

# facts

about children and housing  
in South Africa (2006)



services that they do not have access even to an adequate pit latrine [4].


## South Africa's housing legacy

The current housing situation, with its housing backlog, segregated cities and concentration of children in rural areas, is largely a legacy of apartheid. Housing was one of the primary mechanisms used by the nationalist government to implement its policy of separate development. Forced removals and the deliberate under-provisioning of housing were measures to keep the black population to a minimum in urban areas. Importantly, it was mainly men who were meant to work in urban areas, without the women and children in their families.

## Thinking about children and housing in a holistic way

The National Housing Subsidy Scheme became a critical poverty alleviation strategy during South Africa's first decade of democracy. It represents the biggest single government transfer to poor households, and potentially has the greatest impact on children's quality of life. Home ownership theoretically provides some financial security and enables the transfer of property, a family asset, from one generation to another.

The design of a dwelling is particularly important from a child's perspective: space and privacy may decrease the likelihood of domestic violence, abuse, and the spread of disease. Children will benefit if housing is near schools and clinics, and there should be safe places in the neighbourhood where youth can socialise and children can play.

Electricity supply is important as it means that women and children do not have to collect fuel, and reduces the hazards associated with paraffin use, such as poisoning and fire. Electricity supply also increases visibility and safety at night, and enables children to do their homework after dark. Access to safe water is important for hygiene and for the preparation of baby formula. Access to water on the property means that women and children do not have to spend time fetching water from a communal source. Health risks are reduced by easy access to adequate sanitation. These services all contribute to an adequate standard of living. 

## Introduction

Adequate housing is one of the most basic human needs. Housing is not only about having a roof over one's head; it is inextricably linked to safety and security, access to services, resources and economic opportunities. The housing context determines the environment in which children grow up, and the facilities available to them.

There is a lack of information about children's housing conditions in South Africa, and the government's housing policy pays little attention to the rights and needs of children. This fact sheet outlines the housing situation of children in South Africa. For more information, visit [www.childrencount.ci.org.za](http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za).

## The State's legal obligations

The right to housing features in international law dating back as far as the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights. When the South African government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995, it recognised the right of every child to "a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" [1]. The South African Constitution obliges the government to ensure that everyone has access to adequate housing. Section 26 of the Constitution states that "everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing" and that the "state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right" [2]. In addition, the Bill of Rights refers to the specific rights of children, and in Section 28 (1) (c) provides that "every child has the right... to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services" [3].

The constitutional right to adequate housing is modelled on the right to housing in article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, the government is committed to improving the living environments of slum dwellers (Goal 7, target 11).

## Nearly two million children live in shacks in informal settlements or in the back yards of other houses

### Housing in the context of child poverty

An analysis of the *General Household Survey 2004* indicates that more than half of South Africa's children live in deep poverty. Two-thirds of children under 14 years are so poor that they should qualify for the Child Support Grant. But poverty is multi-dimensional, and there are many indicators of poverty other than income. Nearly two million children live in inadequate housing – either in informal settlements or in shacks in the backyards of other houses. 43% of all children do not have easy access to piped water. Less than 3% of children have a flush toilet on their property, and half live with such poor sanitation

## About Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile



*Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* is a project of the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. The project is aimed at monitoring the realisation of children's socio-economic rights in South Africa. It presents child-centred data on basic demographics and care arrangements for children, as well as on the areas of education, health (including HIV/AIDS), housing, nutrition, social assistance, and water. This fact sheet is one of a series aimed at informing the government and civil society about the situation of South Africa's children. The project hosts an interactive website of child-centred data on socio-economic indicators, which can be accessed at [www.childrencount.ci.org.za](http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za).

# where

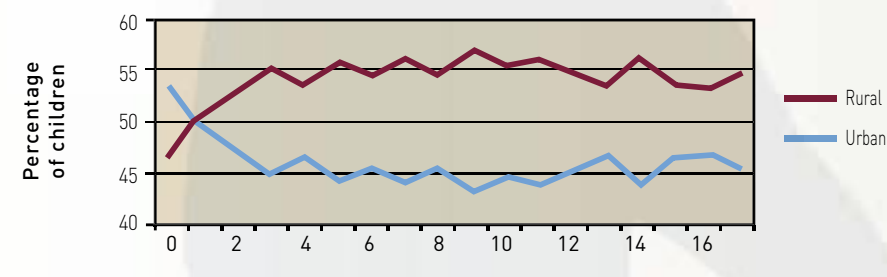
## do South African children live?

### Statistics on children's living environments

- There are just over 18 million children in South Africa, making up 39% of the population.
- Just over half of all children (54%) live in rural areas, whereas only 41% of adults live in rural areas. The most rural provinces are Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Jointly, these provinces are home to 74% of all rural children in South Africa.
- 22% (nearly four million children) live in traditional dwellings in rural areas. This is much higher than the proportion of adults living in traditional dwellings (14%). While traditional dwellings may provide adequate accommodation, municipal services to rural areas are often inadequate or non-existent.
- Two-thirds (66%) of children live in formal dwellings such as brick houses or blocks of flats. This is slightly lower than the proportion of adults living in formal housing.
- 25% of all children live in overcrowded households, where there is an average of more than two people per room (including living room and kitchen).

Source: General Household Survey 2004. Analysis by Debbie Budlender (4)

Diagram 1: Children in the rural-urban divide, by age



Source: General Household Survey 2004. Analysis by Debbie Budlender (4)

Children tend to be mobile, in that they move across households and provinces. The majority of babies younger than one year stay with their mothers in urban areas. **Diagram 1** illustrates a shift which may be accompanied by changing care arrangements after one year, as 55% of children are living in rural areas by the time they are three years old. **Table 1** shows that fewer children than adults live in informal settlements and backyard shacks. This is partly because adults, when moving to cities in search

of work, do not take their children with them, or do not want their children living with them in inadequate conditions in informal settlements. Nevertheless, 11% (nearly two million) children live in these conditions. Households in informal settlements are smaller, on average, than formal households, with fewer household members to care for children while others work or look for work. The annual devastation caused by shack fires and flooding are two examples of the vulnerability of informal residents – and young children and babies are particularly vulnerable. People continue to lose their homes, their possessions, and sometimes their lives, due to inadequate infrastructure and service delivery. (11)

Table 1: Distribution of children and adults, by type of dwelling

HOUSING TYPE	CHILDREN (0-17 yrs)		ADULTS (18+ yrs)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Formal house/town house/flat	12,031,381	66.8	20,098,502	70.7
Traditional dwelling	3,955,055	21.9	4,027,409	14.2
Backyard shack/dwelling/room	876,944	4.9	2,071,887	7.3
Informal elsewhere/caravan/tent	1,103,084	6.1	1,917,054	6.7
Other/unspecified	55,351	0.3	322,622	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,021,815</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28,437,474</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: General Household Survey 2004. Analysis by Debbie Budlender (4)

## What is adequate housing?

The Department of Housing uses the housing backlog to calculate its budgets and prioritise housing delivery. Within this process, a definition of 'inadequate' housing is applied – based mainly on type of dwelling – with informal dwellings in backyards and informal settlements being regarded as inadequate. In terms of this definition, about two million children in South Africa live in

inadequate housing.

But the national Housing Code has a far broader definition, which is more in keeping with international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It defines 'adequate' as being "measured by legal security of tenure, the availability of services; materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability;

accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy" (5).

In other words, adequate housing is not just about the quality of shelter, but about a range of other qualities related to housing such as the provision of services, location and access to facilities, and secure tenure. All of this should theoretically be within the reach of even the poorest households.

# what

## has the Housing Subsidy Scheme done for children?

The National Housing Subsidy Scheme is the government's main mechanism to deliver low-cost housing to new home-owners with a monthly income under R3,500 (now extended to a R7,000 threshold, with the poorest group getting the largest subsidies). The Housing Subsidy Scheme has been successful in progressively delivering large numbers of subsidised houses to poor households, and delivery figures suggest that a significant proportion of subsidised housing is being accessed by women and households with children (6). It is important that women have secure tenure because they are usually the main caregivers of children.

The Housing Subsidy Scheme however excludes poor children living in households without adult care, refugee children, children living on commercial farms, and the children of foreign migrants who do not have permanent residence status. These are some of the most vulnerable categories of children.

According to the Department of Housing, 2.75 million housing subsidies were approved

between 1994 and 2005. **Diagram 2** shows that, by March 2005, over 1.8 million housing units were completed or under construction. The number of children living in these houses is not known, as this information is not collected in any national survey.

Research amongst housing beneficiaries has shown that the emphasis on delivering large

quantities of houses often compromises the quality of houses, and that the planning of new housing developments needs to take place in an integrated, holistic way. Housing developments often tend to be under-resourced, and are located on the borders of urban areas from where it is difficult to reach facilities and employment opportunities. There is a need for research into the impact of subsidy housing delivery on children's quality of life.

Census results over the past decade show a

drop in average household size nationally – from 4.5 in 1996 to 3.8 in 2001. The delivery of small subsidy houses to over 1.5 million households (more than one-tenth of all households) possibly contributed to this recorded decline. The effect of this on children remains to be researched.

Gauteng province, which was initially identified as having the greatest housing need (and received the largest share of subsidies), is the only province that reduced its backlog, although the high population influx means that it is still unable to keep up with demand. A third of all children living in informal housing are resident in Gauteng (8). (11)

2004, the main strategy to address child-headed households relates to succession planning and mechanisms to ensure that orphaned children can inherit property. It proposes (10):

- helping subsidy beneficiaries to make wills when houses are transferred into their names;
- providing alternative housing subsidy mechanisms, such as capital subsidies to construct care facilities for infected people and affected children, and
- making available additional subsidies to finance the building of extra rooms or additional services to households that foster children.

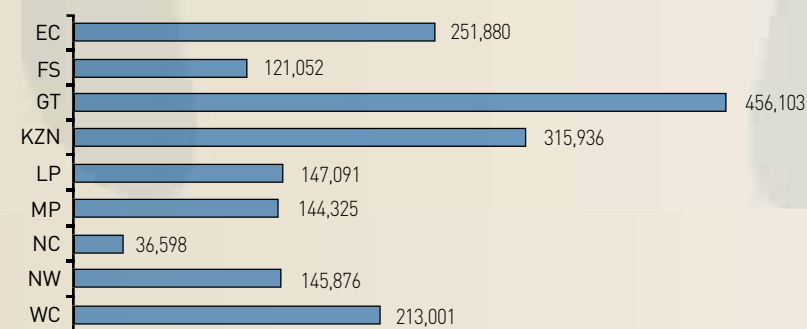
state support to housing efforts (11). States are challenged to acknowledge and support the efforts that poor people make to meet their own housing needs. This requires states to:

- take a more facilitative and flexible approach to housing delivery than the traditional mechanism;
- facilitate access to land, finance and low-cost building materials; and
- actively promote the upgrading of informal settlements.

These measures are regarded as the most efficient and practical approaches to solving the urban housing shortage.

In 2004 the Minister of Housing tabled a new policy framework for the development of sustainable human settlements, called "Breaking New Ground", which outlines similar priorities. The upgrading of informal settlements is now a key focus of the housing programme, with a further emphasis on participatory planning and delivery through the People's Housing Process (12). This approach is being piloted in the ambitious N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town.

Diagram 2: Houses completed or under construction (1994 – 2005)



Source: Department of Housing, www.housing.gov.za (7)

## New strategies

### Housing in the context of HIV/AIDS

The Department of Housing was slow to consider the effects of HIV/AIDS on housing. In a 2003 review undertaken by the Public Service Commission, provincial housing departments identified HIV/AIDS as "a key issue which national policy has largely failed to address" (9). In terms of the national HIV/AIDS framework, released in

The department has also raised the need for further research to assess the impact of HIV/AIDS on human settlements, and to develop appropriate housing designs to meet the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.

### Upgrading informal settlements

Improving the living environments of slum dwellers is one of the Millennium Development Goals. Another international agreement, Agenda 21, codifies principles of sustainable development and contains an important declaration regarding



# Mainstreaming children's needs

Children are an important part of our society, making up nearly 39% of the population. Although children have very specific needs and socio-economic rights, these are often neglected in government policies and budgets unless they relate to child-specific programmes (such as those dealing with social development and education). Housing is one of the mainstream poverty alleviation programmes where the rights and well-being of children have historically been given little consideration. There are a number of ways in which children's needs could be incorporated in the planning, delivery and monitoring of South African housing.

## Developing child-centred data

There is virtually no reference to children in South Africa's housing policy documents – they are simply implied in the general category of 'dependants'. Neither the department's administrative data nor existing national datasets provide appropriate child-centred data to enable an analysis of children's housing need or access to housing subsidies. The collection and analysis of child-centred data will help to monitor the environments in which children live, and to prioritise housing and infrastructure programmes that will realise children's rights.

## Catering for child-headed households

Child-headed households, although they do not exist in great numbers, will remain a reality in South Africa. Two possible areas of need for these children in terms of housing are:

- mechanisms to enable children's access to housing if they do not have caregivers (implying the need for the involvement of some agency or intermediary to facilitate access to housing); and
- assistance with the maintenance of housing.

A third area, which the department has begun to address, relates to the law of succession and the passing of title deeds where children who are already living in subsidy housing lose their parents.

## Providing basic services

The majority of South Africa's children live in rural and under-serviced areas. In general, these areas are home to the poorest children, but have not been targeted by housing development or infrastructure upgrading projects. The Office of the President has


stated that, while rural areas should have access to good education, health and shelter, infrastructure development should be focused mainly in urban areas, which are seen as the engines of economic growth (13).

The Housing Subsidy Scheme was designed to include access to land and services. However, housing and service delivery has been slow in many areas, leading to widespread protests. It is important that rural children are not excluded from basic service delivery simply because their areas are not targeted by the housing subsidy. Where rural housing subsidies are made available, these should include the provision of basic service infrastructure. This will require better inter-departmental collaboration and planning.

## Developing child-friendly cities

Housing development through the subsidy scheme promotes the integration of the 'family' and enables family life close to work opportunities. It is likely that the upgrading of urban informal settlements to formal residential areas will be followed by an influx of children from rural areas. Planners should anticipate the increased need for facilities for children – schools, clinics, safe open spaces and transport routes. The government's stated focus on the development of "sustainable human settlements" acknowledges that rapid housing development and urbanisation can compromise the quality of living environments. Urban planning and design also needs to be rooted in the principles of the CRC, which confers on children the right to play and recreation, and stresses the need to develop appropriate living environments for children (14).

## Child participation in planning

The Department of Housing has reaffirmed its commitment to participatory approaches in the housing planning and delivery process. According to the CRC, children have a right to participate in decision-making which concerns their well-being. Children and youth need to participate in planning and managing their environments. South Africa has signed two important international declarations, Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda (15), both of which affirm the importance of children's agency in shaping their towns. 

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Compiled by Katharine Hall. Edited by Charmaine Smith and Lizette Berry. Design by Candice Turvey.

With thanks to Save the Children (Sweden), the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies for financial support to this project. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the authors and are not necessarily to be attributed to any of the funders.

ISBN: 0-7992-2304-2

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