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# Youth in South Africa

## 2024

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**IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS**



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## Introduction

Youth represent a significant and dynamic demographic globally, embodying potential and driving future socio-economic development and progress. According to the World Youth Report (2020), there are 1,2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population. It is more important than ever to address the many issues that young people face, including gender inequality, unemployment, health, and education access. With almost 60% of its people under 25, Africa has the youngest population in the world.<sup>1</sup>

South Africa's youth population has undergone notable changes over the past three decades. This report examines the demographic shifts from 1996 to 2022 using data from Statistics South Africa, exploring population size, growth trends, gender distribution, and provincial variations within the 15 to 34 age group. The analysis includes the different challenges experienced by the youth over this period. Different sources and reference periods are used in the analysis depending on when the first point of data is available.

## Youth demography

This section examines the demographic shifts from 1996 to 2022 using data from Statistics South Africa Censuses, exploring population size, growth trends, gender distribution, and provincial variations within the 15 to 34 age group.

**Table 1: Youth (15–34 years) population size and growth (1996–2022)**

Age group	1996	2001	2011	2022
	<b>Thousand</b>			
15-19	4 181	4 982	5 003	4 975
20-24	3 982	4 295	5 375	5 310
25-29	3 456	3 935	5 059	5 733
30-34	3 074	3 341	4 029	5 593
<b>15-34</b>	<b>14 693</b>	<b>16 552</b>	<b>19 466</b>	<b>21 611</b>
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Change 1996-2022</b>
	<b>Change (Thousand)</b>			
15-19	801	22	-28	795
20-24	312	1 080	-65	1 327
25-29	479	1 124	674	2 278
30-34	267	688	1 564	2 519
<b>15-34</b>	<b>1 859</b>	<b>2 914</b>	<b>2 145</b>	<b>6 918</b>
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Change 1996-2022</b>
	<b>Growth rate (Per cent)</b>			
15-19	17,5	0,4	-0,6	17,4
20-24	7,6	22,4	-1,2	28,8
25-29	13	25,1	12,5	50,6
30-34	8,3	18,7	32,8	59,9
<b>15-34</b>	<b>11,9</b>	<b>16,2</b>	<b>10,5</b>	<b>38,6</b>

Source: Census 1996 to 2022

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth>

Between 1996 and 2022, the overall youth population in South Africa grew from 14,7 million to 21,6 million, an increase of 6,9 million individuals or 38,6%. The 15–19 age group showed the least growth over this period. In 1996, this group recorded 4,2 million individuals, increasing to 5,0 million by 2022. This represents a growth of 795 000 individuals, or 17,4%. Notably, this age group saw only minor changes after peaking at 5,0 million in 2011, followed by a slight decline by 2022. The 30–34 age group experienced the highest growth during this period. Starting with 3,0 million individuals in 1996, this group grew to 5,6 million by 2022. This represents an increase of 2,5 million individuals, or 59,9%, the highest growth among all age groups.

**Table 2: Youth (15–34 years) by sex (1996–2022)**

Sex	1996	2001	2011	2022
	<b>Thousand</b>			
Male	7 095	8 046	9 772	10 777
Female	7 598	8 506	9 694	10 834
<b>Total</b>	<b>14 693</b>	<b>16 552</b>	<b>19 466</b>	<b>21 611</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>			
Male	48,3	48,6	50,2	49,9
Female	51,7	51,4	49,8	50,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Census 1996 to 2022

Both male and female populations in the 15–34 age group have increased significantly from 1996 to 2022. Males increased by 3,7 million and females by 3,2 million. In 1996, females outnumbered males by 503 608, by 2022, the gender gap had narrowed significantly, with females outnumbering males by only 56 778. Overall, sex variations show that with exception of Census 2011 where 50,2% of youth were male compared to 49,8% female, female youth were more compared to their male counterparts.

**Table 3: Youth (15–34 years) by province (1996–2022)**

	1996	2001	2011	2022	Change 1996- 2022	Growth rate (%) 1996-2022
	Thousand					
<b>Western Cape</b>	1 474	1 696	2 138	2 563	1 088	55,3
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	2 014	2 139	2 228	2 339	325	15,0
<b>Northern Cape</b>	350	286	399	454	104	26,0
<b>Free State</b>	981	1 000	1 003	1 001	21	2,0
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	3 087	3 456	3 932	4 391	1 305	35,2
<b>North West</b>	997	1 333	1 259	1 283	286	25,2
<b>Gauteng</b>	3 124	3 652	5 005	5 590	2 466	58,2
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	1 145	1 154	1 542	1 847	702	47,8
<b>Limpopo</b>	1 522	1 837	1 961	2 144	622	34,3
<b>RSA</b>	<b>14 693</b>	<b>16 552</b>	<b>19 466</b>	<b>21 611</b>	<b>6 918</b>	<b>38,6</b>

Source: Census 1996 to 2022

Gauteng experienced the highest absolute and percentage growth in the youth population between 1996 and 2022, with an increase of 2,5 million individuals, representing a total growth rate of 58,2%. This can be attributed to its status as the economic hub of South Africa, attracting young people for employment and educational opportunities. The Free State showed the lowest growth, with an increase of only 20 584 individuals or 2,0%. Provinces with major urban centres, such as Gauteng and Western Cape, have seen higher growth rates, indicating urbanisation trends. More rural provinces like Free State and Eastern Cape have experienced slower growth, suggesting migration to urban areas for better opportunities.

### Youth headed households

Children and youth headed households frequently encounter a variety of obstacles, such as financial hardships, emotional and psychological issues stemming from the loss or absence of their parents, difficulties in the classroom, and difficulties adjusting to the new way of life. These households are at risk of having to cope without parental care or regular income and are located in areas where services are often poor. Using data from Censuses, the analysis in this section looks at distribution of youth-headed households by type of services they get. Youth refer to those persons 15-34 years, while non-youth refers to persons 35 years and above.

**Table 4: Percentage distribution of households by headship, type of main dwelling and province, Census 1996-2022**

Province	Census year	Formal dwelling		Traditional dwelling		Informal dwelling		Other	
		Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
Western Cape	1996	74,2	85,5	0,8	0,9	24,6	13,3	0,4	0,3
	2001	68,4	86,5	2,6	2,0	28,5	11,2	0,5	0,3
	2011	62,7	87,2	0,5	0,5	35,6	11,5	1,2	0,8
	2022	71,5	91,7	1,1	0,6	27,0	7,4	0,4	0,2
Eastern Cape	1996	47,9	48,0	36,9	41,6	14,7	10,0	0,5	0,3
	2001	51,6	51,4	30,9	38,9	17,1	9,5	0,3	0,2
	2011	64,2	62,9	22,3	30,0	12,3	6,4	1,2	0,8
	2022	80,7	84,2	10,9	11,9	8,0	3,6	0,4	0,3
Northern Cape	1996	75,6	79,3	7,3	7,8	15,4	11,9	1,7	1,0
	2001	76,4	82,6	6,6	7,1	15,9	9,7	1,1	0,6
	2011	75,1	84,8	3,0	3,2	20,1	10,8	1,8	1,2
	2022	80,2	87,5	1,4	1,3	17,6	10,6	0,8	0,5
Free State	1996	58,7	64,9	10,4	10,2	30,2	24,4	0,7	0,6
	2001	58,3	69,9	6,7	7,4	34,6	22,5	0,3	0,3
	2011	73,5	84,0	2,4	2,4	22,9	12,9	1,2	0,7
	2022	84,5	89,7	1,3	1,2	13,6	8,5	0,7	0,5
KwaZulu-Natal	1996	55,4	55,2	26,2	35,6	17,8	8,8	0,5	0,4
	2001	60,9	60,0	21,6	31,2	17,1	8,4	0,5	0,3
	2011	70,7	72,0	12,9	21,5	15,1	5,7	1,4	0,9
	2022	83,9	87,7	6,3	8,4	9,5	3,6	0,3	0,3
North West	1996	66,4	70,9	6,0	6,8	27,1	21,8	0,5	0,4
	2001	65,1	74,6	4,4	5,1	30,2	20,1	0,3	0,2
	2011	68,8	79,2	1,3	1,8	28,8	18,2	1,1	0,8
	2022	79,8	90,0	0,8	0,7	18,7	8,9	0,6	0,4
Gauteng	1996	68,9	77,7	0,8	0,8	30,0	21,2	0,4	0,3
	2001	65,9	78,7	1,3	1,3	32,5	19,7	0,4	0,3
	2011	71,7	84,1	0,4	0,3	26,8	14,8	1,1	0,8
	2022	80,5	91,0	0,4	0,2	18,7	8,5	0,4	0,2
Mpumalanga	1996	63,3	67,1	19,7	19,6	16,6	12,8	0,4	0,4
	2001	69,2	73,6	11,6	13,6	18,8	12,6	0,3	0,2
	2011	80,0	85,5	4,0	4,7	14,9	9,1	1,1	0,7
	2022	88,7	93,3	1,8	1,8	9,2	4,8	0,3	0,2
Limpopo	1996	60,0	63,1	32,6	32,1	7,1	4,5	0,3	0,2
	2001	69,2	73,9	19,8	20,3	10,7	5,6	0,3	0,2
	2011	85,1	91,5	4,8	4,4	9,3	3,7	0,8	0,4
	2022	93,5	95,0	2,0	2,3	4,1	2,3	0,4	0,4
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>62,5</b>	<b>66,2</b>	<b>15,5</b>	<b>19,4</b>	<b>21,6</b>	<b>14,0</b>	<b>0,5</b>	<b>0,4</b>
	<b>2001</b>	<b>64,0</b>	<b>70,4</b>	<b>11,4</b>	<b>16,1</b>	<b>24,2</b>	<b>13,2</b>	<b>0,4</b>	<b>0,3</b>
	<b>2011</b>	<b>71,7</b>	<b>80,1</b>	<b>5,4</b>	<b>8,9</b>	<b>21,7</b>	<b>10,2</b>	<b>1,2</b>	<b>0,8</b>
	<b>2022</b>	<b>82,4</b>	<b>90,2</b>	<b>2,7</b>	<b>3,3</b>	<b>14,5</b>	<b>6,2</b>	<b>0,4</b>	<b>0,3</b>

Source: Census 1996 to 2022

The results presented in Table 4 show percentage distribution of households disaggregated by province, headship and type of main dwelling in the last four Censuses. Overall, there are higher proportions of youth and non-youth headed households residing in formal dwellings compared to other type of dwellings in South Africa. Furthermore, variations were observed between youth and non-youth headed households residing in formal dwellings in all four census years, with the former recording lower percentages compared to the latter. Trends further revealed that the gap widened over the period 1996-2022 (differences in percentage points increased from three in 1996 to eight in 2022).

On the other hand, profile of households that resided in informal dwellings showed that youth headed households recorded higher proportions compared to non-youth headed households



and this was the case in all census years. Provincial profile depict a pattern similar to the national one; higher percentage of youth headed households that resided in informal dwellings compared to non-youth headed households and this was the case for all provinces. However, Western Cape, Free State, North West and Gauteng recorded higher percentages of youth headed households that resided in informal dwellings compared to other provinces.

Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal has higher proportions of youth and non-youth headed households residing in traditional dwellings. Interestingly, both provinces have higher proportions of non-youth headed households compared to youth headed households residing in traditional dwellings in both Census years. Provincial variations depicted in the Table 3 are consistent with inter provincial migration patterns, i.e urban provinces where youth are likely to migrate to in search of better education facilities and job opportunities recorded higher proportions of youth headed households residing in informal dwelling.

**Table 5: Percentage distribution of households by headship and access to piped water, Census 1996-2022**

Census year	Piped water in dwelling		Piped water inside yard		Piped water on community stand		No access to piped water	
	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
1996	42,7	44,9	17,7	16	22,3	18,4	17,3	20,6
2001	29	33,6	30,9	28,3	27,1	21,6	13	16,5
2011	40,5	48,6	31,8	25,2	20,2	16,9	7,5	9,3
2022	51,2	62,1	28,1	21,2	11,5	8,2	9,3	8,6

Source: Census 1996 to 2022

The results on access to piped water presented in Table 5 showed that nationally, the percentage of youth headed households with access to piped water inside the dwelling was lower in all census years compared to non-youth headed households. In Census 2022, non-youth headed households with access to piped water inside the dwelling were eleven percentage points higher than youth headed households (51,2% and 62,1% respectively). Equally, all provinces recorded lower proportion of youth headed households with access to piped water inside the dwelling compared to non-youth headed households.

**Table 6: Percentage distribution of households by headship and toilet facilities, Census 1996-2022**

Census year	Flush toilet		Chemical toilet		Pit latrine/toilet with ventilation pipe (VIP)		Pit latrine/toilet without ventilation pipe		Bucket toilet		Other		None	
	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
2001	50,7	52,4	1,9	1,9	5,4	5,8	21,8	23,2	4,9	3,8	0,0	0,0	15,3	12,9
2011	60,5	59,9	2,7	2,4	7,6	9,3	17,9	19,9	2,9	1,7	2,3	2,0	6,2	4,8
2022	67,9	71,7	3,3	2,4	8,5	9,7	13,3	12,3	3,4	1,7	1,1	1,0	2,5	1,3

Table 6 shows the percentage distribution of households by headship and toilet facilities from Census 2001 to 2022. Overall, there were higher proportions of non-youth headed households with flush toilet compared to youth headed households and the gap seem to have widened over the period 2001-2022.

**Table 7: Percentage distribution of households by headship status and energy for cooking - Census 1996-2022**

Census year	Electricity		Gas		Paraffin		Wood		Coal		Animal dung		Solar		Other		None	
	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
1996	46,1	48,1	3,3	3,1	25,8	19,9	20,5	23,9	3,3	3,7	0,9	1,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
2001	50,4	51,8	2,7	2,5	28,3	18,6	15,6	22,4	1,8	3,1	0,7	1,1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,0
2011	75,6	73,2	2,8	3,8	12,0	7,1	8,2	14,3	0,4	0,8	0,2	0,4	0,2	0,2	0,3	0,2	0,3	0,2
2022	72,6	62,7	17,2	28,1	4,7	2,1	4,7	6,5	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,3	0,1

Table 7 shows the percentage distribution of households by headship and energy used for cooking in all four Censuses 1996-2022. Over the years, there has been visible shifts in type of energy used for cooking. While for the period 1996-2001 we see higher proportion of non-youth households using electricity cooking compared to youth headed households, this has since changed. In both Censuses 2011 and 2022, percentage of households using electricity for cooking were higher among youth headed households. However, although there has been tremendous decrease in percentage of households using paraffin for cooking, there seem to be considerably higher proportions of youth headed households relying on paraffin to prepare meals compared to their non-youth counterparts.

**Table 8: Percentage distribution of households by headship and energy for lighting - Census 1996-2022**

Census year	Electricity		Gas		Paraffin		Candles		Solar		Other		None	
	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
1996	56,6	58,8	0,4	0,4	13,2	12,6	29,9	28,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
2001	65,9	71,3	0,3	0,2	7,9	6,3	25,4	21,6	0,2	0,2	0,3	0,3	0,0	0,0
2011	82,0	85,8	0,3	0,2	3,9	2,6	13,2	10,7	0,3	0,4	-	-	0,4	0,3
2022	91,7	95,5	0,3	0,2	1,5	0,7	5,0	2,6	1,0	0,6	0,2	0,1	0,3	0,1

Table 8 shows the percentage distribution of households by headship, energy used for lighting from Census 1996 to 2022. Overall, there were higher proportions of non-youth headed households using electricity for lighting compared to youth headed households. On the other hand, considerable higher proportions of youth headed households using candles for lighting were observed across all census years.

**Table 9: Distribution of households by headship status and refuse removal - Census 1996-2022**

Census year	Removed by local authority at least once a		Removed by local authority less often		Communal refuse dump		Communal container/central collection point		Own refuse dump		No rubbish disposal		Other	
	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth	Youth	Non-youth
1996	51,7	52,4	2,7	2,1	4,0	2,9	0,0	0,0	32,0	32,7	9,4	9,8	0,2	0,2
2001	56,5	55,0	1,9	1,4	2,3	1,5	0,0	0,0	31,1	33,2	8,3	8,8	0,0	0,0
2011	64,5	61,1	1,8	1,4	2,4	1,7	0,0	0,0	25,2	29,4	5,2	5,5	0,9	0,9
2022	64,1	68,0	1,5	1,2	2,2	1,4	3,7	2,2	21,9	22,4	5,7	4,2	0,7	0,7

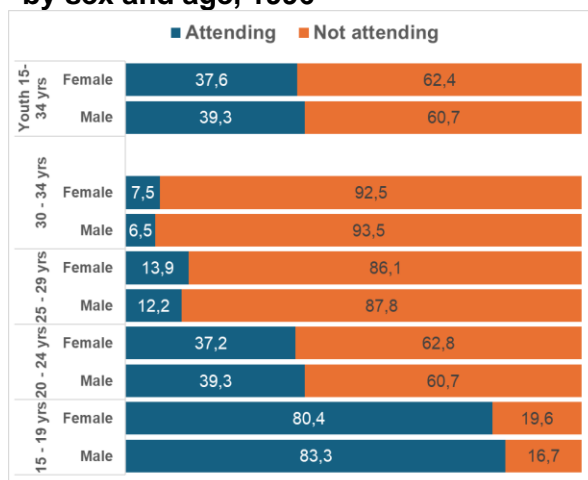
Table 9 shows the percentage distribution of households by headship and refuse removal services. Overall, more than half of youth and non-youth headed households have refuse removed by local authority at least once a week compared to other form of refuse removal in South Africa. Furthermore, in Census 2022, approximately more than a fifth (1,9% and 22,4%) of youth and non-youth headed households had their own refuse dump compared to other refuse removal in South Africa. Generally, there has been a decrease in proportion of households with no refuse removal facilities over the period 1996-2022 among both youth and non-youth headed households.

## Education

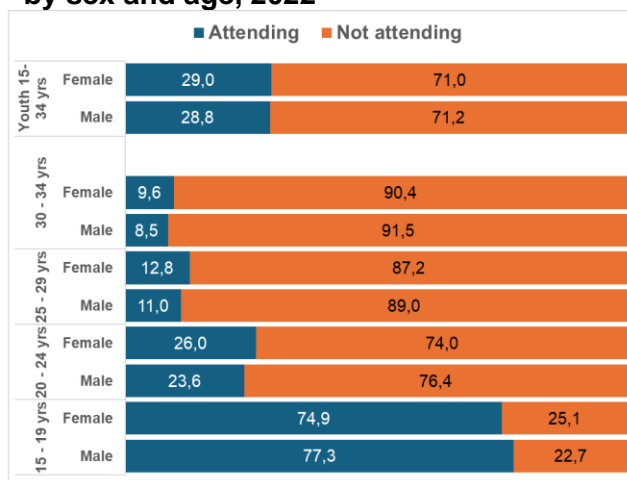
South Africa’s education policies primarily focus on access to basic education, including early childhood development, and make schooling compulsory for children aged seven to 15 to ensure that all learners have access to quality education without discrimination. The near universal school attendance of young children unfortunately does not translate into a high participation rate among the youth, especially at tertiary education level. According to Census 2022 results, functional illiteracy rates declined between 1996 and 2022, although females had slightly higher rates of illiteracy compared to their male counterparts. Among the 20 million youth aged 15–34 in 2022, only 5,8 million were participating in educational institutions. In this section, the analysis will look at the percentage of youth (15–34 years) who attended educational institutions and the highest level of education completed between 1996 and 2022 based on Census data as well data from the General Household Survey (GHS).

### Attendance

**Figure 1: Percentage of those attending or not attending educational institution by sex and age, 1996**



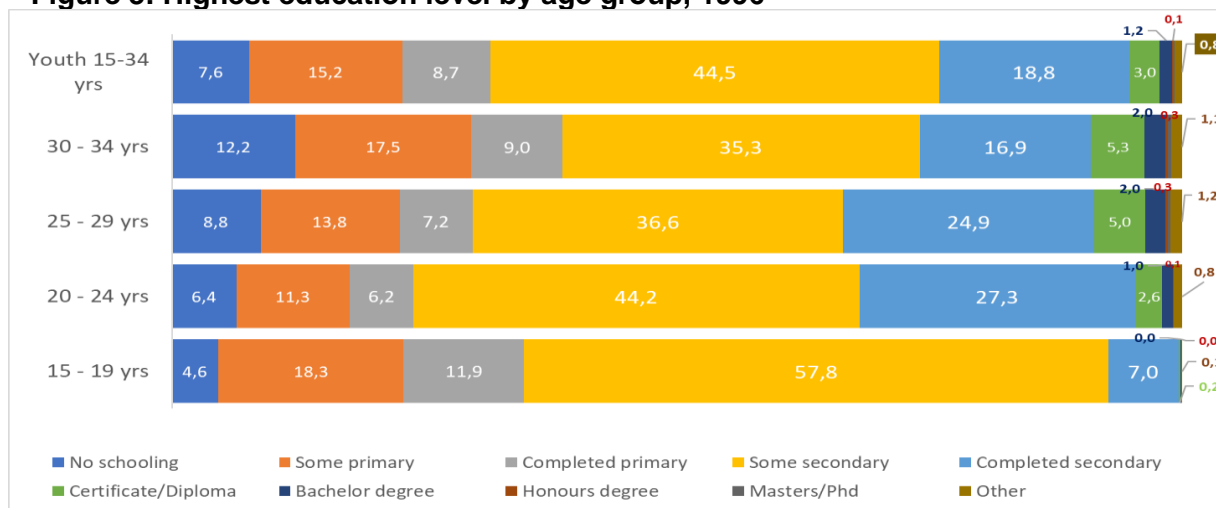
**Figure 2: Percentage of those attending or not attending educational institution by sex and age, 2022**



Source: Census 1996 and 2022

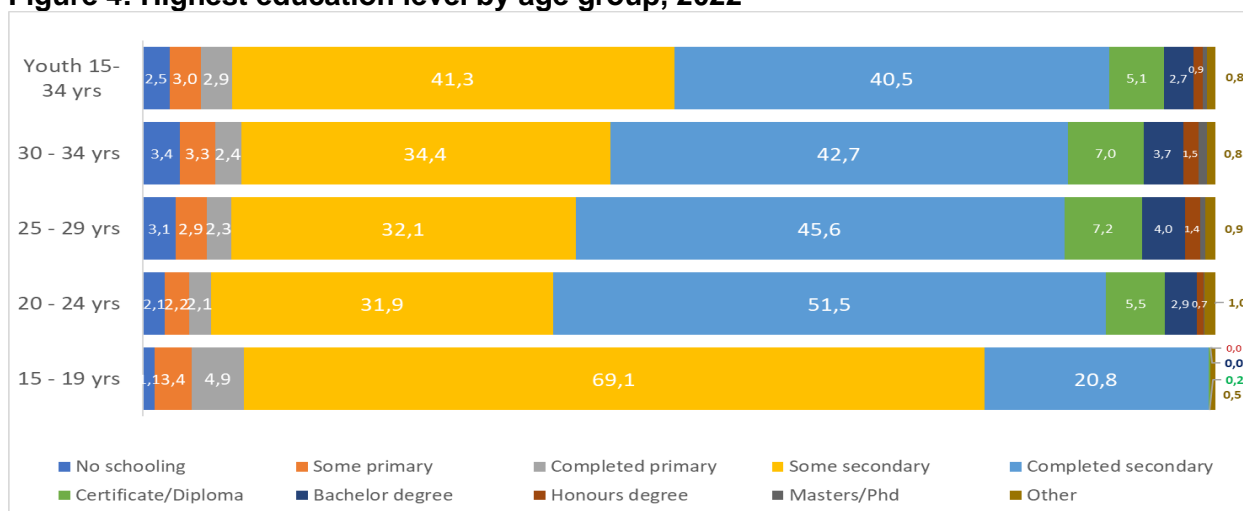
Attendance of educational institutions among the youth aged 15–34 has declined overall from close to 39,3% in 1996 to 28,8% among males and from 37,6% among females in 1996 to 29% in 2022. Gender disparities in attendance of educational institutions were minimal, however, there was more participation in educational institutions among females between the ages 15–29 compared to males. Furthermore, participation in educational institutions among the older youth has slightly increased, particularly among those aged 30–34 years from 6,5% in 1996 to 8,5% in 2022 for males and 7,5% in 1996 to 9,6% in 2022.

**Figure 3: Highest education level by age group, 1996**



Source: Census 1996 and 2022

**Figure 4: Highest education level by age group, 2022**

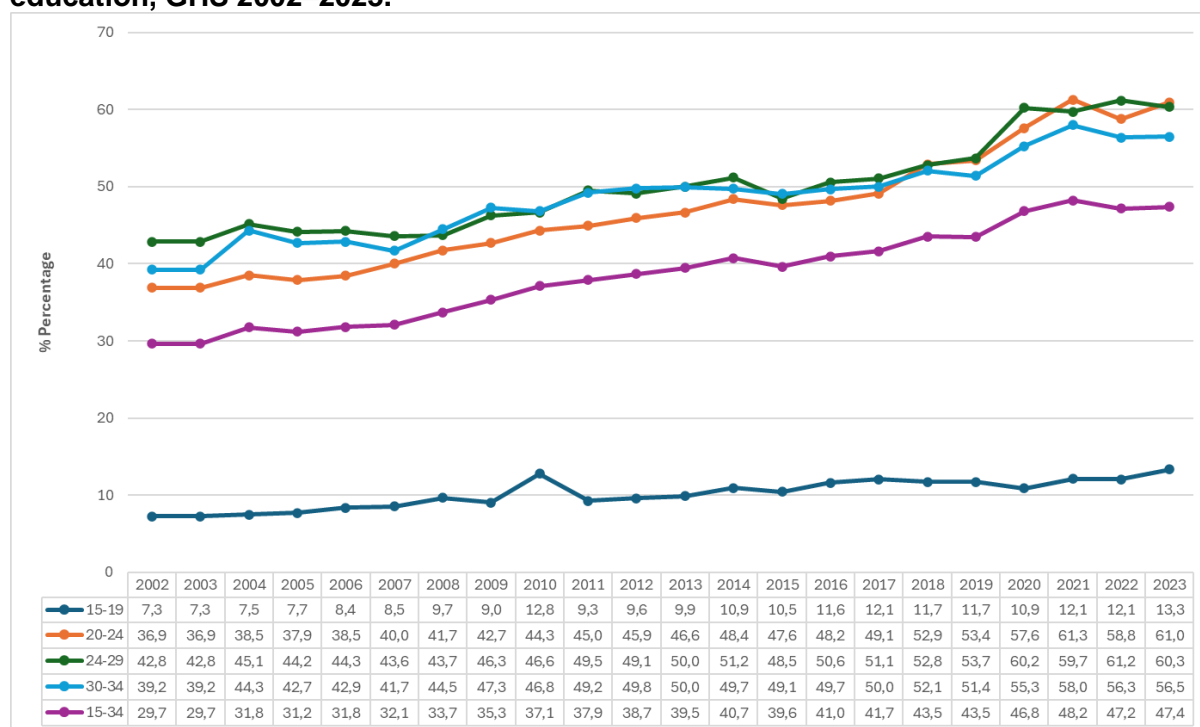


Source: Census 1996 and 2022

In 1996, the highest percentage (12,2%) of individuals without any schooling was in the age group (30–34 years), indicating that a significant portion of young people in this cohort did not receive formal education. However, by 2022, this percentage notably decreased to 3,4% for the same age group. There was also a noticeable increase in the percentage of individuals completing secondary education across all age groups from 1996 to 2022.

The age groups 20–24 and 25–29 show the most substantial increases in completion of at least secondary education from 1996 to 2022. The percentage of individuals aged 15–34 attaining a bachelor's degree doubled from 1,2% in 1996 to 2,7% in 2022. While there is an increase, the percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree remains relatively low.

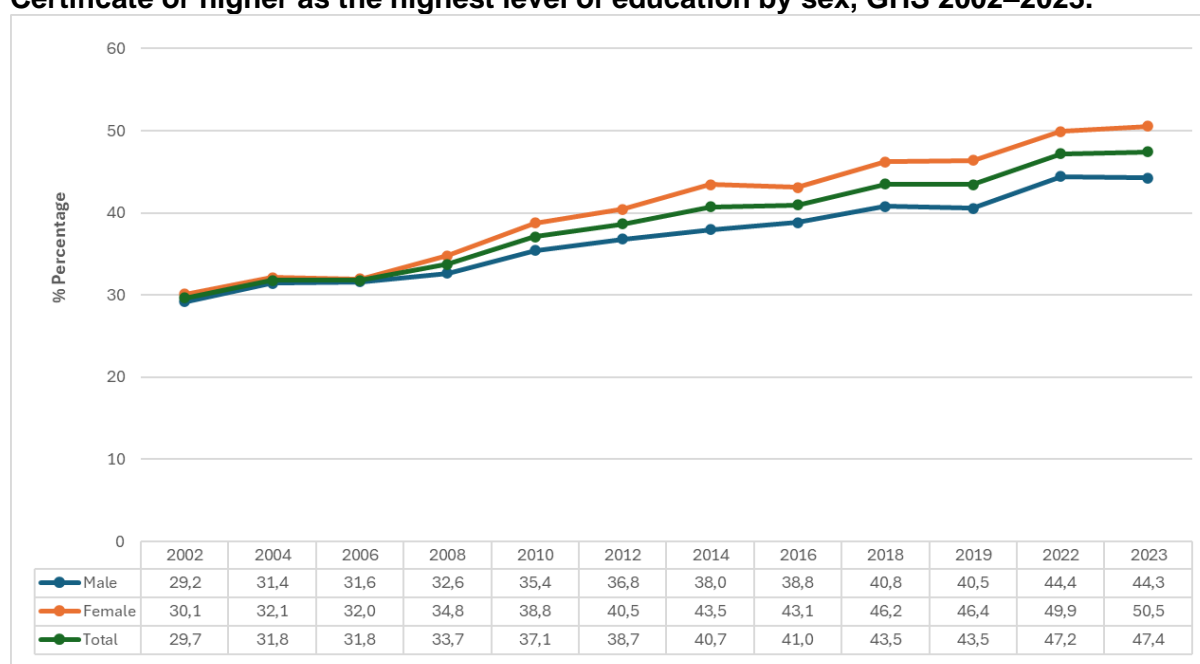
**Figure 5: Percentage of youth who have at least attained matric as the highest level of education, GHS 2002–2023.**



Source: General Household Survey (GHS) 2002–2023

The finding outlined in Figures 3 and 4 are corroborated by Figure 5 which shows a consistent increase since 2002 in the percentage of youth, across all youth age categories, that have attained a National Senior Certificate (matric) or higher as their highest level of education.

**Figure 6: Percentage of youth aged 15–34 years who have attained a National Senior Certificate or higher as the highest level of education by sex, GHS 2002–2023.**



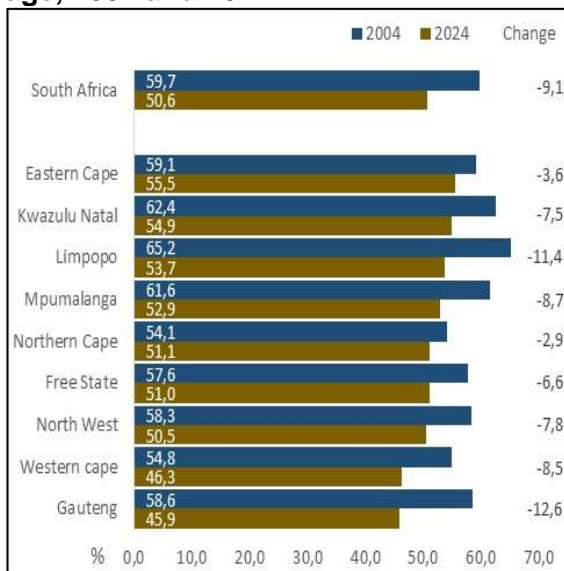
Source: General Household Survey (GHS) 2002–2023

Figure 6 shows that female youth aged 15–34 outperformed their male peers in terms of attaining at least a National Senior Certificate (matric). While very similar percentages of male and female youth in this age group had achieved matric in 2002, by 2023 more than one-half (50,2%) of female youths had achieved matric, compared to 44,3% of their male counterparts.

**Youth labour market**

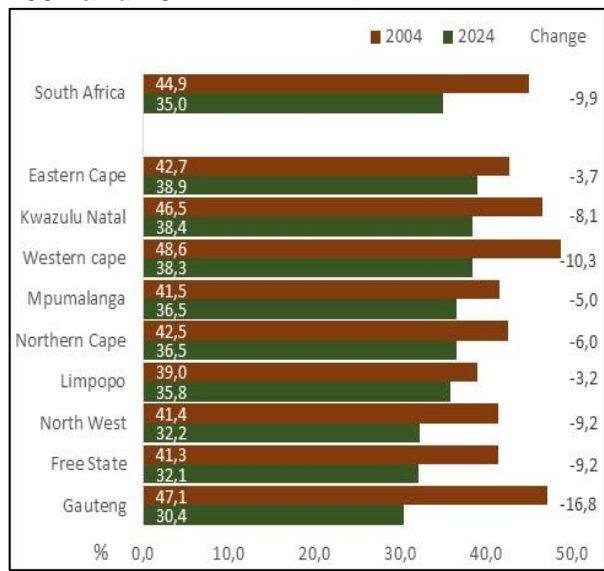
South Africa, like many countries globally, grapples with the challenge of youth unemployment. This is supported by statistics indicating a 45,5% unemployment rate among young individuals (aged 15–34), in contrast to the national average of 32,9% in the first quarter of 2024. However, when looking at the Labour Market Dynamics in South Africa report for 2022<sup>2</sup>, which tracks individuals over multiple quarters using annual panel data released by Statistics South Africa, youth with some form of experience far surpass adults in transitioning from unemployment or inactivity into employment between quarters, with rates of 12,3% and 7,4% respectively. The following analysis is based on data collected through the labour force surveys.

**Figure 7: Share of youth in the working age, 2004 and 2024**



Source: LFS March 2004 and QLFS Q1:2024

**Figure 8: Share of youth in employment, 2004 and 2024**

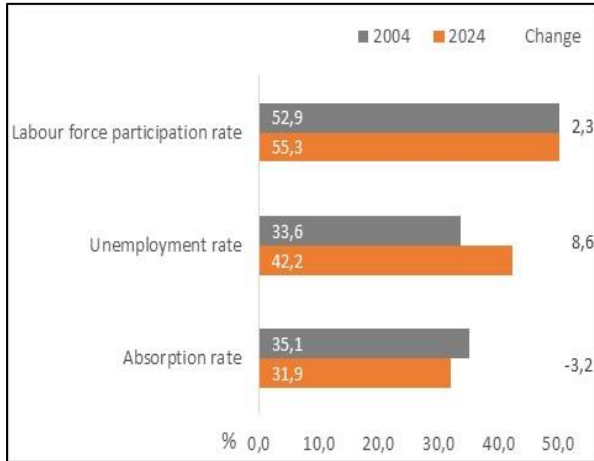


The share of youth in employment declined in all the provinces, with substantial declines recorded in Gauteng (16,8 percentage points) and Western Cape (10,3 percentage points)

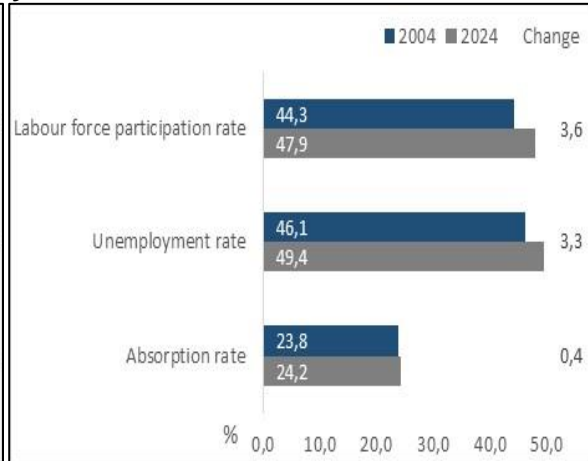
<sup>2</sup> [https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=1854&PPN=Report-02-11-02](https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=Report-02-11-02)

between 2004 and 2024. Low levels of education and social and economic deprivation contribute the most to the high levels of unemployment, the NEET rate and the absence or lack of access to opportunities available in the country for the youth.

**Figure 9: Labour market rates for youth males, 2004 and 2024**



**Figure 10: Labour market rates for youth females, 2004 and 2024**



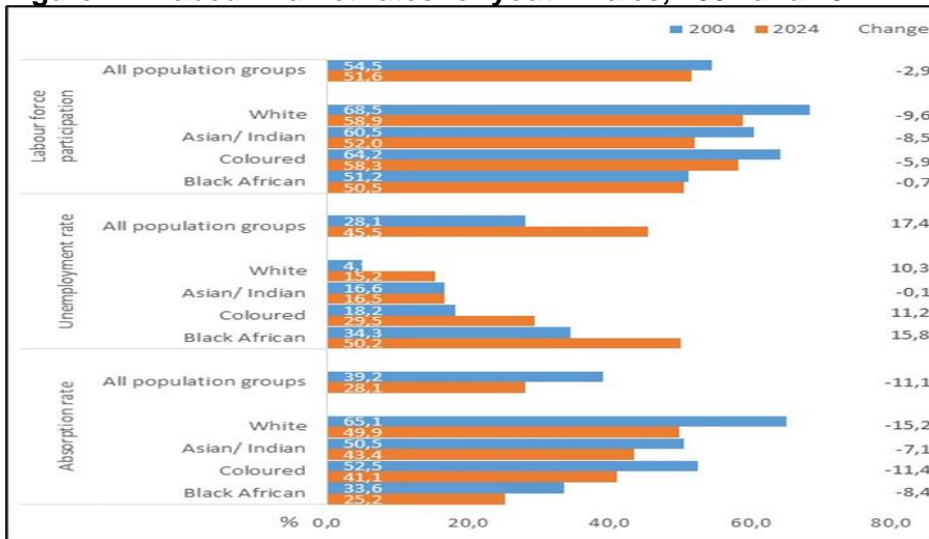
Source: LFS March 2004 and QLFS Q1:2024

Generally, young females have more difficulties in finding decent jobs in the labour market compared to males, due to various factors. Education is the main contributing factor in improving access to better employment opportunities. The 2022 panel data has shown that compared to persons without matric, those with a tertiary qualification are more likely to transition into employment from either unemployment or inactivity. Men were more likely to transition into employment compared to their female counterparts (6,5% and 4,2% in 2022, respectively).

It is therefore evident in Figures 9 and 10 that young women are more vulnerable in the labour market compared to young men. In 2024, young men had recorded an absorption rate of 31,9% compared to 24,2% for young women. The high unemployment rate in the country may be attributable to problems of absorption and mismatch of skills between the employer and job-seeker. In addition to that, females are more likely to be engaged in family responsibilities which may hinder their progress in the South African labour market. Females' unemployment rate was estimated at 49,4% in 2024, which was an increase of 3,3 percentage points from 46,1% in 2004. Females are generally characterised by high levels of unemployment, low levels of absorption and low levels of labour force participation.



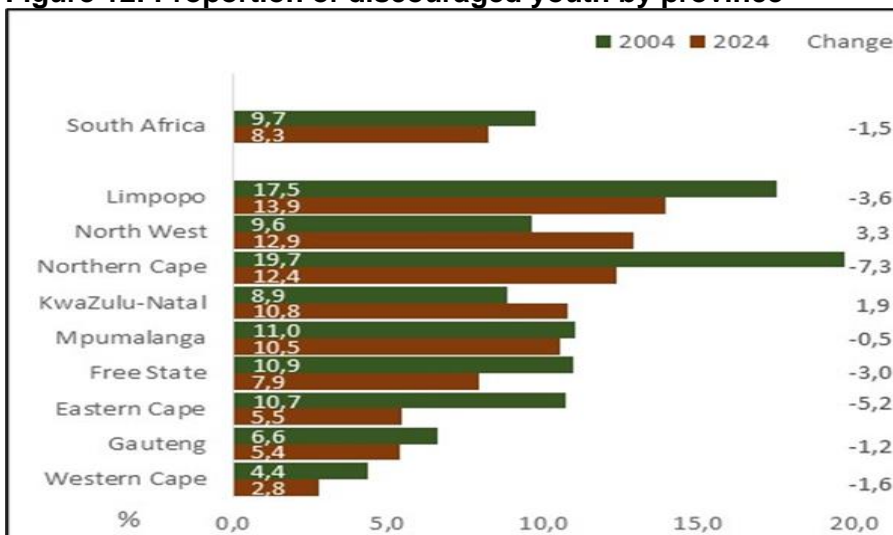
**Figure 11: Labour market rates for youth males, 2004 and 2024**



Source: LFS March 2004 and QLFS Q1:2024

South Africa is characterised by high levels of crime, inequality and racial differences in the labour market. The black African population group was more likely to be unemployed compared to other population groups. In 2024, more than 50% of black Africans in the labour force were unemployed compared to 15,2% for the white population group. The latter gravitates towards high levels of absorption (65,1% in 2004 and 49,9% in 2024) and low levels of unemployment (4,2% in 2004).

**Figure 12: Proportion of discouraged youth by province**



Source: LFS March 2004 and QLFS Q1:2024

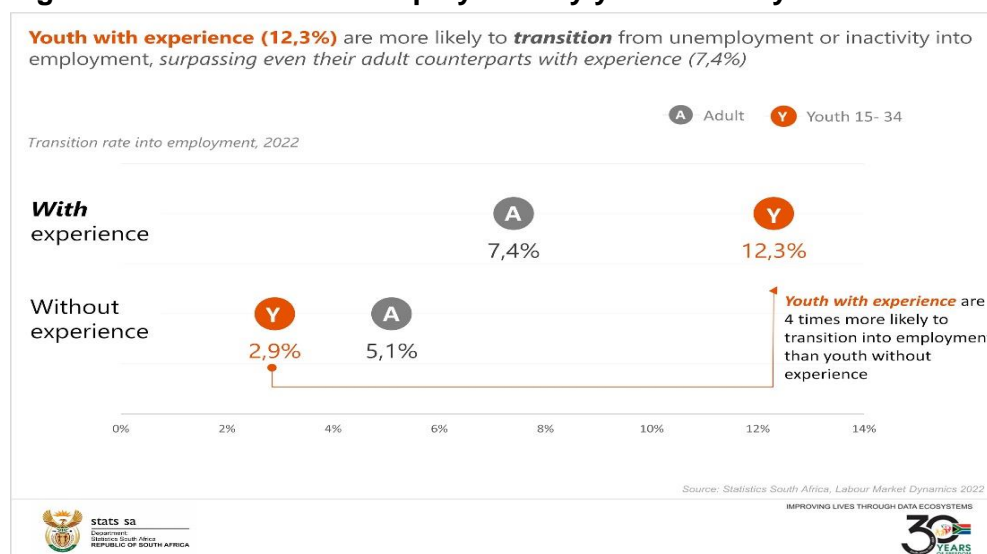
Over the past 20 years, discouraged job seekers, who were available for work but did not actively seek employment during the reference period, constituted a noteworthy demographic.

In 2024, only 2,8% of young individuals aged between 15 and 34 years were categorised as discouraged in the Western Cape, whereas this figure stood at 13,9% in Limpopo. Over the span of 2004 to 2024, seven out of the nine provinces experienced declines in the proportion of discouraged youth, with the Northern Cape experiencing the most significant reduction of 7,3 percentage points. Conversely, the North West (with an increase of 3,3 percentage points) and KwaZulu-Natal (with an increase of 1,9 percentage points) were the only provinces where the number of discouraged individuals grew in 2024 compared to 2004.

### Transition rates

Transition matrices help us understand the labour market movements of matched individuals in a panel. Various socio-economic characteristics hinder the process of finding a decent job in the South African labour market. Young women remain vulnerable in the labour market with a higher unemployment rate, long-term unemployment rate and they take even longer to transition into employment.

**Figure 13: Transition into employment by youth 15–34 years.**



Source: QLFS Q3:2022 and Q4:2022

Even more stark is the difference in transition rates between youth without experience and those with experience. The experience “dividend” reveals that youth with experience outperform youth without experience by a margin of four to one. Youth with experience (12,3%) were more likely to transition into employment than youth without prior work experience (2,9%).

A person's chances of landing and keeping a job are also greatly influenced by their level of education and experience. Clearly, initiatives such as experiential learning, apprenticeships,

or other forms of exposure to the workplace have far-reaching implications in addressing the scourge of youth unemployment.

## Poverty

Poverty is a key development challenge in social, economic and political terms, not only in South Africa but throughout the developing world. In post-apartheid South Africa, fighting the legacy of poverty and under-development has always been a central theme of government. This was cemented in the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) of 1994 and reiterated in the National Development Plan (NDP) published in 2011.

The guiding objectives of the NDP is to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030, and all the elements of the plan must demonstrate their effect on these two objectives. The Living Conditions Survey (LCS) and the Income and Expenditure Survey (IES) conducted by Stats SA are the two primary contributors toward profiling and monitoring poverty and inequality over time.

**Table 10: Multidimensional poverty levels of South African youth by province, 2011**

Province	Headcount (%)	Intensity (%)	Youth MPI	Youth MPI rank
Eastern Cape	49,6	52,9	0,262	1
KwaZulu-Natal	38,0	50,2	0,191	2
Limpopo	37,2	50,4	0,187	3
North West	37,0	51,3	0,190	4
Northern Cape	32,3	50,2	0,162	5
Free State	30,7	50,0	0,153	6
Mpumalanga	30,6	49,5	0,152	7
Western Cape	22,8	47,2	0,108	8
Gauteng	21,2	48,3	0,102	9
<b>RSA</b>	<b>33,4</b>	<b>50,3</b>	<b>0,168</b>	-

Note: Youth refers to young persons aged 15-24 years

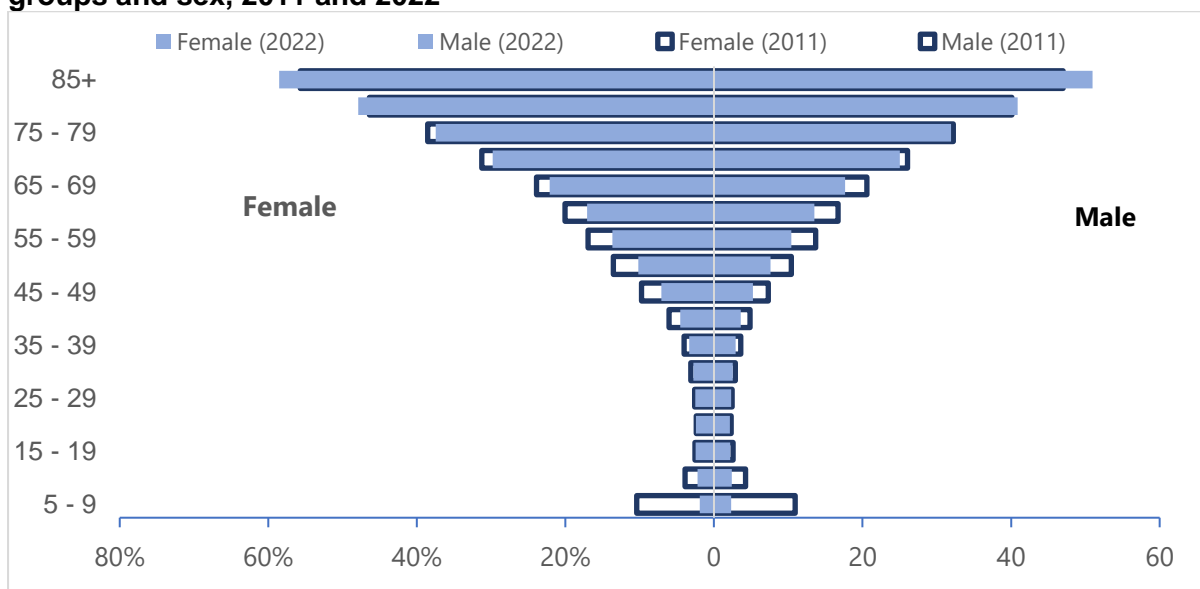
According to the Youth MPI report published in 2016, about 33,4% of young people in South Africa were multidimensionally poor in 2011 and were deprived on average in 50,3% of the weighted indicators. The spatial intensity of multidimensional poverty for the youth of South Africa was high across all the 9 provinces, irrespective of whether their respective poverty rates are high or low. The intensities ranged from 47,2% to 52,9%.

The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo were the top three provinces with highest rates of youth multidimensional poverty while the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces experienced the lowest rates of youth multidimensional poverty. The young population of South Africa were found to be deprived in 16,8% of the possible deprivations.

### Disability

Disability, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), includes individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments. These impairments, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This definition underscores the recognition that persons living with disabilities are equal and valuable members of society who should be acknowledged and included in all aspects of life (South African Human Rights Commission). Young people living with disabilities face unique challenges that can impact their education, employment opportunities, social interactions, and general growth. The analysis in this section uses data from Census 2011 and 2022 to explore disability among the youth.

**Figure 14: Percentage of persons aged five and older by disability status, 5-year age groups and sex, 2011 and 2022**



Source: Census 2011 and 2022

The biggest decline in the disability prevalence was observed among those aged 5–14 and 40–74. Moreover, those 80 years and older showed an increase during 2022 compared to 2011. Disability was less prevalent among the younger age groups.

**Table 11: Distribution of persons aged 15–34 by province and disability status**

Province	Census 2011			Census 2022		
	Without disability	With disability	Total	Without disability	With disability	Total
Western Cape	98,0	2,0	100,0	97,8	2,2	100,0
Eastern Cape	96,9	3,1	100,0	97,0	3,0	100,0
Northern Cape	96,6	3,4	100,0	97,5	2,5	100,0
Free State	96,3	3,7	100,0	96,7	3,3	100,0
Kwa-Zulu Natal	96,9	3,1	100,0	97,5	2,5	100,0
North West	97,0	3,0	100,0	97,4	2,6	100,0
Gauteng	97,9	2,1	100,0	97,8	2,2	100,0
Mpumalanga	97,5	2,5	100,0	97,7	2,3	100,0
Limpopo	98,0	2,0	100,0	97,9	2,1	100,0
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>97,4</b>	<b>2,6</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>97,6</b>	<b>2,4</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Census 2011 and 2022

Nationally, the percentage of persons aged 15–34 without disabilities slightly increased from 97,4% in 2011 to 97,6% in 2022, while those living with disabilities decreased from 2,6% to 2,4%. Most provinces show a stable or decreasing trend in the proportion of individuals living with disabilities over the 11-year period. Northern Cape (0,9 of a percentage point) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (0,6 of a percentage point) exhibit significant reductions in disability prevalence among the youth.

**Table 12: Distribution of persons aged 15–34 by sex and disability status**

Sex	Census 2011			Census 2022		
	Without disability	With disability	Total	Without disability	With disability	Total
Male	97,5	2,5	100,0	97,7	2,3	100,0
Female	97,4	2,6	100,0	97,4	2,6	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,4</b>	<b>2,6</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>97,6</b>	<b>2,4</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Census 2011 and 2022

Despite the small decrease in the proportion of males living with disabilities, males were less likely to live with disabilities compared to females in 2011 (2,5% vs. 2,6%) and continued to be so in 2022 (2,3% vs. 2,6%). Females maintained a stable disability status, with no change in the proportions over the 11 years.

## Crime and safety

Victims of crime statistics are population estimates of the level of crime in South Africa derived from Government, Public Safety and Justice Survey (GPSJS) data and previous Victims of Crime (VOCS) data. The report focused on young person's (16–34 years) perceptions of

safety and experiences of crime. The survey profiled different aspects that are inherent in the different types of crime, such as the timing of the different crimes.

**Table 13: Number of individuals aged 16–34 who experienced specified types of crime during the past 12 months, 2018/19–2022/23**

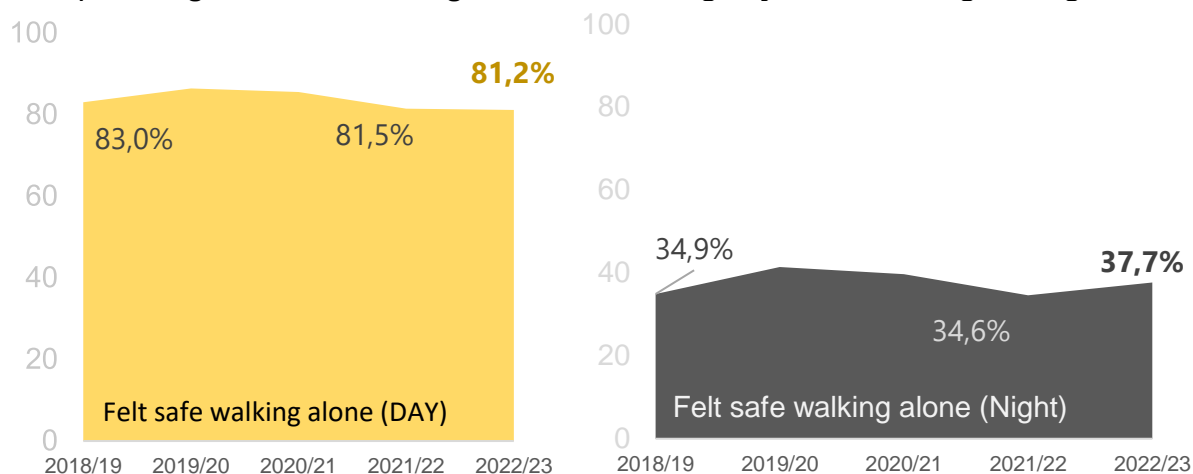
Individual Type of Crime	2018/19	Percentage	2019/20	Percentage	2020/21	Percentage	2021/22	Percentage	2022/23	Percentage
Theft of Personal Property	626 184	3,2	522 236	2,7	357 271	1,8	623 285	3,2	623 030	3,1
Street Robbery	297 325	1,5	292 163	1,5	208 038	1,1	155 916	0,8	271 668	1,4
Consumer Fraud	22 644	0,1	143 540	0,8	162 096	0,8	150 934	0,8	125 691	0,6
Hijacking	8 315	0,0	38 933	0,2	34 869	0,2	62 053	0,3	52 822	0,3
Assault	204 065	1,0	153 432	0,8		0,0		0,0	163 966	0,8
Sexual Offence	25 968	0,1	19 998	0,1		0,0		0,0	24 757	0,1

Source: GPSJS 2018–2023

Table 13 shows crime experience by youth aged 16–34. Theft of personal property remains the most common crime experienced by youth in South Africa. The number of youth who experienced this crime was 626 000 in 2018/19 which slightly decreased for two consecutive years by 0,5 of a percentage point from 3,2% in 2018/19 to 2,7% in 2019/20 then 0,9 of a percentage point to 1,8% in 2020/21, before it increased back to 623 000 in 2021/22 and 2022/23. The second most common crime experienced by youth during the five-year period is street robbery. Street robbery decreased from 297 000 in 2018/19 to 208 000 in 2020/21, and further declined to 156 000 in 2021/22. There is an increase observed to 271 000 in 2022/23. Consumer fraud has been fluctuating over the past 5 years, from 2018/19 to 2022/23.

### Individual’s perceptions of their safety

**Figure 15: Percentage of individuals aged 16–34 who felt safe (“Very safe” and “Fairly safe”) walking alone in their neighbourhood during daytime vs during the night.**



Source: GPSJS 2018-2023

Figure 15 presents perception of safety for the youth from 2018/19 to 2022/23. The youth that felt safe walking alone in their neighbourhoods during the day decreased from 83,0% in 2018/19 to 81,2% in 2022/23. Those who felt safe walking alone at night increased from 34,9% in 2018/19 to 41,4% in 2019/20. However, from 2019/20 there was a constant decrease then an increase was observed from 34,9% in 2021/22 to 37,7% in 2022/23.

## Conclusion

- Between 1996 and 2022, the overall youth population in South Africa grew from 14,7 million to 21,6 million, an increase of 6,9 million individuals or 38,6%. The 15–19 age group showed the least growth over this period.
- Overall, there are higher proportions of youth and non-youth headed households residing in formal dwellings compared to other type of dwellings in South Africa.
- Profile of households that resided in informal dwellings showed that youth headed households recorded higher proportions compared to non-youth headed households in all census years.
- The percentage of youth who have completed at least secondary education has more than doubled from 1996 to 2022. However, participation in tertiary education and skills development and training among the youth remains low.
- According to the data, young women display heightened vulnerability in the labour market when compared to young men. In 2024, the absorption rate of young men was 31,9%, outpacing young women, whose rate stood at 24,2%. The unemployment rate among young females was estimated at 49,4% in 2024, marking a notable increase of 3,3 percentage points from 46,1% in 2004.
- The spatial intensity of multidimensional poverty for the young people of South Africa was high across all nine provinces, irrespective of whether their respective poverty rates are high or low.
- Nationally, the percentage of young people without disabilities increased slightly from 97,4% in 2011 to 97,6% in 2022. Correspondingly, the percentage of young people living with disabilities decreased from 2,6% in 2011 to 2,4% in 2022.
- In 2022/23, assault was the third most experienced crime by young people. Less youth are feeling safe walking by themselves at night whereas more feel safe walking alone during the day.

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