

Introducing Children Count

South Africa's commitment to the realisation of socio-economic rights is contained in the Constitution, the highest law of the land, which includes provisions to ensure that no person should be without the basic necessities of life. These are specified in the Bill of Rights, particularly section 26 (access to adequate housing); section 27 (health care, sufficient food, water and social security); section 28 (the special rights of children) and section 29 (education).

Children are specifically mentioned, and are also included under the general rights: every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. These form part of what are collectively known as socio-economic rights. While these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, the question is: how well is South Africa doing in realising these rights for all children? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to monitor the situation of children, which means there is a need for regular information that is specifically about them.

A rights-based approach

Children Count, an ongoing data and advocacy project of the Children's Institute, was established in 2005 to monitor progress for children. It provides reliable and accessible child-centred information which can be used to inform the design and targeting of policies, programmes and interventions, and as a tool for tracking progress in the realisation of children's rights.

Child-centred data

Any monitoring project needs regular and reliable data, and South Africa is fortunate to be a fairly data-rich country. There is an array of administrative data sets, and the national statistics body, Statistics South Africa, undertakes regular national population surveys which provide useful information on a range of issues. However, most information about the social and economic situation of people living in South Africa does not focus on children, but rather counts all individuals or households. This is the standard way for central statistics organs to present national data, but it is of limited use for those interested in understanding the situation of children.

"Child-centred" data does not only mean the use of data about children specifically. It also means using national population or household data, but analysing it at the level of the child. This is important, because the numbers can differ enormously depending on the unit of analysis. For example, national statistics describe the unemployment rate, but only a child-centred analysis can tell how many children live in households where no adult is employed. National statistics show what proportion of households is without adequate sanitation, but when a child-centred analysis is used, the proportion is significantly higher.

Counting South Africa's children

Children Count presents child-centred data on many of the areas covered under socio-economic rights. As new data become available with the release of national surveys and other data sources, it is possible to track changes in the conditions of children and their access to services over time. This year, national survey data are presented for each year from 2002 to 2017, and many of the indicators in this issue compare the situation of children over this 16-year period.

The tables on the following pages give basic information about children's demographics, care arrangements, income poverty and social security, education, health and nutritional status, housing and basic services. Each table is accompanied by commentary that provides context and gives a brief interpretation of the data. The data are presented for all children in South Africa and, where possible, by province.

The indicators in this *South African Child Gauge* are a sub-set of the *Children Count* indicators on demographics and socio-economic rights. The project's website contains the full range of indicators and more detailed data, as well as links to websites and useful documents. It can be accessed at www.childrencount.uct.ac.za.

Confidence intervals

Sample surveys are subject to error. The proportions or percentages simply reflect the mid-point of a possible range, but the true values could fall anywhere between the upper and lower bounds. The confidence intervals indicate the reliability of the estimate at the 95% level. This means that, if independent samples were repeatedly taken from the same population, we would expect the proportion to lie between upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval 95% of the time.

It is important to look at the confidence intervals when assessing whether apparent differences between provinces or sub-groups are real: the wider the confidence interval, the more uncertain the proportion. Where confidence intervals overlap for different sub-populations or time periods, it is not possible to claim that there is a real difference in the proportion, even if the mid-point proportions differ. In the accompanying bar graphs, the confidence intervals are represented by vertical lines at the top of each bar (I).

Data sources and citations

Children Count uses a number of data sources. Most of the indicators draw on the General Household Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa, while some draw on administrative databases used by government departments (Health, Education, and Social Development) to record and monitor the services they deliver.

Most of the indicators presented were developed specifically for this project. Data sources are carefully considered before inclusion, and the strengths and limitations of each are outlined on the project website. Definitions and technical notes for the indicators are included in the accompanying commentary, and can also be found on the website.

Here are a couple of examples of how to reference Children Count data correctly. When referencing from the Demography section in this publication, for example:

Hall K & Sambu W (2018) Demography of South Africa's children. In: Hall K, Richter L, Mokomane Z & Lake L (eds) *South African Child Gauge 2018*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

When referencing from the Housing and Services online section, for example:

Hall K (2018) *Housing and Services – Access to adequate water*. Children Count website, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. Accessed on 20 November 2018: www.childrencount.uct.ac.za

Each domain is introduced below and key findings are highlighted.

Demography of South Africa's children

(pages 132 – 136)

This section provides child population figures and gives a profile of South Africa's children and their care arrangements, including children's co-residence with biological parents, the number and proportion of orphans and children living in child-only households. There were 19.6 million children in South Africa in 2017. Fourteen percent of children are orphans who have lost either their mother, father or both parents; 21% of children do not live with either of their biological parents; and 0.3% of children live in child-only households.

Income poverty, unemployment and social grants

(pages 137 – 143)

In 2017, over half of children (65%) lived below the "upper bound" poverty line (with a per capita income below R1,138 per month), and 30% lived in households where no adults were employed. Social assistance grants are therefore an important source of income for caregivers to meet children's basic needs. In March 2018, just over 12 million children received the Child Support Grant; 416,000 children received the Foster Child Grant; and a further 147,000 children received the Care Dependency Grant.

Child health

(pages 144 – 148)

This section monitors child health through a range of indicators. Under-five mortality has decreased from 81 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003 to 34 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016. The infant mortality rate has followed a similar trend and is estimated at 25 deaths per 1,000 live births for 2016. A fifth (20%) of children travel far to reach their primary health care facility and 12% of children live in households that reported child hunger.

Children's access to education

(pages 149 – 156)

Many children in South Africa travel long distances to school. One in seven children (13%) live far from their primary school and this increases to nearly one in five children (21%) in secondary school. Despite these barriers, South Africa has made significant strides in improving access to education with a gross attendance rate of 98% in 2017. Access is also increasing in the preschool years, with 92% of 5 – 6-year-olds attending some kind of educational institution or care facility. However, this does not necessarily translate into improved educational outcomes or progress through school. In 2017, 89% of 10 – 11-year-olds had completed grade 3, and only 69% of 16 – 17-year-olds had completed grade 9.

Children's access to housing

(pages 157 – 159)

This domain presents data on children living in rural or urban areas, and in adequate housing. The latest available data show that, in 2017, 57% of children were living in urban areas, and 79% of children lived in formal housing. Just 1.6 million children lived in backyard dwellings and shacks in informal settlements, and one in six children (18%) lived in overcrowded households.

Children's access to basic services

(pages 160 – 162)

Without water and sanitation, children face substantial health risks. In 2017, 70% of children had access to drinking water on site, while children's access to adequate toilet facilities rose to 78%.