

Housing and Services - Urban-rural distribution

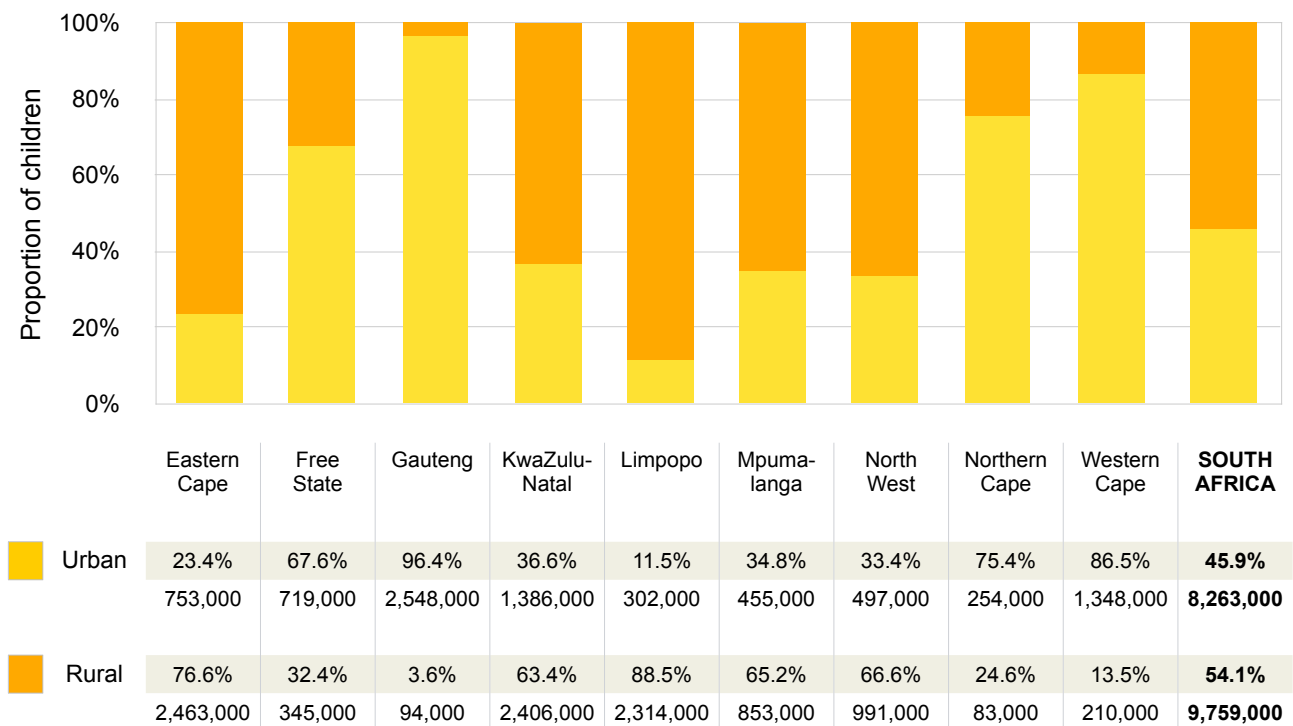
Author/s: Katharine Hall

Date: Updated October 2009

Definition

This indicator shows the number and proportion of children living in urban or rural areas, as reported by Statistics South Africa up to 2004. Since 2004, this variable has not been reported due to difficulties in classification.

Distribution of children in urban/rural areas in South Africa, 2004



- Source
- Statistics South Africa (2003; 2008) General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2007. Pretoria, Cape Town: Statistics South Africa.
 - Analysis by Double-Hugh Marera & Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

- Notes
1. Children are defined as persons aged 0–17 years.
 2. Population numbers have been rounded off to the nearest thousand.
 3. Sample surveys are always subject to error, and the proportions simply reflect the mid-point of a possible range. In this instance it does not make sense to provide confidence intervals because the size of the urban and rural population is imposed on the data, rather than estimated by the survey. The data is weighted to accord with the mid-term estimates for that year. These are calculated through demographic modelling which is itself subject to error.

What do the numbers tell us?

Location is one of the seven elements of adequate housing identified by the International Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – (CECSR). Residential areas should ideally be situated in areas close to work opportunities, clinics, police stations, schools and child-care facilities. In a country with a large rural population, this means that services and facilities need to be well distributed. In South Africa, service provision and resources in rural areas lag far behind urban areas.

The most recent data on children's urban/rural status is drawn from the General Household Survey 2004. The urban–non-urban variable is part of the stratified sample design, and the weights that are applied effectively impose on the data the urban–rural split that is estimated by a demographic model. Therefore the distribution of urban and rural households reflects the estimated size of urban and rural populations, and is not a statistical finding of the survey itself. Although the urban–non-urban variable is still used in the sampling procedure, it has not been reported by Statistics South Africa since 2004, due to controversy around the definition of area types. This is a pity because information on the whereabouts of children could help to shed light on child mobility and urbanisation, and inform spatial targeting. The location of children in urban or rural areas directly influences their access to formal housing through the Housing Subsidy Scheme because subsidised housing projects tend to be concentrated in urban areas, which are seen as the engines of economic growth.

The General Household Survey captures information on all household members, making it possible to look at the distribution of children in urban and non-urban households and compare this to the adult distribution. Just over half of South Africa's children (54%) lived in rural households in 2004 – equivalent to almost 10 million children. Looking back over three years (from 2002 to 2004), the figures are fairly consistent. Children are significantly less likely than adults to live in urban households. While slightly less than half of all children are found in urban households (46%), the majority of adults over 18 years reside in urban areas (58%).

There are marked provincial differences in the rural and urban distribution of the child population. This is related to the distribution of cities in South Africa, and the creation of 'homelands' under the apartheid state, which were populated mainly by women, children and older people. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces alone are home to about three-quarters (74%) of all rural children in South Africa. The province with the highest proportion of rural children is Limpopo, where only 12% of children live in urban areas. It is surprising, then, that the data consistently show Limpopo as having amongst the greatest proportions of children living in formal housing. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have large rural populations, but are also home to some of the largest cities in the country – and so we see a more even urban–rural split. Children living in Gauteng province are almost entirely urban-based (97%) and 87% of children in the Western Cape are urban.

Non-urban areas offer few work opportunities, so adults living in rural areas often move to urban centres in search of work, while their children remain in rural areas, to be cared for by grandparents or other family members. Babies younger than one year are more likely to be living in urban areas than older children, suggesting that babies born in urban areas initially remain with their mothers. The proportion of babies in urban areas drops from 53% to 49% after one year, and to an average of 44% for 5-year-olds.

Technical notes

The distinction between urban and rural is described by Statistics South Africa as "rather fluid", and some areas have been reclassified in the past few years. This is mostly because the 'semi-urban' category was dispensed with in the 2001 Census, resulting in a slightly more inclusive 'urban' classification which, for example, now includes informal settlements on the urban periphery.

Strengths and limitations of the data

The data are derived from the General Household Survey, an annual survey conducted by the national statistics body, Statistics South Africa. The sample is based on the enumeration areas established during the Census demarcation phase and therefore covers all parts of the country. The sample of 30,000 dwelling units ensures a representative sample when stratifying by province. The resulting estimates should be representative of the total population of South Africa. Person and household weights are provided by Statistics South Africa and are applied in Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile analyses to give representative estimates at the provincial and national levels.

When comparing the weighted 2004 data with the ASSA2003 Aids and Demographic model estimates, it seems that the number of children aged 7 – 12 years was over-estimated by 6%. The number of very young children appeared to have been under-estimated. The patterns of over- and under-estimation appear to differ across population groups. For example, the number of White children appears to be over-estimated by 14%, while the number of Coloured persons within the 13 – 22-year age group appears to be 9% too low.

The GHS sample consists of households and does not cover other collective institutionalised living-quarters such as boarding schools, orphanages, students' hostels, old-age homes, hospitals, prisons, military barracks and workers' hostels. These exclusions should not have a noticeable impact on the findings in respect of children.

Changes in sample frame and stratification

A new master sample was used for the first time in 2004, meaning that for longitudinal analysis 2002 and 2003 may not be easily comparable with later years as they are based on a different sample frame.

Provincial boundary changes

Provincial boundary changes occurred since 2002, and may slightly affect the provincial populations. Comparisons on provincial level should therefore be treated with some caution. The sample and reporting are based on the old provincial boundaries as defined in 2001.¹

Disaggregation

Statistics South Africa suggests caution when attempting to interpret data generated at low level disaggregation. The population estimates are benchmarked at the national level in terms of age, sex and population group while at provincial level, benchmarking is by population group only. This could mean that estimates derived from any further disaggregation of the provincial data below the population group may not be robust enough.

References

¹ Statistics South Africa (2008). General Household Survey 2007 Metadata. Cape Town, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

© Children's Institute, University of Cape Town



This fact sheet has been updated with the financial support of the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD), a partnership programme of the Presidency, Republic of South Africa and the Delegation of the European Union. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the Presidency or the European Union.



Copyright

The Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, holds copyright of the papers and publications on this site. Permission is granted to reproduce and distribute copies of these works for non-profit or library purposes, provided that the author, source, and copyright notice are included on each reproduced copy. Users who cite the material must acknowledge the author and copyright holder, and fully reference the work. It is also the policy of the Children's Institute to respect the intellectual property rights of others, and the authors have attempted to ensure that no unauthorised use of copyrighted resources occurs.

Disclaimer

Every attempt is made to ensure that the material on these pages is accurate and as up-to-date as possible. Neither the University of Cape Town, its Faculty of Health Sciences, staff, agents nor any other person shall be liable to whomsoever may have sustained any loss of any kind as a result of having relied to his/her detriment upon any information contained in or downloaded from any of the pages at the World Wide Web – Children Count site of the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town.