

The State of Youth Well-being in South Africa

June 2018



Using indicators on youth well-being to inform policy and interventions

More than two decades after South Africa's transition to democracy, more than half of all young people between the ages of 15 to 24 in the country continue to live in income poverty. While progress has been made in several areas of youth well-being, outcomes in crucial domains such as educational attainment, employment, and health remain low.

The current National Youth Policy¹ (NYP) recognises this reality and places these three domains (economic inclusion and participation; education, skills, and training; health and well-being)² central in its approach. However, by mid-2018, the policy remains without an implementation plan, and the country continues to lack a coherent understanding of the range of deprivations in young people's lives and the complex ways in which these interact.

This policy brief focuses specifically on 15 to 24-year-olds as this is a crucial development stage during which young people transition from adolescence into young adulthood. It is also the international definition of youth as applied by the World Health Organisation.³ We present a set of indicators

based on national, provincial and municipal data from the 2011 Census and – where available – the 2016 Community Survey data. Indicators such as these could help inform the implementation of the NYP, both within line departments and in an across-government approach. The sub-national analyses allow for the identification of areas of greatest need within provinces and municipalities. In addition, the focus on income poverty as well as multidimensional deprivation highlights the many and complex challenges facing South Africa's youth.

The data and maps used in this brief draw on the interactive Youth Explorer. This online tool is developed by the University of Cape Town's Poverty and Inequality Initiative (PII), based at the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit, through an ongoing partnership with Statistics South Africa, OpenUp, the Economies of Regions Learning Network, the DG Murray Trust and the Centre of Excellence in Human Development, University of the Witwatersrand.

The Youth Explorer (<http://youthexplorer.org.za>) provides a wide range of information on youth well-being across different geographical levels in South Africa. It indicates in which domains of youth well-being progress is being made, and points at gaps in our understanding that could begin to be filled by further exploring local level administrative data.







The Youth Explorer team hopes to roll out the work with administrative data to as many provinces as possible. Please contact us on youthexplorer@uct.ac.za if you wish to support us in this endeavour.

What is the current state of South Africa's youth?

South Africa is home to more than 10 million young people between the ages of 15 to 24. This youth cohort constitutes 19% of the total population.⁴ In 2011, more than six out of 10 young people (62%) aged 15 – 24 lived in households with a per capita monthly income of less than R779 [the "upper bound poverty line"⁵] compared to 46% of the adult population.⁶ Income poverty continues to be strongly

associated with race: 69% of African youth and 46% of Coloured youth were living below the poverty line in 2011, compared to 5% of White young people⁷. Figure 1 on the next page provides a summary overview of the various indicators of youth well-being in South Africa, and changes over time.

Figure 1: Overview of youth well-being in South Africa and changes over time, 2011 and 2016

Domain	Indicator	2011	2016	Change	Status of change
Demographics 	Total youth population	19.9%	18.7%	-1.2%	↓ decreased
	Male	50%	50%	0%	
	Female	50%	50%	0%	
Education 	Proportion of youth aged 20 – 24 who have completed matric or higher	49.4%	51%	1.6%	↑ improved
	Proportion of youth aged 16 – 17 who have completed grade 9 or higher	70%	77%	7%	↑ improved
	Male	64%	72%	8%	↑ improved
	Female	76%	82%	6%	↑ improved
Economic opportunities 	Proportion of youth living in households without an employed adult	42%			N/A*
	Proportion of youth who are NEET	32.2%			N/A*
	Youth unemployment rate	52.4%			N/A*
Family & living environment 	Proportion of youth living in households with no electricity	14%	9%	-5%	↑ improved
	Proportion of youth living in households with no toilet facilities	6%	3%	-3%	↑ improved
	Proportion of youth living in households with no piped water	11%	14%	3%	↓ worsened
	Proportion of youth living in households that are in informal dwellings	10%	9.1%	-0.9%	↑ improved
	Proportion of youth aged 15 – 19 not living with parents	39%	36%	-3%	↑ improved
Poverty 	Proportion of youth living in income-poor households	62.2%			N/A*
	Male	60%			N/A*
	Female	64%			N/A*
	Proportion of youth who are multidimensionally poor	33.1%			N/A*
	Male	34%			N/A*
	Female	33%			N/A*
	Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)	0.17			N/A*
Health & wellness 	Proportion of young women who have given birth to a child	31.1%	28.8	-2.3%	↑ improved
	Age 16 – 19	14%	12%	-2%	↑ improved
	Age 20 – 24	48%	45%	-3%	↑ improved

* **Note:** We do not have employment and income indicators for 2016 as the 2016 Community Survey data on unemployment and income have not been publically released. We indicate the domains with missing data as N/A (not available).

Schooling

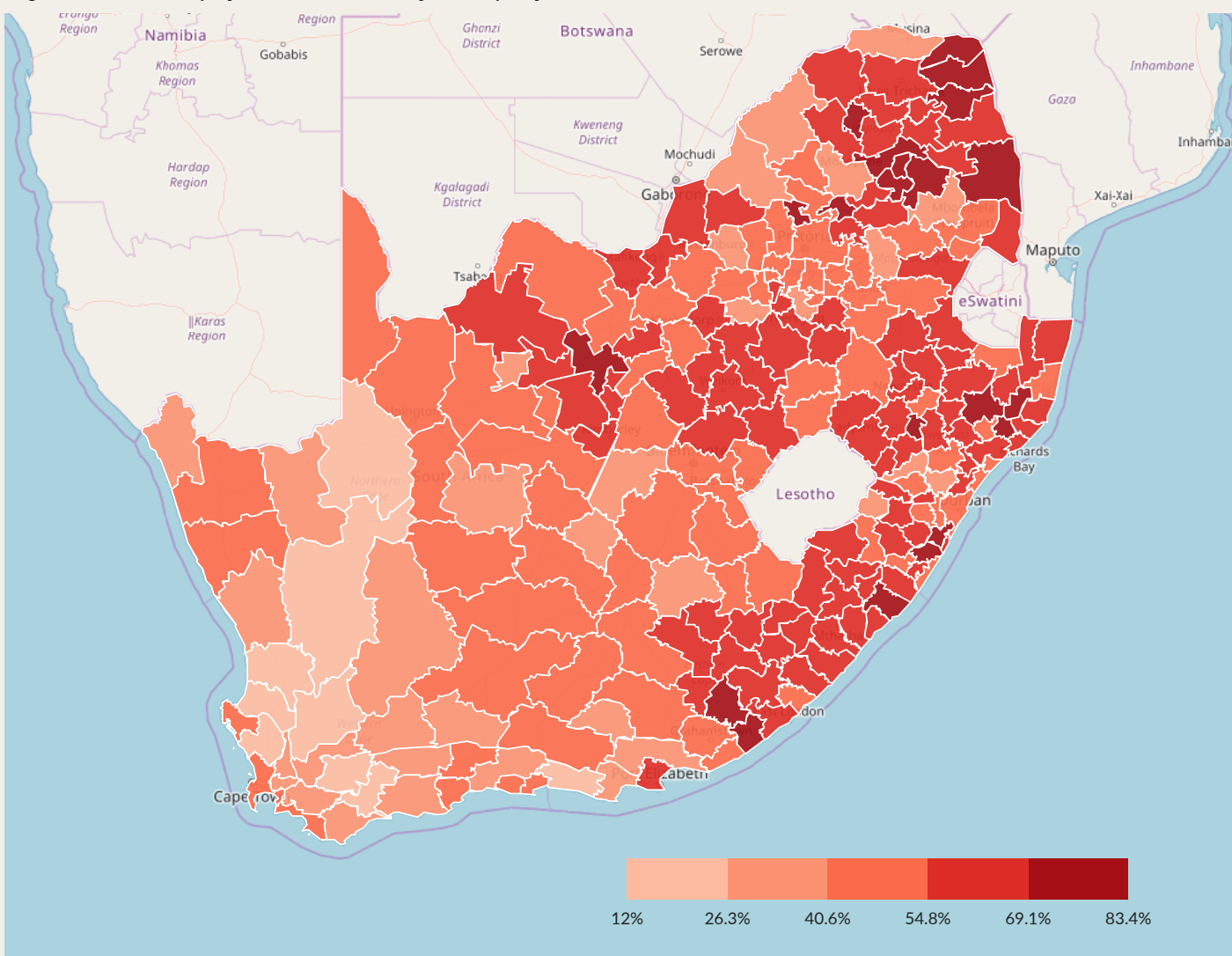
Nationally, 77% of youth aged 16 – 17 had completed grade 9 or higher in 2016, a 7% increase from 2011. This national figure, however, masks important differences at the sub-national level. While close to 88% of 16 – 17-year-olds in Gauteng complete grade 9 or higher, only 67% of youth in the Eastern Cape do so, for instance. At the municipal level, even starker differences exist with, for example, less than 44% of the 16 – 17-year-olds completing grade 9 or higher in Kwa Sani in KwaZulu-Natal compared to 89% in Randfontein in Gauteng.

In addition, many young people in the country struggle to finish secondary schooling, with only 45% of youth aged 20 – 24 having completed their matric or matric equivalent in 2016. By the ages of 20 – 24, only 6% have completed any form of tertiary education. A learner falling behind earlier on in his or her school career is one of the main drivers of the high levels of incomplete secondary education in the country.⁸

Examining additional administrative data can give us a more detailed understanding of this situation and could warn authorities of the need for interventions. For instance, Western Cape 2017 administrative data on the results of the Grade 9 Mathematic and Language Systemic Tests show the areas in which young learners need remediation.⁹ The provincial mean score for language and maths is 43%. A breakdown of this mean score shows that 53% of the students passed languages with an average score of 51%, while only 22% of the student passed maths with an average score of 34%.

These already low provincial averages again mask significant disparities. For example, while municipalities like Cape Agulhas (42%), Bergivier (38%) and Saldanha Bay (37%) have average maths scores higher than the provincial average, others like Laingsburg (17%), Kannaland (24%) and Prince Albert (26%) have average scores lower than provincial average.

Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate in 2011, by municipality



Source: Poverty and Inequality Initiative (2018) *Youth Explorer*. PII, SALDRU, University of Cape Town.
Access at: <https://youthexplorer.org.za>.

These are important findings: low educational outcomes at the secondary level hinder young people’s access to further education and training. Yet, a college or university qualification increases young people’s employment chances and earning potential. In 2016, only 38% of South Africa’s youth aged 18 – 24 attended college or university.¹⁰ Other reasons for low attendance at the post-school level include a lack of access to information when deciding on matric subjects or pathways to higher education or employment, costly and complicated application processes at learning institutions, and institutional cultures and requirements that tend to exclude the most vulnerable youth.¹¹

Economic opportunities

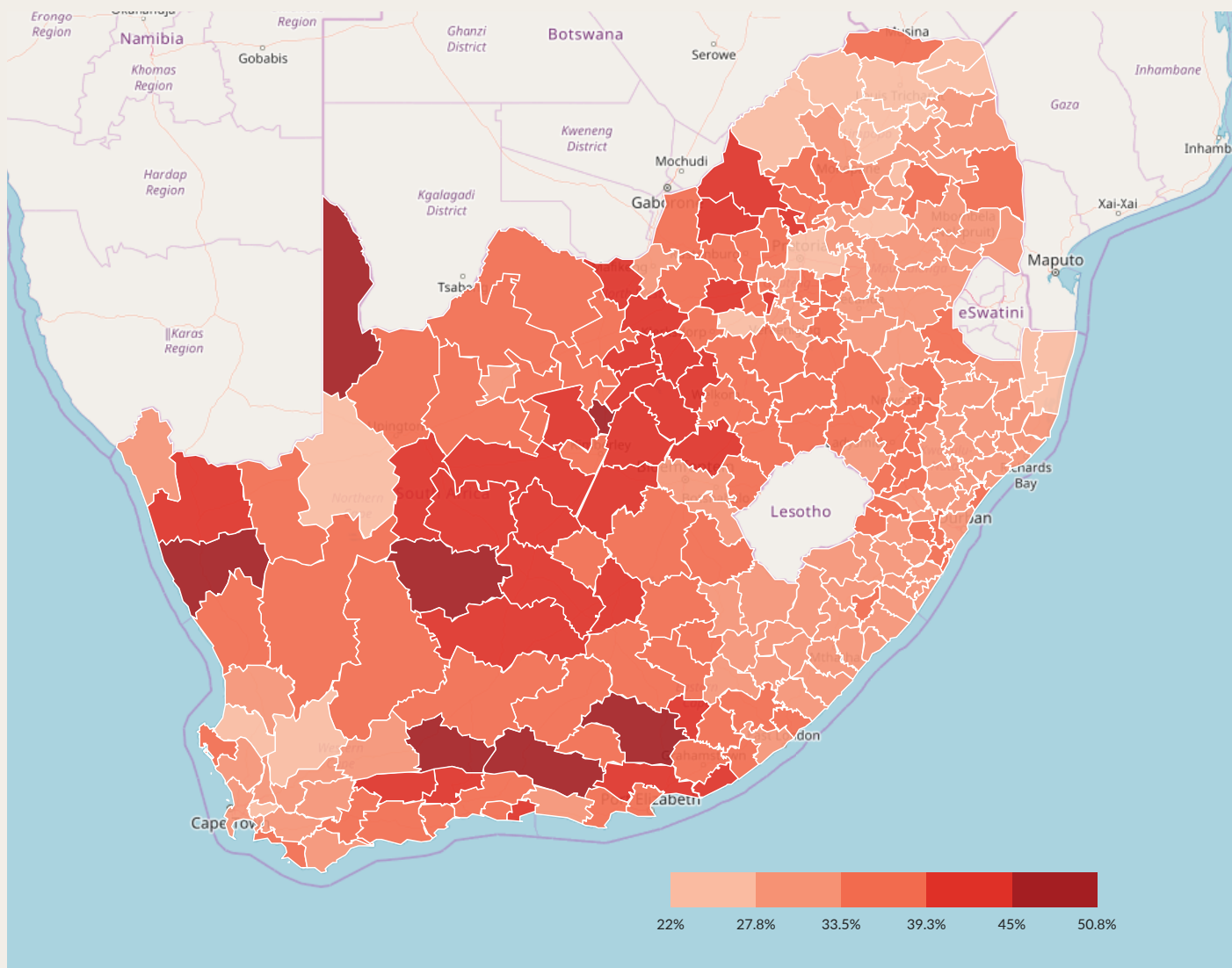
While access to education has improved significantly since 1994, the data indicate that education levels remain low. In the context of a labour market that demands higher levels of skills, the low educational outcomes contribute to the country’s high youth unemployment rates. The official unemployment rate for youth aged 15 –

24 was 52% in 2011 – and this rate increases to 64% if discouraged work-seekers are included.¹² Unemployment is highest for youth without a matric (57%) and lowest for those with any tertiary education and training (29%).¹³ Increasing the number of young people who complete their matric or matric equivalent with higher levels of literacy, numeracy and other technical skills is thus important. A better articulation between the various parts of the South African education system, and the creation of second-chance learning and job opportunities that are accessible also to those who currently remain without a matric would help lowering unemployment rates too.¹⁴

Social connections can facilitate successful job search,¹⁵ and having an adult in the household is also a source of information about the world of work. Yet, in 2011, 42% of South Africa’s youth aged 15 – 24 grew up in households where no adult was employed.¹⁶

There are again vast differences in unemployment rates depending on where young people live. The youth unemployment rate for the Western Cape, for example, is 41%,

Figure 3: Youth not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in 2011, by municipality



Source: Poverty and Inequality Initiative (2018) *Youth Explorer*. PII, SALDRU, University of Cape Town. Access at: <https://youthexplorer.org.za>.

while it is 63% for Limpopo.¹⁷ Figure 2 (page 3), which displays the variation of youth unemployment rates across municipalities (darker colours are municipalities with high youth unemployment rates, lighter colours show low rates) clearly shows pockets of very high youth unemployment hidden behind the national and provincial averages. While the provincial average of youth unemployment for the Western Cape is 41%, it hides worse situations in municipalities like Bergrivier, Cederberg and Witzenberg who all have youth unemployment rates of more than 80%.

Unemployment is especially high for young people living in the former homeland and rural areas, with youth unemployment rates of above 70% in Ntambanana, Hlabisa, and Indaka in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as Ngqushwa, Nkonkobe and Ngquza Hill in Eastern Cape. In contrast, unemployment is relatively lower – at less than 50% – for young people living in urban areas like Mogale City and City of Johannesburg in Gauteng.

Thus, youth in and around cities do better as they are closer to economic nodes and opportunities, and there are more services that facilitate job search and job retention. Despite these advantages, even youth near urban hubs struggle to connect to jobs and learning opportunities as affordable inner-city accommodation is hardly available and transport to travel into the city is expensive and often unreliable.¹⁸ Information on existing programmes and support services often does not reach young people.¹⁹

A particularly vulnerable group of young people are those not in education, employment and training (NEET), affecting approximately one out of three South Africans (32%) aged 15 – 24. Figure 3 illustrates the importance of interrogating these national averages at provincial and municipal levels (darker colours show municipalities with high proportion of NEET youths, lighter colours show low proportions). For instance, proportions of youth who are NEET go up to well over 36% in the North West and Northern Cape.

Within the Northern Cape, in the municipality of Kamiesberg, no less than 51% of young people aged 15 – 24 are NEET. Even in provinces where the overall rate is lower than the national average, pockets of much higher NEET rates exist: in Gauteng, just under 32% of youth are NEET but, within the province, the municipality of Westonaria has a youth NEET rate of 42%.

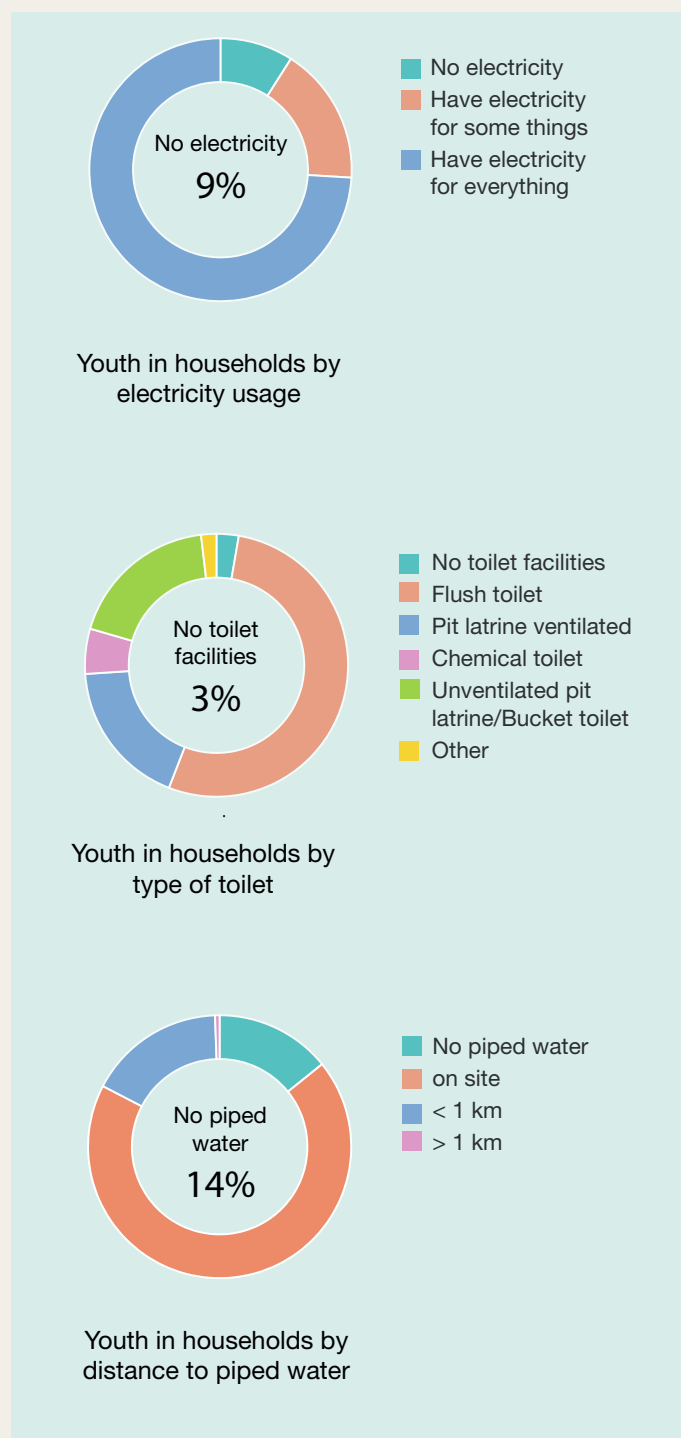
Family and living environment

Access to basic services has improved significantly in the post-apartheid period. However, a sizeable number of young people continue to live in households without basic necessities (see Figure 4). In 2016, 9% of youth aged 15 – 24 did not have electricity within their homes, and 3% did not have toilet facilities in the house. Nine percent of them live in an informal dwelling, 16% live in households that

are overcrowded and 36% of youth aged 15 – 19 live with neither of their parents. Moreover, 14% of youth do not have access to piped water within their homes.

While these percentages seem relatively low compared to other indicators, mapping the outcomes at sub-national and sub-provincial levels again shows extreme disparities across the country. For example, while on average about 1% of youth live in households without access to piped water in the Western Cape, youth in some of the province’s municipalities like Stellenbosch (23%) fare much worse. In the Eastern Cape, with an average of 34%, more than 60% of youth aged 15 – 24 in the municipalities of Mbhashe, Ntabankulu and Port St Johns live in households without piped water.

Figure 4: Proportion of youth with access to basic services in 2016



Health and wellness

Adolescent behaviours and health are key predictors of the adult burden of disease. Improving the health of adolescents and youth, therefore, is crucial for not only their current well-being but also for future economic productivity. Poverty is associated with experiences of social exclusion, heightened stress, violence and trauma which may increase risk and severity of mental illness and substance misuse, and compromise access to care. These connections remain poorly understood in the South African context.

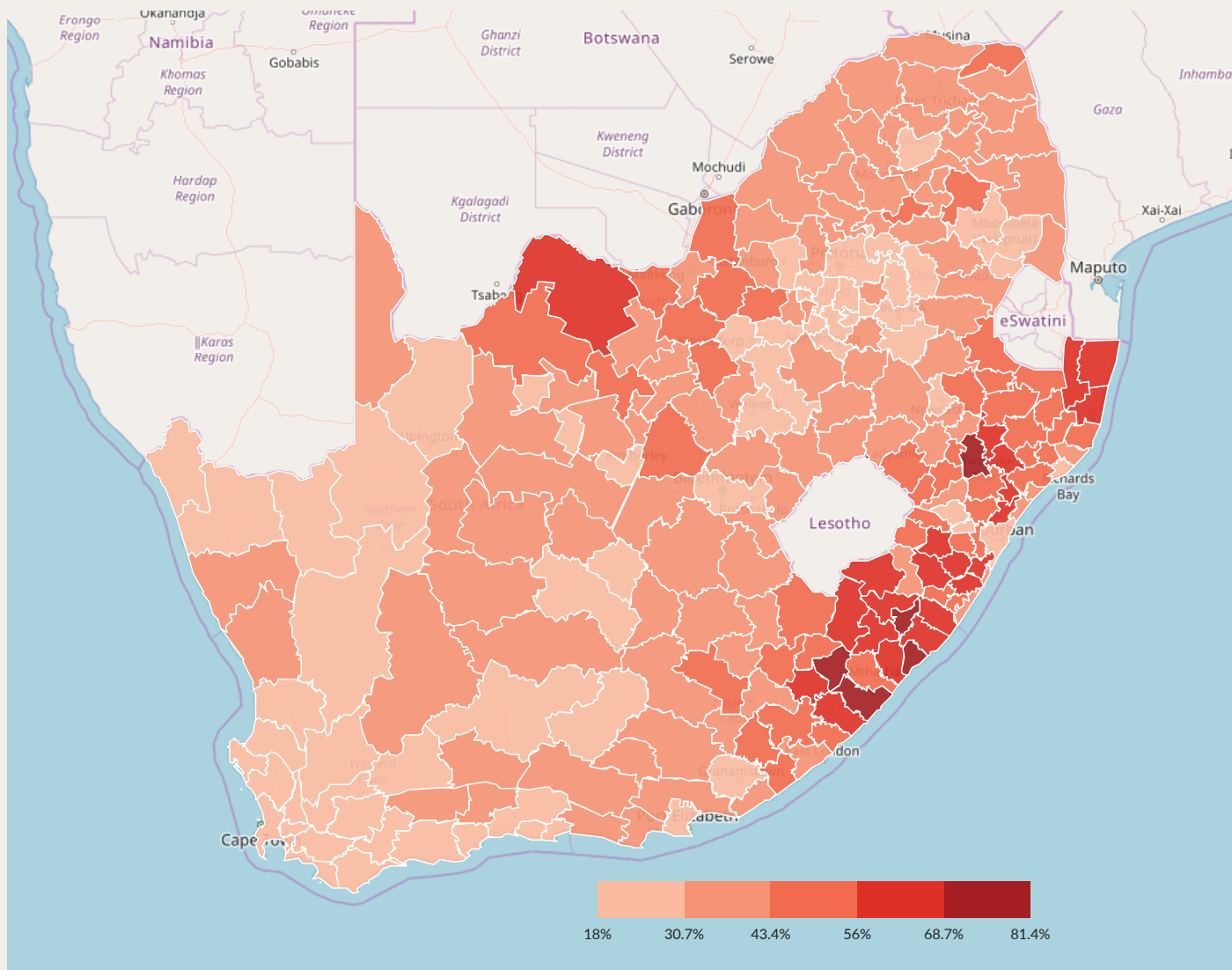
Nationally, health data on the Youth Explorer can, at the moment, only tell us about “general functionings” as the census interrogates only a small fraction of the physical health problems young people may struggle with. For instance, 4% of all youth aged 15 – 24 have difficulty seeing even when using spectacles – a proportion that goes up to just under 8% in the Free State. Data on mental health – such as anxiety, depression and low levels of self-esteem – are not captured. Questions about injuries, interpersonal violence or HIV and AIDS are not asked even though these are leading

causes of death for youth. A better understanding of these issues might trigger better survival outcomes.

In 2016, nearly 29% of all 15 – 24-year-old girls or young women reported having given birth to a child. While most of those births were among the older cohort (20 – 24 years), still more than one out of 10 teenage girls between ages 15 – 19 (12%) reported having given birth to a child. Taking on the responsibility for a child whilst still at school poses great financial, emotional and social risks, may lead to early school leaving and can compromise employment prospects due to child care responsibilities.²⁰

The picture of youth well-being that emerges from National Census and Community Survey data is inadequate. The health-related information that they capture is limited, and so is the scope for understanding how multiple deprivations in young people’s lives interact. Administrative data that are collected by specific line departments and at various levels of governance are extremely useful in contributing to a more comprehensive understanding that leads to better-informed interventions and policy that can lead to change in young people’s lives.

Figure 5: Incidence of multidimensional youth poverty in 2011, by municipality



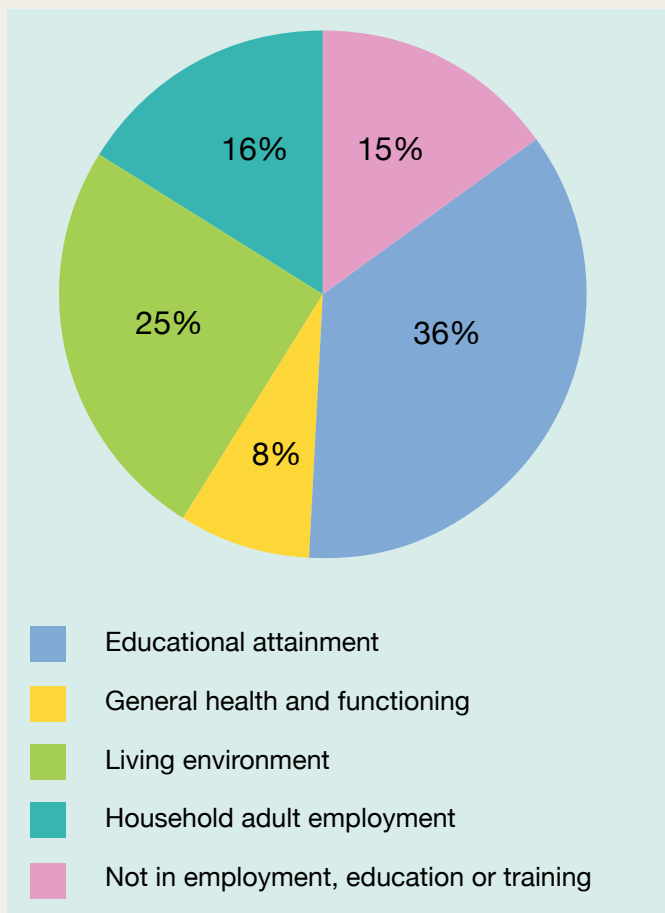
Source: Poverty and Inequality Initiative (2018) *Youth Explorer*. PII, SALDRU, University of Cape Town. Access at: <https://youthexplorer.org.za>.

Why is it important to consider multidimensional poverty?

Many young people experience several deprivations simultaneously, including low levels of education, poor health and limited access to housing, basic services, and economic opportunities. Their vulnerabilities are often interrelated: for example, income poverty can compromise living conditions, which, in turn, impact on youth's health, education, and employment prospects.

The Youth Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is designed to capture the multiple deprivations experienced by young people.²¹ It comprises 11 indicators on education, health, living environment, and economic opportunities. Understanding the multiple dimensions of poverty and how they interact is crucial to support young people adequately by targeting those multiple deprivations at the same time through comprehensive and transversal policies. A comprehensive approach in policy increases the chances of making a real difference in youths' lives. As the deprivations interrelate and are cumulative, progress in the one field could however be wiped out by setbacks in another field.

Figure 6: Contributors to youth multidimensional poverty in 2011



Source: Frame, E., De Lannoy, A. & Leibbrandt, M. (2016). *Measuring multidimensional poverty among youth in South Africa at the sub-national level*. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit working paper no. 169. Cape Town: SALDRU, University of Cape Town.

Overall, 33% of youth (age 15 – 24) in South Africa are multidimensionally poor, with African youth most affected (36%). The spatial inequalities in young people's well-being, as described above, are equally noticeable when mapping the MPI across the country. Figure 5 depicts multidimensional poverty rates that range from under 18% in municipalities (shaded light pink) to over 40% in other areas, mainly in the former homelands (shaded dark red).

A decomposition of the Youth MPI (see Figure 6) shows that educational attainment (36%), living environment (26%), adult household employment (16%), and NEET (15%) are the largest contributors to multidimensional youth poverty. These findings indicate the urgency to intervene in ways that would improve young people's educational outcomes, living environment, and connections to the labour market.

Conclusion

In 2011, more than 60% of young people in the country were living in income poor households and one out of three were considered multidimensionally poor. While the data in this policy brief indicate improvement in some of the domains of youth well-being, such as grade 9 completion, matric completion, teenage childbearing and living environments, data on two key drivers of intergenerational poverty and inequality - income and employment - are absent which hampers the correct and accurate comparison of progress made in these areas.

We point out the need for critical examination of data that are presented only at the national or provincial levels, as such information hides considerable discrepancies and pockets of more severe deprivations. In addition, the use of administrative data proves crucial to understand important nuances.

Taking education as an example, we see that while at a national level matric completion has improved, the rate remains very low, with just over half of all youth aged 20 to 24 having completed their final high school year. In addition, administrative data collected in certain areas indicate continuously low literacy and numeracy levels.

Overall, the picture thus remains dire especially as matric completion, and literacy and numeracy skills are considered crucial in the labour market.

Finally, this brief emphasises that young people experience multiple deprivations simultaneously. It argues therefore that it is important to consider the possibility of a comprehensive social security programme for youth, to increase their chances of breaking poverty traps for themselves and for their children.



Suggested citation

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Notes

- 1 National Youth Policy (2015). *National Youth Policy 2015 – 2020*. Pretoria: The Presidency.
- 2 The policy also adds nation-building and social cohesion, as well as creating an efficient “youth machinery”, to its core targets. We have insufficient data available for the analysis of youth well-being in these areas in the national datasets used for the Youth Explorer.
- 3 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (no date). *Definition of youth*. UNDESA.
- 4 Statistics South Africa (2016). Community Survey. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Gibson Mudiriza, Poverty & Inequality Initiative, UCT.]
- 5 R779 is the Rand value, in 2011 prices, of Stats SA’s rebased “upper bound poverty line”. See: Statistics South Africa (2015). *Methodological report on rebasing of national poverty lines and development on pilot provincial poverty lines – Technical Report*. Pretoria: Stats SA. With the new adjusted poverty line of R1 138 (Stats SA’s 2017 adjusted “upper bound poverty line”), the proportion of young people living in poor households increases to 69.6%, while for the adult population it increases to 53%.
- 6 Statistics South Africa (2011) *Census*. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Poverty & Inequality Initiative, UCT.]
- 7 See no. 6 above.
- 8 Spaul, N. (2015). Schooling in South Africa: How low quality education becomes a poverty trap. In: De Lannoy, A., Swartz, S., Lake, L. & Smith, C. (eds) *South African Child Gauge 2015*. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town.
- 9 Western Cape Department of Education. Administrative data on systemic evaluations for the period 2011/2017 provided by the PGWC.
- 10 See no. 4 above.
- 11 Branson, N., Hofmeyer, C., Papier, J., & Needham, S. (2015). Post-school education: Broadening alternative pathways from school to work. In: De Lannoy, A., Swartz, S., Lake, L. & Smith, C. (eds) *South African Child Gauge 2015*. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town.; Papier, J. (2009). “Getting the right learners into the right programmes”: An investigation into factors that contributed to the poor performance of FET college learners in NCV 2 and NCV 3 programmes in 2007 and 2008 – reasons and recommendations. Cape Town: FETI, University of Western Cape.
- 12 See no. 6 above.
- 13 See no. 6 above.
- 14 Graham, L. & Mlatsheni, C. (2015). Youth unemployment in South Africa: Understanding the challenge and working on solutions. In: De Lannoy, A., Swartz, S., Lake, L. & Smith, C. (eds) *South African Child Gauge 2015*. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town.; See no. 11 above (Branson, et al., 2015).; See no. 8 above.
- 15 Godlonton, S. & Burns, J. (2006) *Social networks, employment and worker discouragement: Evidence from South Africa*. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit working paper no. 06/06. Cape Town: SALDRU, University of Cape Town.; Seekings, J. & Natras, N. (2005) *Race, class and inequality in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 16 See no. 6 above.
- 17 See no. 6 above.
- 18 Kerr, A. (2015). *Tax(i)ing the poor? Commuting costs in South Africa*. REDI working paper no. 12.; Banerjee, A. & Sequiera, S. (2014) *Transport subsidies and job matchmaking in South Africa*. Cape Town: Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.
- 19 Graham, L., Patel, L., Chowa, G., Masa, R., Khan, Z., Williams, L., & Mthembu, S. (2016). Youth assets for employability: *An evaluation of youth employability interventions (Siyakha Youth Assets Baseline Report)*. Johannesburg: Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg.
- 20 Branson, N., & Byker, T. “Causes and consequences of teen childbearing: Evidence from a reproductive health intervention in South Africa”. *Journal of Health Economics*. vol. 57, 2018, pp 221-235.
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- 21 Frame, E., De Lannoy, A., Koka, P. & Leibbrandt, M. (2016). *Multidimensional Youth Poverty: Estimating the Youth MPI in South Africa at ward level*. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit working paper no. 189. Cape Town: SALDRU, University of Cape Town.