

# Demography of South Africa's children

Helen Meintjes<sup>a</sup> and Katharine Hall<sup>b</sup> (Children's Institute)

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-2008, South Africa's total population was estimated at 48.7 million people, of whom 18.7 million were children (under 18 years). Children therefore constitute 39% of the total population. The child population has grown by about 7% (1.2 million) over the seven-year period from 2002 to 2008.

Half of all children live in three of South Africa's nine provinces: KwaZulu-Natal (22%), Eastern Cape (15%) and Limpopo (13%). A further 18% of children live in Gauteng, a mainly metropolitan province, and 10% in the Western Cape. It is not uncommon in South Africa 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 greater proportions of adults in the largely metropolitan provinces. Despite being the smallest province on the map, Gauteng accommodates nearly a quarter (24%) of all adults, and 24%

of households, but only 18% of children. This is because of the relatively large number of adult-only households in the province.

There have been striking changes in the provincial child populations since 2002. While there are slight decreases in the number of children living in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the North West provinces, the number of children living in Gauteng has risen by 25%. This may be partly the result of in-migration of children to join existing households, or new births within the province.

Either way, the increase suggests a more permanent migration pattern. An increase in the child population in the Northern Cape since 2002 is very pronounced due to the relatively small population in that province.

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

**Table 1a: Distribution of households, adults and children in South Africa, 2008**

Province	Households		Adults		Children		% change 2002 – 2008
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Eastern Cape	1,678,000	13	3,802,000	13	2,773,000	15	-2.2
Free State	824,000	6	1,825,000	6	1,049,000	6	6.0
Gauteng	3,109,000	24	7,040,000	24	3,440,000	18	25.5
KwaZulu-Natal	2,347,000	18	5,994,000	20	4,093,000	22	6.8
Limpopo	1,310,000	10	2,882,000	10	2,393,000	13	-4.3
Mpumalanga	895,000	7	2,067,000	7	1,517,000	8	16.2
North West	948,000	7	2,135,000	7	1,292,000	7	-9.7
Northern Cape	293,000	2	698,000	2	426,000	2	41.5
Western Cape	1,411,000	11	3,473,000	12	1,789,000	10	12.4
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>12,815,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29,916,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>18,771,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7.1</b>

**Sources:** Statistics South Africa (2003; 2009) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2008*. 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. 132 – 134. 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 parent(s)

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, and many children experience a sequence of different caregivers or are brought up 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 2008 indicates that 35% of children (0 – 17 years) in South Africa lived with both their biological parents. Forty percent of all children – more than 7 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-three percent of children live with neither biological parent. Yet only 19% of these children are double orphans.

In both the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces, the proportion of children living with both parents was significantly higher than the national average, with more than half of children resident with both parents

(54% and 52% respectively). Similarly, the number of children living with neither parent was low in these two provinces (11% and 12%). In contrast, nearly a third of children (32%) in the Eastern Cape lived with neither parent. These patterns are consistent from 2002 to 2008.

Less than one third of African children were living with both their parents in July 2008; yet the vast majority of Indian and White children (86% and 81% respectively) were resident with both biological parents. One quarter (25%) of all African children do not live with either parent and a further 43% 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 their fathers are present or not) 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 2008, this situation applied to more than a quarter of children aged 6 – 17 years.



**Table 1b: Number and proportion of children living with biological parents, 2008**



**Table 1c: Number and proportion of children living with biological parents, 2002**



**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](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, we define orphans 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 2008 General Household Survey indicates that there were approximately 3.95 million orphans in South Africa. This includes children without a living biological mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 21% of all children in South Africa. The total number of orphans has increased substantially, with nearly one million more orphaned children in 2008 than in 2002. This equates to an increase of four percentage points in the total orphan population since 2002.

Orphan numbers do not say anything about the nature or extent of care that children are receiving: 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 both with and without living parents. 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>2</sup>

In 2008, 13% of children were paternal orphans (whose mothers were still alive), 3% of children (approximately 624,000 children) were documented to be maternal orphans (with living fathers); and a further 5% of children (860,000) 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 (1%, or 185,000 children, have fathers whose vital status is reported to be "unknown").

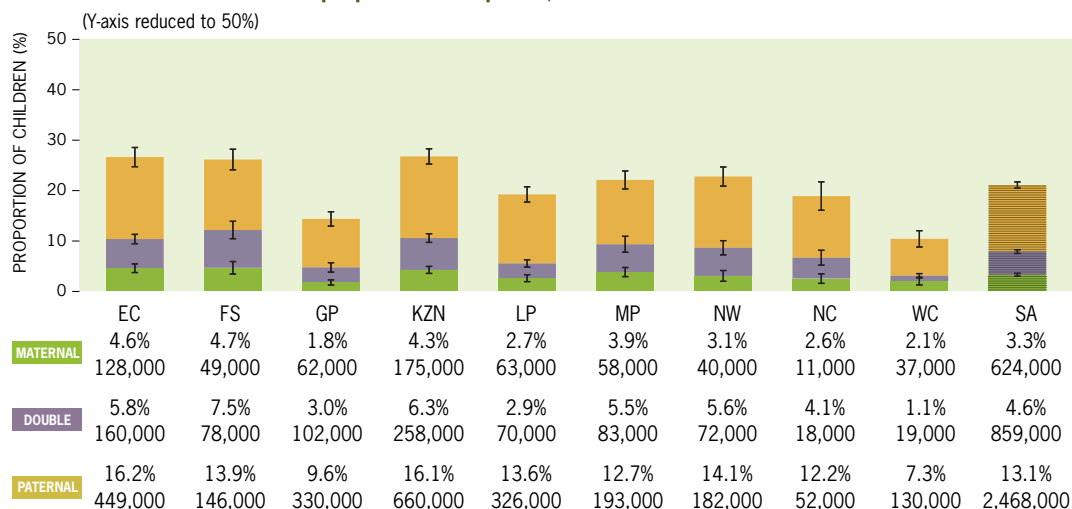
The figures illustrate notable increases in the number and proportion of double orphans over a seven-year period: The number of children who have lost both a mother and a father has more than doubled since 2002 (from approximately 350,000 to 850,000), indicating an increase of nearly three percentage points in double orphans as a proportion of all children in South Africa (2002: 2%; 2008: 4.6%). 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% of the child population in each of these provinces. The orphaning rate is also high in the Free State, where 26% of children are orphans.

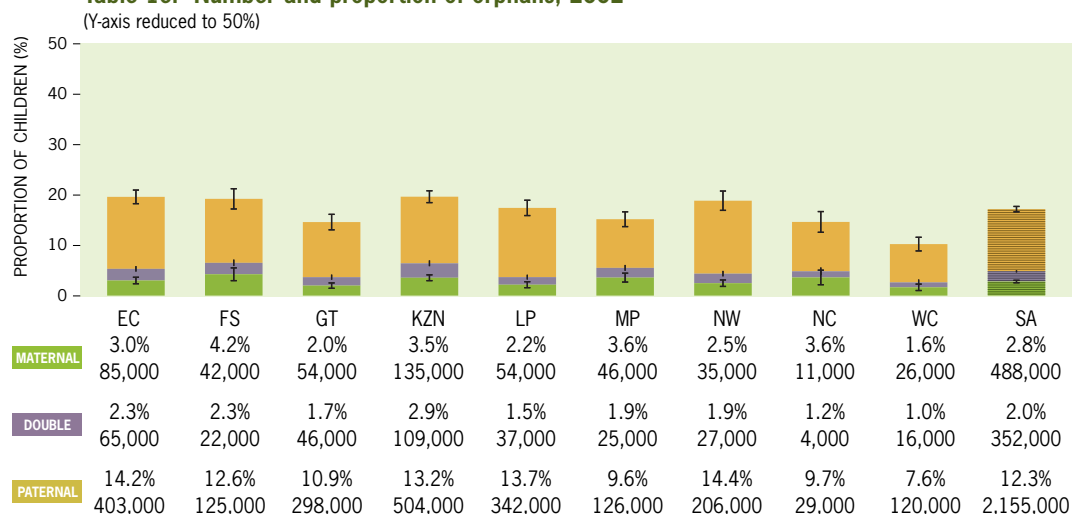
In 2008, 76% of all child orphans were of school-going age (between seven and 17-years-old) and half were 12 years or older.



**Table 1d: Number and proportion of orphans, 2008**



**Table 1e: Number and proportion of orphans, 2002**



**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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## 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'.

Government and civil society are concerned that the numbers of children living in child-only households will increase 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. While there is limited evidence that this is the case,<sup>3</sup> it is important to monitor the prevalence of child-headed households as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues.

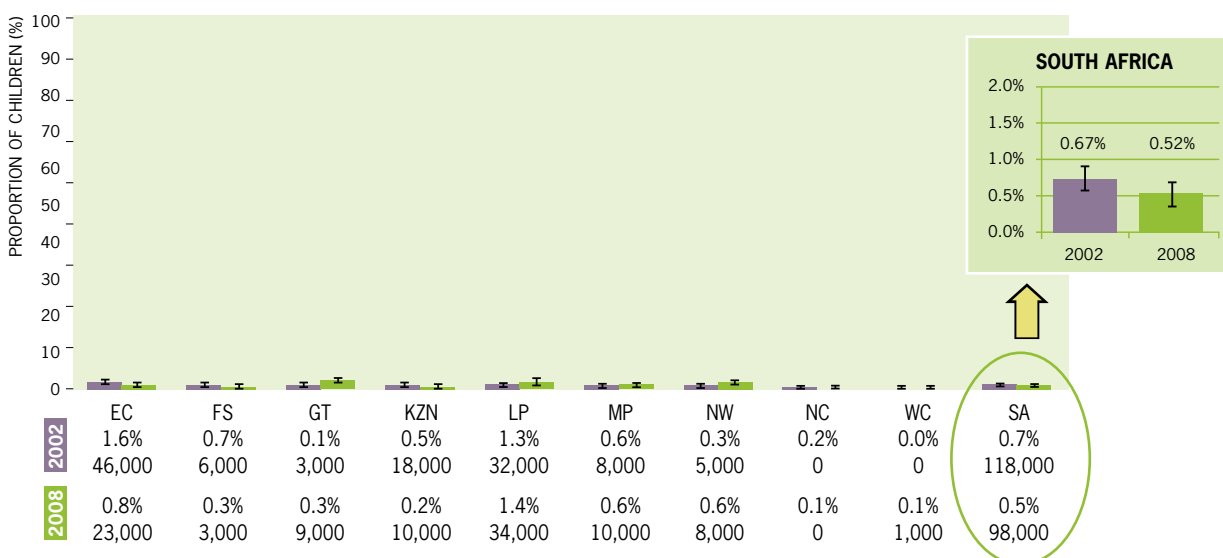
In 2008, there were 100,000 children living in a total of 56,000 child-only households across South Africa. This equates to 0.5% of all children and 0.4% of all households. There has been no significant change in the proportion of children living in child-only households from 2002 to 2008.

While it is not ideal for any child to live without an adult present, it is positive that half (48%) of all children living in child-only households are over 14 years old. Most children living in child-only households (77%) live in four provinces: Limpopo (35%), Eastern Cape (24%), KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga (10% each).

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>4</sup>

There is no 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 General Household Survey. In particular, we caution against reading too much into the provincial breakdowns, or into any differences noted between the 2002 and 2008 estimates.

**Table 1f: Number and proportion of children living in child-headed 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.

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## References

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- See no. 3 above; Hill C, Hosegood V & Newell M-L (2008) Children's care and living arrangements in a high HIV prevalence area in rural South Africa. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 3(1): 65-77.