

Children's access to housing

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Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa¹ 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 Child² 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, informal and traditional housing. For the purposes of the indicator, ‘formal’ housing is considered a proxy for adequate housing and consists of: dwellings or brick structures on separate stands; flats or apartments; town/cluster/semi-detached houses; units in retirement villages; 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; 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, which is the data source.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 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 social infrastructure like schools, libraries, clinics and hospitals.

Provinces with the largest proportions of children accommodated in ‘traditional’ dwellings are the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which together are home to 87% of all children living in traditional dwellings.

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

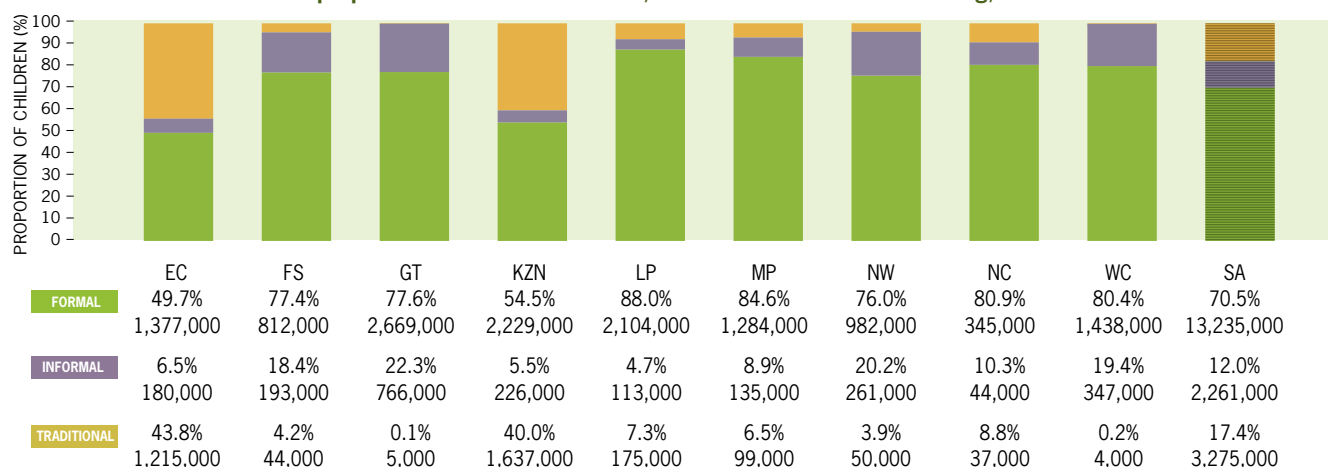
In 2008, nearly 2.3 million children in South Africa lived in backyard dwellings or shacks in informal settlements. Of these, nearly 80% are found in just four provinces: Gauteng (where 22% of children live in informal dwellings), North West (20%), the Western Cape (19%) and the Free State (18%). Limpopo has the lowest proportion (5%) of children in informal housing and the highest proportion in formal dwellings. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal also have low proportions of children in informal housing. Forty percent of children in informal housing are in the 0 – 5-year age group. These young children are also more vulnerable to environmental hazards such as shack fires and paraffin poisoning.

The distribution of children in formal, informal and traditional dwellings has remained fairly constant over a seven-year period. This is surprising, given the delivery of over 2.5 million houses since the launch of the National Housing Subsidy Scheme in 1994.

The General Household Survey shows persistent racial inequalities. Ninety-eight percent of White children live in formal housing, compared with only 66% 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. About a quarter of all children in South Africa live apart from their mothers (see *Demography* on pp. 99 – 104). 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 7a: Number and proportion of children in formal, informal and traditional housing, 2008



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2009) *General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Double-Hugh Marera, 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. 132 – 134. ④ 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 dwellings when there is a ratio of more than two people per room (excluding bathrooms but including kitchen and living room). Thus, a dwelling with two bedrooms, a kitchen and sitting-room would be counted as over-crowded if there were more than eight household members.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines 'habitability' as one of the criteria for adequate housing.³ 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 – 2008) 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 account of household size.

In 2008, 5.6 million children lived in over-crowded households.

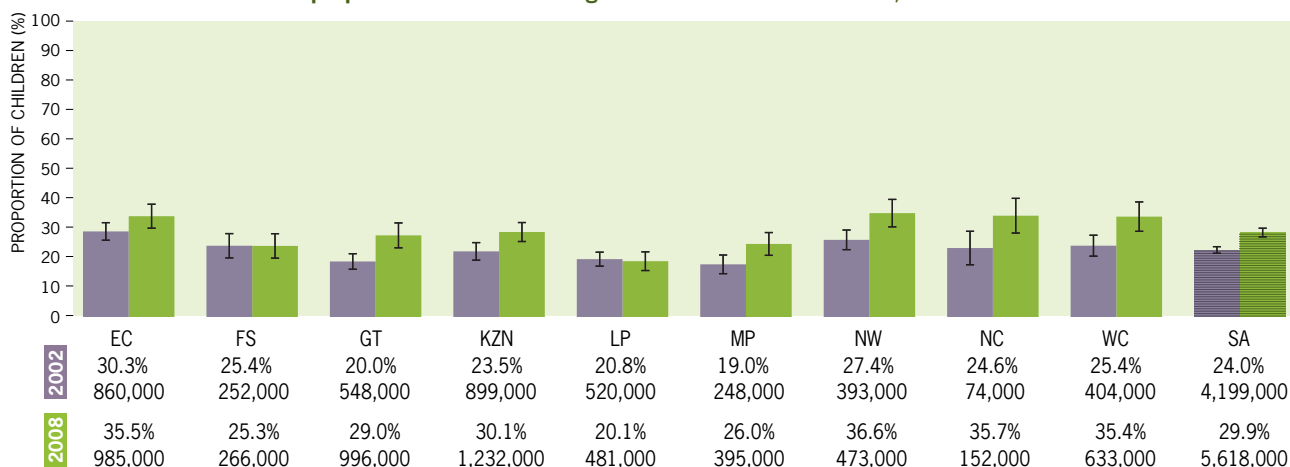
This represents 30% of the child population – much higher than the proportion of adults living in crowded conditions (20%). Over-crowding is associated with housing type: 63% of children who stay in informal dwellings also live in over-crowded conditions, compared with 23% of children in traditional dwellings and 4% of children in formal housing.

In Gauteng there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children living in over-crowded households between 2002 (20%) and 2008 (29%) – despite the massive roll-out of subsidy housing in the province. Significant increases in over-crowding are also found in the Western Cape (from 25% to 30% of children) and the North West province (from 27% to 37%). Over the same period, there have been slow but steady increases in over-crowding in the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

There is a strong racial bias in children's housing conditions. Coloured children (29%) and African children (32%) are significantly more likely to live in crowded conditions than Indian and White children (3% and 4% respectively).

The average household size has gradually decreased from 4.5 in 1996 to around 4 in 2008, 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 2.7, while the median for households with children is 6.5 members.⁴

Table 7b: Number and proportion of children living in over-crowded households, 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 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. 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.

References

- 1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 Statistics South Africa (2009) *General Household Survey 2008*. Pretoria: StatsSA. [Calculations by Hall K, Children's Institute, UCT]