

# South African Early Childhood Review 2024

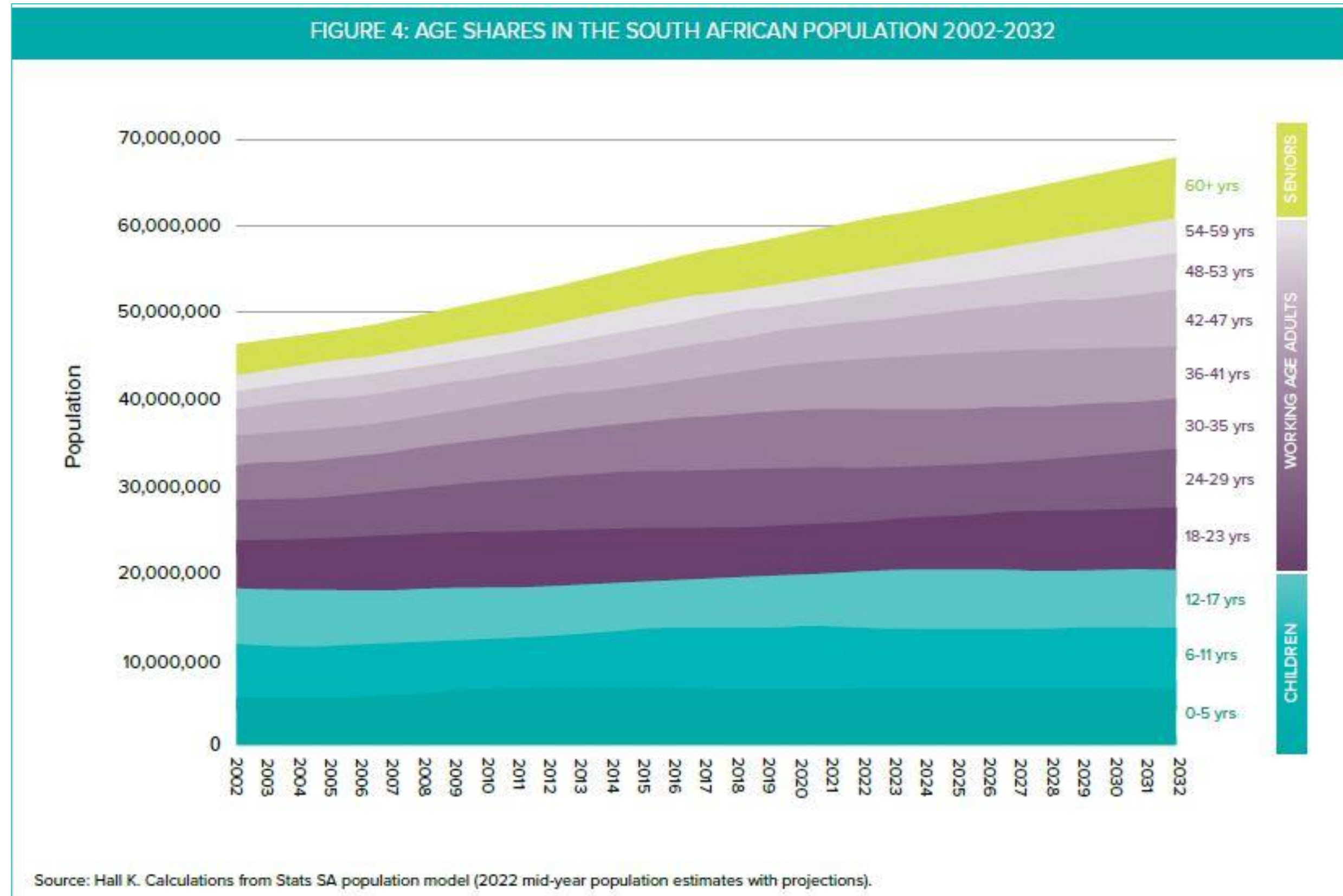


## 1. Children under 6 years in South Africa

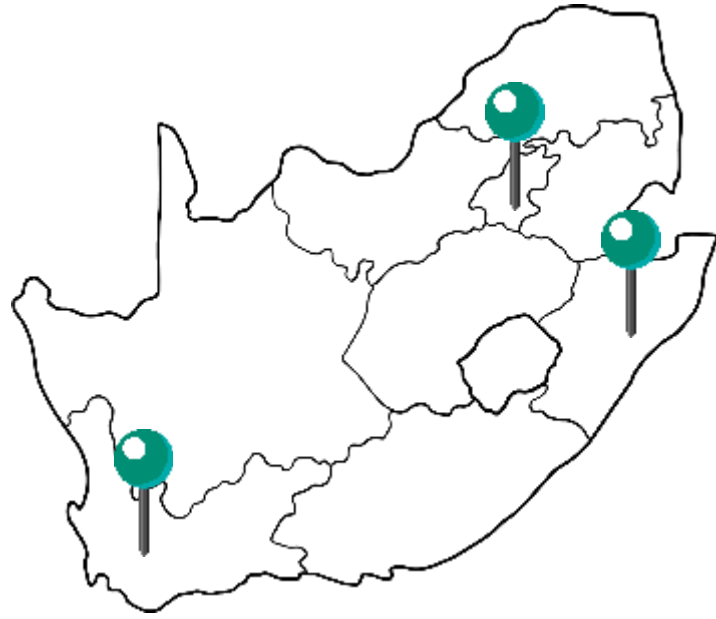
Hall K, Almeleh C, Giese S, Mphaphuli E, Slemming W, Mathys R, Droomer L, Proudlock P, Kotze J, and Sadan M. South African Early Childhood Review 2024. Cape Town: Children's Institute University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana

# Investing in children is an investment in the future

- The South African population is getting older. It is projected to reach nearly **70 million people by 2032, of whom 50 million will be adults.**
- A growing adult population means that the number of **children born each year will remain stable** or even rise slightly, even though fertility rates continue to fall.
- The number of young children to be reached by ECD services will not change hugely, but all young children do need to be reached.



# Trends in the young child population



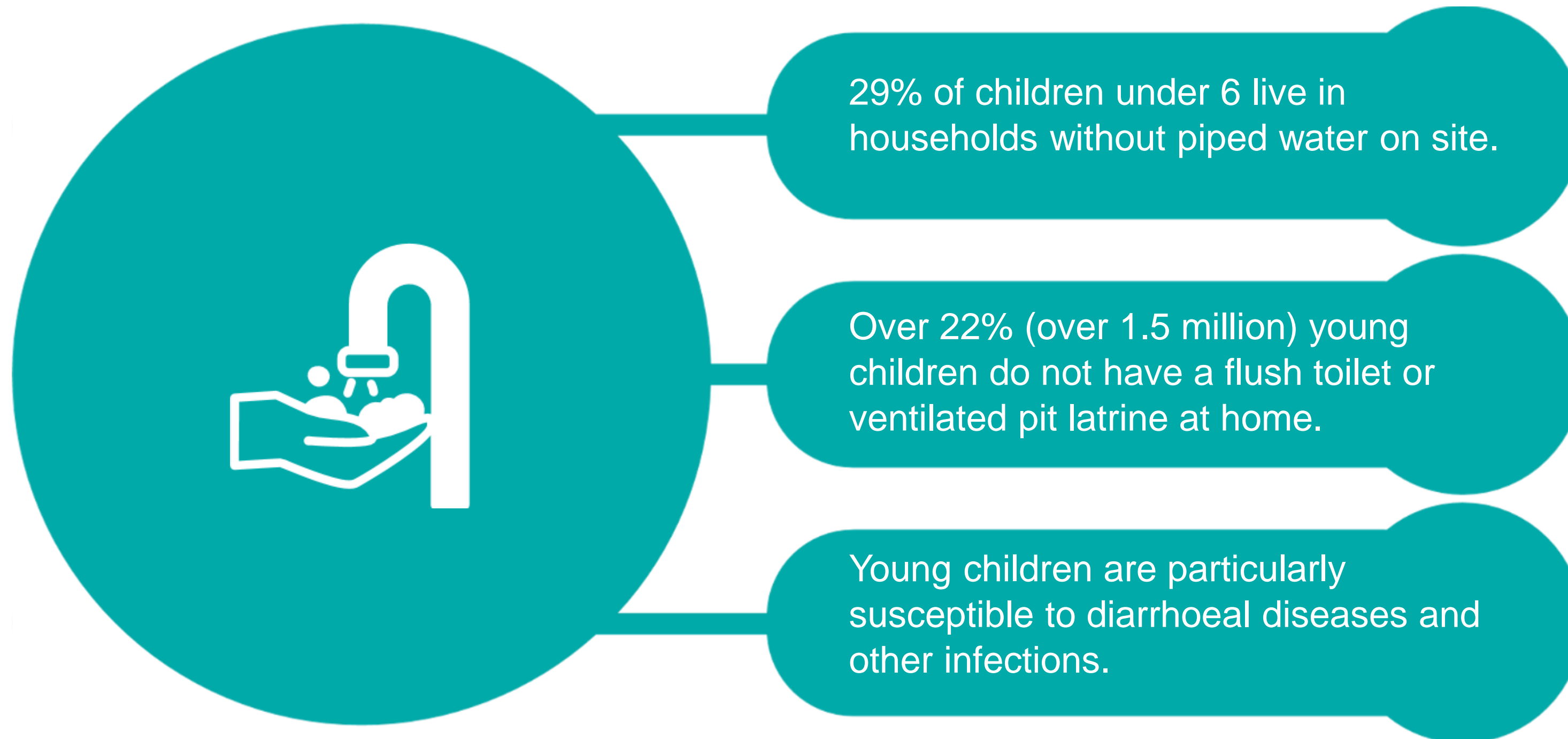
- There are approximately **1.1 million births in South Africa annually** – an average rate of about 3,000 babies born every day.
- **4 out of 10** young children live in rural settings, mainly in the former homelands. KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and the Eastern Cape previously held the largest share of children under 6. Rural households, and rural women mainly, carry a **significant burden of unpaid care work**.
- **Gauteng has surpassed KwaZulu-Natal and now has the largest under-6 population** in the country. The under-6 population in the Western Cape is also growing.



**Government needs to take account of the growing urban population of young children in its planning and budgeting processes, while also ensuring that services reach more remote rural areas.**

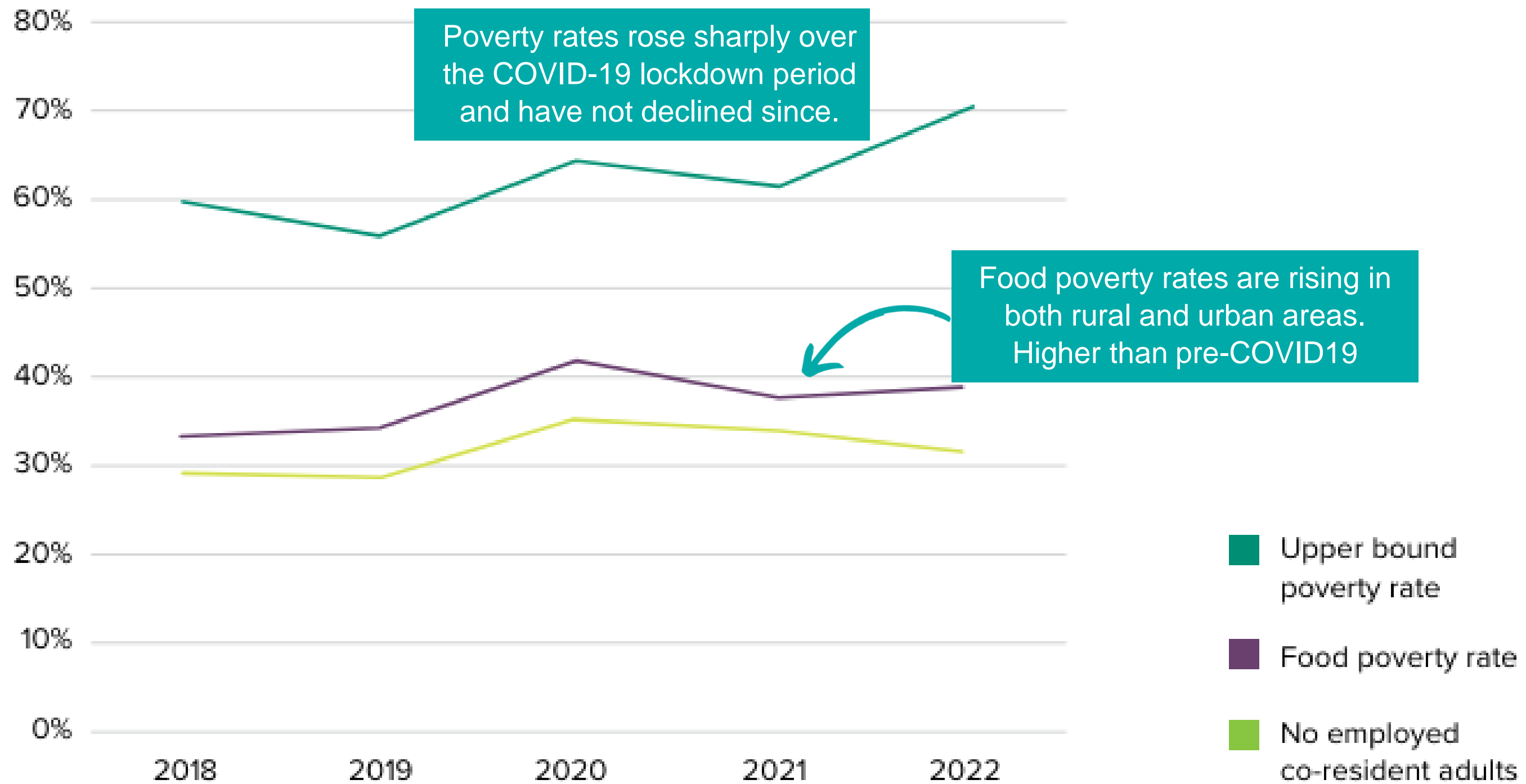
# Basic services: water and sanitation

There have been **no significant improvements** in access to adequate water or sanitation among children under 6 over the past five years.



# Poverty rates

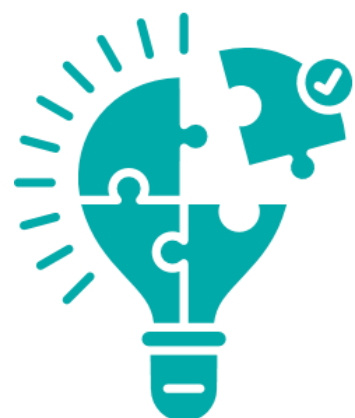
FIGURE 5: TRENDS IN UNDER-6 POVERTY RATES OVER THE LOCKDOWN AND POST-LOCKDOWN PERIOD



Source: K Hall analysis of Stats SA General Household Survey 2018-2022.

# Poverty rates

- In 2022, the **highest under-6 poverty rates** were in the **Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal**, and the **lowest were in the Western Cape and Gauteng**.
- Over **2.7 million children under 6 live below the food poverty line** (in households that are too poor to meet basic nutritional needs). Food poverty for children under 6 is no longer primarily a rural challenge: **food poverty rates are rising in urban areas too**. Poverty rates are likely to be reflected in **nutritional deficits in the future**.
- In **2019, 650,000 infants (under 1 year) were in households below the upper-bound poverty line**. The poverty headcount for infants **increased each subsequent year to 850,000 in 2022**. Adult unemployment rates spiked in 2020. Although there was some recovery, the household-level unemployment rates, when viewed from the perspective of young children, had still not returned to their pre-COVID levels by 2022.



It is essential and urgent to ensure that current and future cohorts of young children can develop healthily and thrive. Failure to make these investments would lead to the continued erosion of the human capital of future generations.

TABLE 1: THE STATUS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA, BY PROVINCE




3 year change		Indicator	SA	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	data year	source
Population	↔	<b>Number of children under 6 years</b>	<b>6 976 000</b>	797 000	337 000	1 573 000	1 402 000	855 000	617 000	523 000	156 000	716 000	2022	a
	↔	<b>Households with children under 6 years</b>	<b>4 950 000</b> <b>27%</b>	480 000 28%	248 000 25%	1 368 000 24%	861 000 27%	553 000 32%	457 000 32%	376 000 28%	112 000 30%	494 000 24%	2022	b
Area type	↔	<b>Urban</b> Children under 6 living in urban areas (formal / informal)	<b>3 963 000</b> <b>57%</b>	304 000 38%	292 000 87%	1 522 000 97%	486 000 35%	135 000 16%	223 000 36%	219 000 42%	106 000 68%	676 000 94%	2022	b
	↔	<b>Rural - traditional</b> Children under 6 living in former homeland areas	<b>2 725 000</b> <b>39%</b>	483 000 61%	31 000 9%	37 000 2%	809 000 58%	710 000 83%	365 000 59%	264 000 50%	26 000 17%	- 0%		
	↔	<b>Rural - farms</b> Children < 6 living in commercial farming areas (i.e. old “white” SA)	<b>288 000</b> <b>4%</b>	10 000 1%	13 000 4%	15 000 1%	107 000 8%	11 000 1%	29 000 5%	40 000 8%	23 000 15%	40 000 6%		

continued



TABLE 1: THE STATUS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA, BY PROVINCE

3 year change	Indicator	SA	EC	FS	GT	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	data year	source
↔	<b>Inadequate water</b> Children < 6 without piped water to their home	<b>2 053 000</b>	487 000	45 000	74 000	578 000	405 000	155 000	205 000	33 000	71 000	2022	b
		<b>29%</b>	61%	13%	5%	41%	47%	25%	39%	21%	10%		
↔	<b>Inadequate sanitation</b> Children < 6 without a flush toilet or ventilated pit latrine on site	<b>1 538 000</b>	100 000	55 000	169 000	339 000	345 000	248 000	163 000	36 000	82 000	2022	b
		<b>22%</b>	13%	16%	11%	24%	40%	40%	31%	23%	11%		
↑	<b>Children living in poverty</b> Children below upper bound poverty line (R1417 pp/mth)	<b>4 915 000</b>	661 000	262 000	889 000	1 142 000	667 000	462 000	419 000	104 000	309 000	2022	b
		<b>70%</b>	83%	78%	57%	81%	78%	75%	80%	67%	43%		
		<b>Food Poverty</b> Children under 6 living in food poor households (R663 pp/mth)	<b>2 748 000</b>	412 000	126 000	386 000	690 000	410 000	266 000	278 000	45 000		
<b>39%</b>	52%		37%	25%	49%	48%	43%	53%	29%	19%			
↑	<b>Household unemployment</b> Children under-6 living in households where no adults are employed	<b>2 231 000</b>	360 000	134 000	308 000	538 000	335 000	203 000	223 000	43 000	85 000		
		<b>32%</b>	45%	40%	20%	38%	39%	33%	43%	28%	12%		

  numbers have increased or decreased since the pre-COVID baseline   
  no significant change between pre-COVID baseline and most recent data

 worsening / negative   
  improving / positive   
  no significant change



# Data gaps

- The 2022 population census was done just after the lockdown and produced a substantial undercount rate of around 30%. Children under 5 years had one of the highest undercount rates at 35%.
- When comparing the child population estimates from the 2022 population census with those of StatsSA's 2022 mid-year population estimate model for the same year, there is substantial variation at the provincial level. The number of infants recorded in the Census is higher than the population estimates produced by StatsSA and Thembisa.
- Overall, there is considerable uncertainty around the 2022 Census numbers, but it is possible that the modelled population estimates are out of date. There is also uncertainty around the statistics derived from the General Household Survey during the lockdown years, which may affect the trends described. There is an urgent need for reliable estimates on the numbers of infants born each year, and the size and distribution of the young child population.