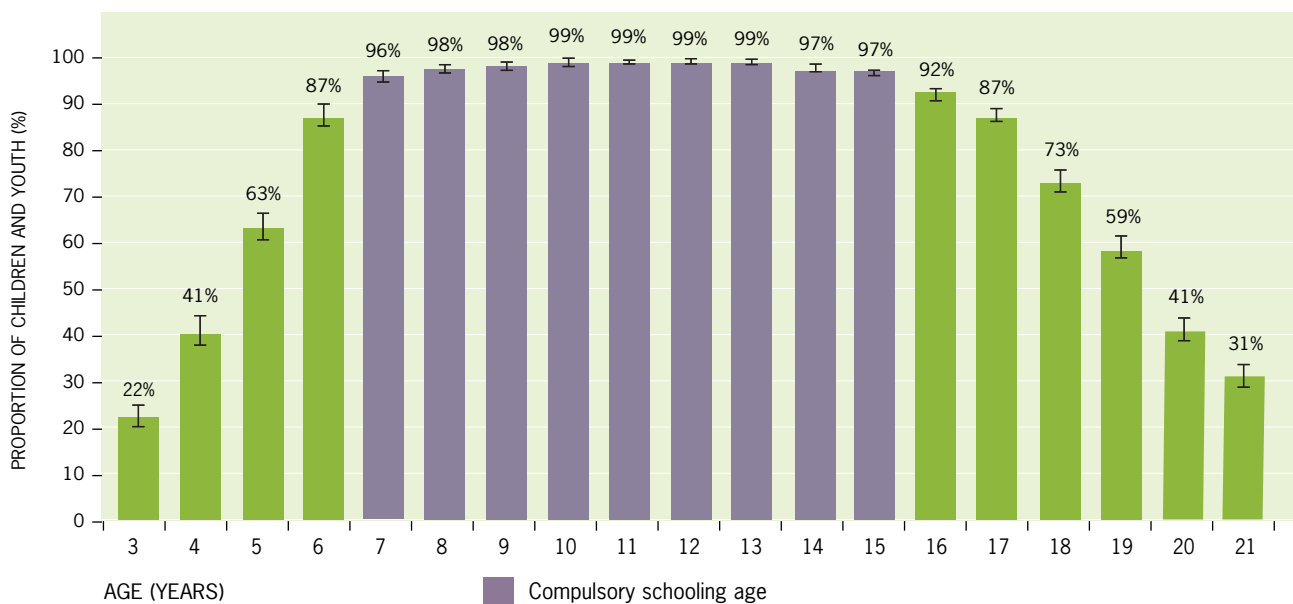
Overall attendance rates tend to mask the problem of drop-out among older children. Analysis of attendance among discrete age groups shows a significant drop in attendance amongst children older than 14. Whereas 99% of 13-year-olds were reported

to be attending an educational institution in 2008, the attendance rate dropped to 97% for 14- and 15-year-olds. As schooling is compulsory until the age of 15 or the end of grade 9, the attendance rate decreases more steeply from age 16 onwards, with 92% of 16-year-olds, 87% of 17-year-olds, and 73% of 18-year-olds reported to be attending school. There is no significant difference in drop-out rates between boys and girls. Cost of education is the main reason for non-attendance in the high school age group, followed by a perception that “education is useless”.⁴ Other reasons for drop-out are illness and exam failure. Pregnancy accounts for between 11% and 20% of drop-out amongst teenage girls not attending school.⁵

It is encouraging to note that 42% of children (just over 1.3 million) in the pre-school age group (3 – 5-year-olds) were attending some kind of educational institution in 2008.

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 – ie with limited economic resources, lower levels of parental education, or who have lost one or both parents – are less likely to enrol in school and are more likely to drop out or progress slowly than their more advantaged peers.⁶ Similarly, school attendance rates tell us nothing about the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in school. Systemic evaluations by the Department of Education have recorded very low pass rates in numeracy and literacy amongst both grade 3 and grade 6 learners.⁷

Table 6b: Proportion of children reported to be attending an educational institution, by age, 2008



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2009) *General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: StatsSA.

The number and proportion of children living far from the nearest school

This indicator reflects the distance from a child's household to the nearest school. Distance is measured via a proxy indicator: length of time travelled to reach the nearest school. The nearest school is regarded as 'far' if a child would have to travel more than 30 minutes to reach it, irrespective of mode of transport. Distance is measured to the nearest primary school for children aged 7 – 13, and to the nearest secondary school for children aged 14 – 17.

Access to schools and other educational facilities is a necessary condition for achieving the right to education. The location of a school and the distance between school and 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 their homes, the cost, risk and effort of getting to school can influence decisions about regular attendance. 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.

Statistics South Africa's population estimates show that there were approximately 7.3 million children of primary school age (7 – 13 years) in South Africa in mid-2008. A fifth (21%) of these children would have to travel more than 30 minutes to reach the nearest primary school. The highest proportions of children living far from the nearest primary school are in KwaZulu-Natal (32%), the North West (22%) and the Eastern Cape (22%).

Around 4.3 million children in South Africa are of secondary school age (14 – 17 years). A third (33%) of these children do not have a high school within a 30-minute radius of their homes. KwaZulu-Natal (41%), the Eastern Cape (42%) and North West (36%) are provinces with particularly high proportions of teenage children who do not have schools within easy access of their homes.

Access to school thus remains a problem for many children in South Africa, particularly those living in rural areas. Rural schools tend to be merging or closing down, making the situation worse for children in these areas. It appears that the problem is greater for children of secondary school age than for younger children.

The greatest change over the seven-year period (2002 – 2008) is in Gauteng, where the proportion of children living far from the nearest school has increased significantly at both the primary and secondary levels. This may be related to rapid population growth and in-migration of children.

It is important to note that children do not necessarily attend the school closest to their home for many reasons, including over-crowding, poor facilities and quality of education. The school fee exemption policy aims to remove financial obstacles to education in fee-charging schools. In theory the exemption makes it possible for children living in poor areas to attend better schools in areas further away. The proportion of learners who actually travel far to school is therefore likely to be higher than reflected in this indicator.

References

- 1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996.
- 2 Secretary General of the Organisation of the African Union (1990) *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, OAU resolution 21.8/49. Addis Ababa: OAU.
- 3 Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UN General Assembly resolution 44/25. Geneva: United Nations.
- 4 Statistics South Africa (2009) *General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: StatsSA.
- 5 See no. 4 above.
- 6 Crouch L (2005) *Disappearing schoolchildren or data misunderstanding? Dropout phenomena in South Africa*. North Carolina, USA: RTI International;
Lam D & Seekings J (2005) *Transitions to adulthood in urban South Africa: Evidence from a panel survey*. Prepared for the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) general conference, 18 – 23 July 2005, Tours, France.
- 7 Department of Education (2008) *2007 grade 3 systemic evaluation*. Pretoria: DoE. [Leaflet];
Department of Education (2005) *Grade 6 intermediate phase systemic evaluation report*. Pretoria: DoE.

Table 6c:
Number and proportion of children living far from the nearest primary school, 2002 & 2008

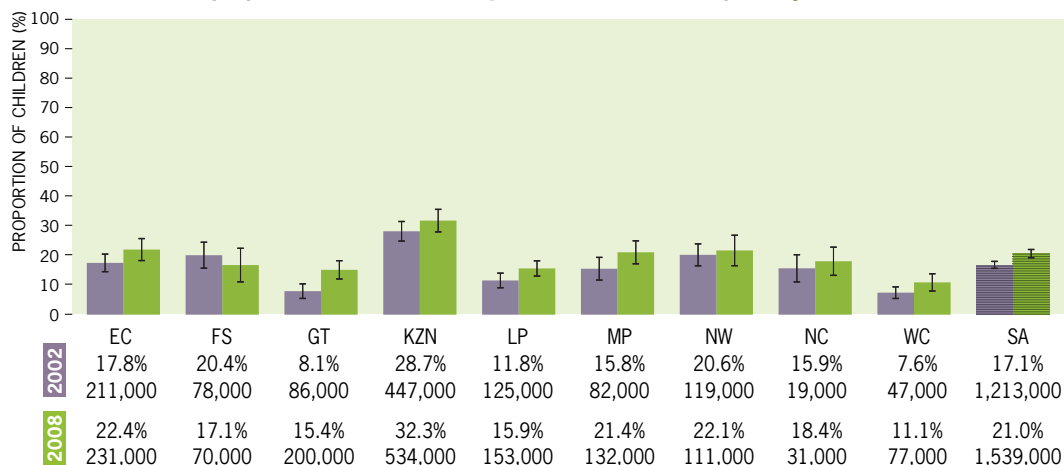
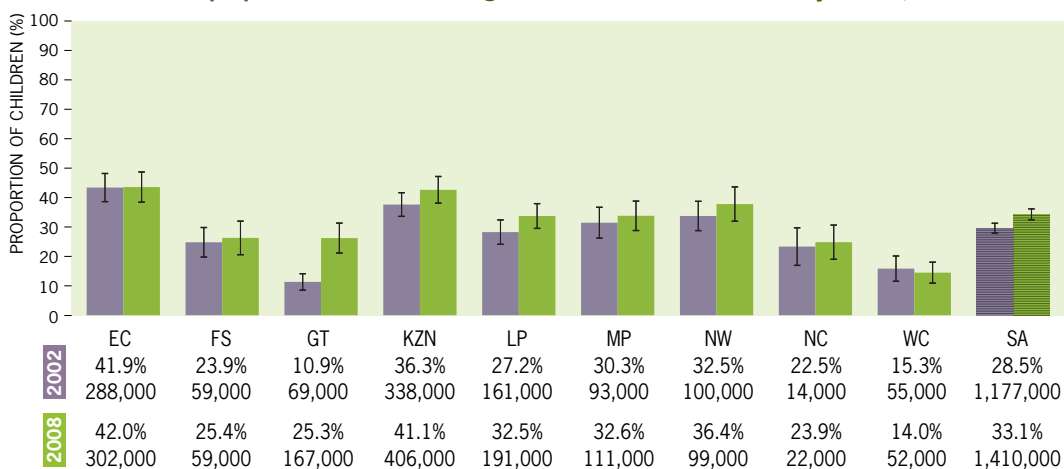


Table 6d:
Number and proportion of children living far from the nearest secondary school, 2002 & 2008



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2009) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall & Double-Hugh Marera, Children's Institute, UCT.

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