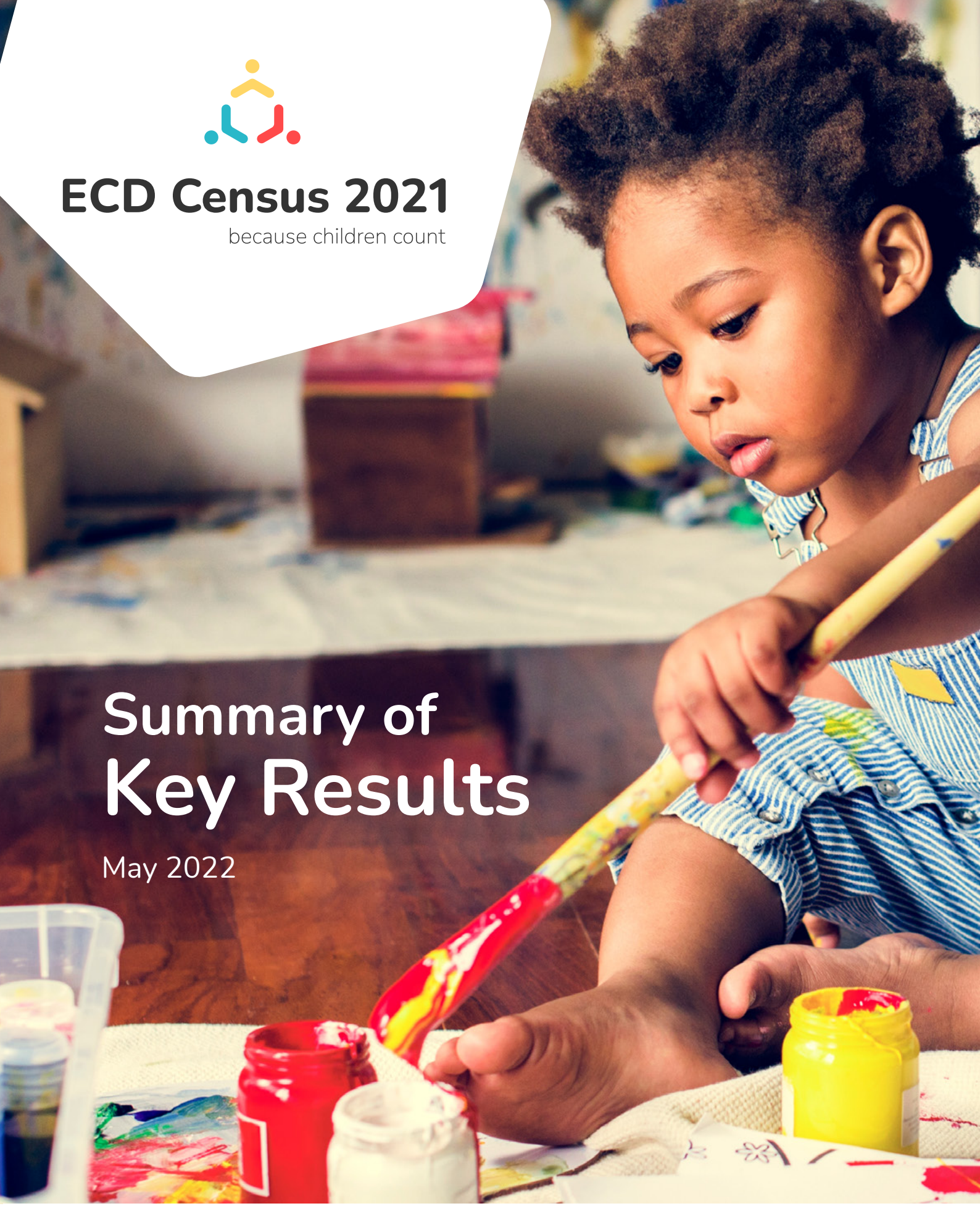
ECD Census 2021

because children count



Summary of Key Results

May 2022

Basic Education
Social Development

The LEGO Foundation

Read to Lead
A Reading Nation is a Leading Nation

2030 NDP

STAY SAFE
PROTECT SOUTH AFRICA
TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE CORONAVIRUS

Acronyms

DBE Department of Basic Education

DSD Department of Social Development

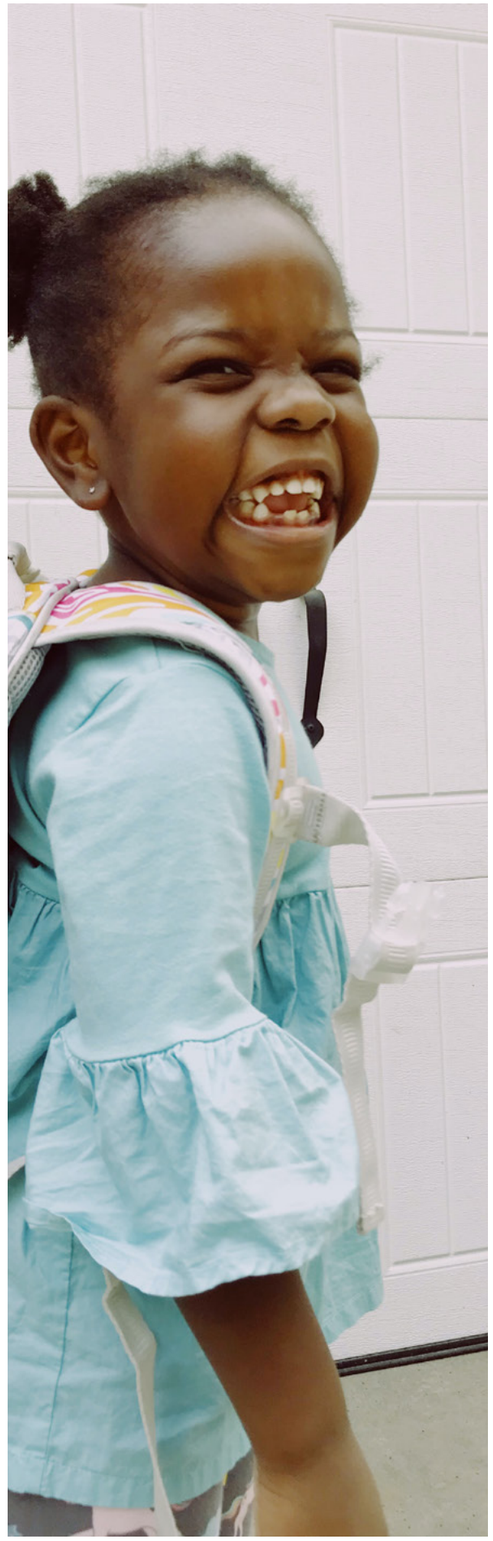
ECD Early Childhood Development

ELP Early Learning Programme

EMIS Education Management Information System

LtP Learning through Play

Q Income quintile where Q1 refers to the poorest income quintile and Q5 to the richest



[1]Early Learning Programmes are also commonly referred to as pre-schools, creches, educare centres, day mothers or playgroups (but not Grade R).

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Foreword

Angie Motshekga

Minister of Basic Education

I've always been a firm believer in the fact that building the future we strive for starts with strengthening early learning and development. And as we begin a new chapter for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa, under the curatorship of the Department of Basic Education, we are proud of the success and insights gathered through the first national ECD Census. These will be the building blocks for us to improve access to quality ECD services for our young children and families.

From the outset, the primary objective of the ECD Census was to gather reliable, verified data on Early Learning Programmes (ELPs) that would help us move towards a centralised management information system to enable improved resource allocation, oversight and support of ELPs throughout the country. The data on children accessing ECD services and the number of practitioners providing those services, is instrumental for our planning and will allow us to prioritise the poorest children most in need of public assistance.

It is encouraging to recognise the progress made by the sector in terms of provision of quality ECD services in the country – despite the devastating pressure that the Covid-19 pandemic has placed on the system. Additionally, the priorities and areas of growth are clear – continued professionalisation and training of the ECD workforce, strengthening play-based curriculum implementation, and improving our processes for registering and funding ELPs in order to expand access.

The ECD Census also shone a light on the role of Learning through Play in our sector. As a country we need to afford our youngest citizens opportunities to learn in the manner which comes most naturally to them – through play. We also need to provide our practitioners and ELPs with the tools and competencies to facilitate this kind of learning to equip them with the skills needed for the future.

This partnership with the LEGO Foundation is an important one, whose outcomes will be lasting. It will assist us to improve the quality of ECD in South Africa.

We're energised to create the foundation that our children need to thrive, together. Because every child counts.

Foreword

Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen

CEO of The LEGO Foundation

The resilience of children and families over the past few years in SA has been nothing short of extraordinary. Despite the tumultuous climate, the determination and agility of learners and caregivers have been inspiring to witness. This has been especially true for the ECD sector in SA who suffered and continue to deal with the impact that Covid had on the sector.

At the LEGO Foundation, we believe that learning through play is one of the key vehicles to help children build social and emotional learning skills to successfully navigate life's challenges and uncertainties. At the heart of it all, children play to make sense of the world around them. To find meaning in life's many experiences by connecting it to something already known to them. Through play, children learn about themselves and the great big world around them. It also unlocks skills they need for study, work and relationships, making play a fundamental building block to our society's success.

We appreciate that an enabling environment for quality learning through play needs to be in place for quality learning to happen. And for a country to scale such environments, solid national systems need to be in place. It is for this reason that we saw the need to partner with government and invest in systems-building projects like the ECD Census that will pave the way for South Africa to foster quality early learning environments and give children the nurturing care and stimulation they so desperately need in these pivotal years.

Findings from the ECD Census indicate that little time is allocated for free play, and materials and equipment that lend themselves to these activities, are not very common. It is also concerning to note that opportunities for free play, where children have more agency in their learning, is more common in higher quintile ELPs.

We look forward to building on the foundation laid by the ECD Census and continuing to work with the government and the ECD sector of South Africa as they build systems to drive quality learning in the early years. We celebrate this incredible achievement as a significant milestone in the learning journey of all children in South Africa.

Acknowledgments

The ECD Census 2021 has been the largest effort to map the South African ECD landscape to date, and its success was only possible through a partnership between government, civil society and the private sector.

The LEGO Foundation's role has been invaluable as not just the funder, but as a sector coordinator, and overall supporter of the project.

The Department of Social Development offered critical support in identifying ECD services both through existing databases and local DSD officials provided much-needed guidance to the data collection teams in the field.

The ikapadata team deserves gratitude for conducting the fieldwork under extraordinary circumstances. Their fieldworkers worked tirelessly as they visited each and every ward in the country to identify Early Learning Programmes.

We would also like to thank Nelson Mandela Foundation, Brian Liggett and Prof Andy Dawes who offered their advice, insights and knowledge for the duration of this project. We would also like to thank the project steering committee (UNICEF, StatsSA, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation) for their ongoing support and guidance throughout the project.

But most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the selfless support of NGOs, ward councillors, community members, NECDA, and especially the ECD principals and practitioners who so willingly opened their doors to us.

Thank you!

Our Partners

ikapadata

The LEGO Foundation

Basic Education
Social Development

planning, monitoring and evaluation
Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Read to Lead
A Reading Nation is a Leading Nation

2030 NDP

STAY SAFE
PROTECT SOUTH AFRICA
TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE CORONAVIRUS

NECDA
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP
"Building a better Future for Children"

impande

STATS SA
STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA

NELSON MANDELA FOUNDATION
Living the legacy

unicef

Executive Summary

The ECD Census 2021 constitutes the first complete mapping of Early Learning Programmes (ELP) in South Africa. Its purpose is to integrate ELPs into the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Education Management Information System (EMIS), identify gaps in the access to and quality of ELPs in South Africa, support research on ECD, and gain insights into the current enabling environment for Learning through Play (LtP).

The ECD Census was initiated by the DBE in partnership with the LEGO Foundation. The data collection was carried out by service provider ikapadata (Pty) Ltd.

Data for the Census was collected between August 2021 and February 2022. Over 360 fieldworkers visited every ward in the country to identify ELPs of any size and type. In total, 42420 ELPs were captured during fieldwork. The province with the most ELPs is Gauteng (10376), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (8089) and Eastern Cape (5426). About 60% of ELPs are urban, 40% are rural.

Over 1.6m children enrolled in ELPs were counted during the Census, but only 1.1m children were physically present during site visits. Based on ECD practitioners' estimates, about 1.5m children usually attend ELPs on a day-to-day basis and just under 2m children did so before the Covid pandemic. Forty percent of ELPs are fully or conditionally registered with DSD as a partial care facility, an early learning programme or both, while 16% are in the process of registering. Forty-two percent of programmes are not registered with DSD. One third of ELPs stated that they receive a subsidy from DSD.

The large majority (69%) of ELPs mention fees as their main source of funding, followed by government funding (27%) and donations/ fundraising (4%). The average monthly fee amount is R509 per child. Many (77%) ELPs provide meals for learners, and at just under half (48%) of ELPs parents also contribute to the meals. Government provides meals at 17% of ELPs. At 59% of ELPs children can wash their hands using water from a tap and flush toilets are available at 60% of ELPs.

Just over half (52%) of ECD practitioners have an ECD qualification at NQF level 4-9, and 27% underwent a relevant skills programme. 22% do not have any relevant qualifications.

More than half (54%) of ELP programmes allocate less than 30 minutes per day to free play as part of their daily programme. ELPs that are subsidised by the government have on average more types of play and learning materials (13.5) than those that are not subsidised (11.1). Only 56% of ELPs have access to age-appropriate children's books.

The next steps after the conclusion of data cleaning and verification will be the integration of the dataset into EMIS. An anonymised version of the dataset will be made available to the public in June 2022 via DataFirst at the University of Cape Town. This will coincide with the full report, and provincial profiles being released.

Rationale for the ECD Census 2021

Significant progress has been made in terms of provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) services in South Africa after the first democratic elections in 1994. Since then, the South African government has put in place several policies and programmes intended to prioritise ECD as a critical component to overcoming the negative impact of poverty on young children.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable national data that enables regular monitoring of the quality of early learning programmes. Neither does South Africa have an administrative data system for ECD similar to those used by the Departments of Health and Basic Education.

For example, there is no reliable data on the number of registered and unregistered ECD sites and how many children are accessing these services. As a result, all data on ECD services is drawn from national survey data, such as the StatsSA General Household Survey (GHS) and the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS), which is not optimal nor sustainable for robust programme monitoring and planning.

While there have been two prior ECD audits, this time the goal was to capture all ELPs in the country in order to lay the foundation for a permanent register of ECD services nationwide. An undertaking of this magnitude has not been attempted in the ECD sector prior to the ECD Census 2021.

The lack of accurate data and formality in the ECD sector continues to hamper government and civil society's efforts to harness its full potential. Having a comprehensive and well-maintained ECD database in place, similar to DBE's Education Management Information Systems for schools, would represent a huge leap forward in providing access to early learning opportunities and measuring the impact of the sector on children's development and well-being. Knowing exactly how many ECD services are operating in which parts of the country, and what their challenges are in terms of infrastructure, funding, qualifications and government support will enable the relevant decision makers in government and civil society to allocate resources more effectively and efficiently.

The data and insights gained from this exercise will also be of immense value to academics and researchers working on early childhood development. Those who are designing studies on early childhood development in South Africa will for the first time have a reliable sampling frame for ELPs available, and they will be able to use the ECD Census results for their own explorations of factors that are enabling or hindering the advancement of ECD in the country.

Finally, the Census also shines light on the role of Learning through Play (LtP) in the South African ECD sector, and looks at factors that will enable or hinder quality LtP taking place in ELPs. This includes factors such as availability of relevant play and learning materials, practitioner attitudes, dedicated time for free play, and indoor and outdoor spaces for play.

ECD Census 2021 by the Numbers

Data was collected between **August 2021** and **February 2022**

42,420
Early Learning Programmes

198,361
Staff employed

1,660,316
Children enrolled

Fees

R509 MEAN MONTHLY FEE charged by MOST ELPS

62% allow at least SOME CHILDREN to attend **FREE**

Funding

33% of ELPs receive subsidies from the DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (DSD)

40% are REGISTERED or CONDITIONALLY REGISTERED with DSD

FUNDING SOURCES

69% FEES

27% GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

4% DONATIONS, FUNDRAISING ETC.

Nutrition & Infrastructure

84% of ELPs provide BREAKFAST

94% of ELPs provide LUNCH

73% have access to a TAP ON THE PREMISES

60% have a FLUSH TOILET

86% are housed in a FORMAL STRUCTURE

Enrolment

60% enrolled in URBAN AREAS

40% enrolled in RURAL AREAS

39 CHILDREN per ELP

Staff

4.7 STAFF MEMBERS per ECD programme

3.9 TEACHING STAFF per ECD programme

52% of teaching STAFF have a relevant NQF QUALIFICATION

22% of teaching staff have NO QUALIFICATION

Play

30 MINS OR LESS FREE PLAY PER DAY

54% as part of DAILY PROGRAMME

45% in the form of OUTDOOR PLAY

34% of ELPs DO NOT HAVE ACCESS to an outdoor playground with SUITABLE EQUIPMENT

Learning Materials

77% of ELPs have SOME CHILDREN'S BOOKS

61% have at least 10 BOOKS

ONLY **56%** have AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOKS for different age groups

Coverage

Coverage

Geographical Distribution

In total, 42420 ELPs were counted during the Census. The province with the highest total number of ELPs is Gauteng (25% of all ELPs), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (19%), the Eastern Cape and Limpopo (both 13%).

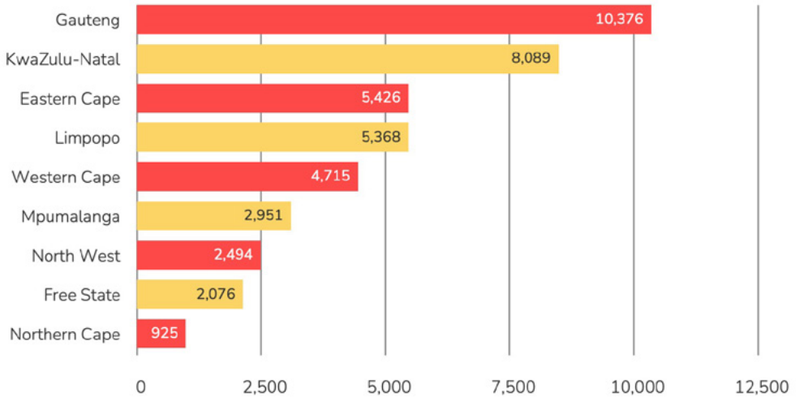


Figure: ELPs per Province

The following visualisation reflects the chart above by mapping the ratio of ELPs per 1000 children (based on Census 2011 data) by municipality. The breakdown by municipality displays a much stronger variance (1.6-17.2) across municipalities than the provincial breakdown above suggests.

On average, there are 6.2 ELPs per 1000 children between 0-5 years nationwide. This ratio varies geographically though.

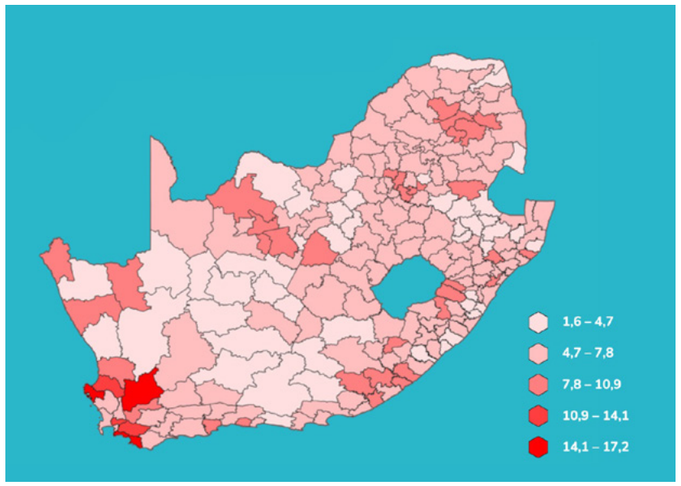


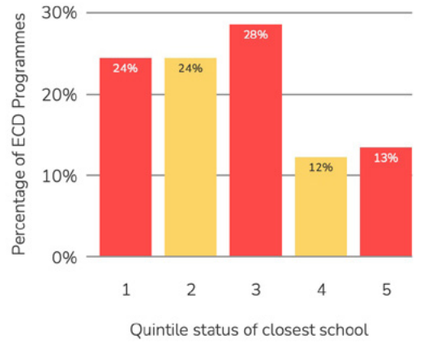
Figure: ELPs per Province

Coverage

Quintiles

The GPS locations for ELPs collected during fieldwork were used to conduct a spatial join to the NatEmis 2021 database of South African schools to obtain the socio-economic quintile of the closest school for each ELP.

Almost half (48%) of the ELPs fall into one of the two lower quintiles 1 and 2, over a quarter (28%) into the middle quintile 3 and a quarter into the two highest quintiles 4 and 5.



Urban vs Rural

Six out ten (60%) ELPs are located in urban[2] areas, which is an almost perfect match compared to the proportion of urban enumeration areas (59%) according to national census demarcations used by StatsSA.

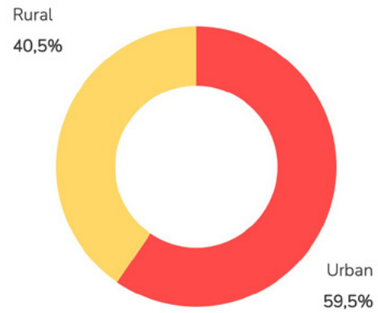


Figure: Urban vs Rural Distribution

[2] The urban vs rural classification was derived from plotting the ELPs' GPS locations on StatsSA's map of census enumeration areas which are classified into urban (formal and informal) and non-urban (commercial farms, traditional or tribal authority areas, and other non-urban areas) categories.

Registration Status and DSD Subsidy

Registration Status and DSD Subsidy

Four out of ten (40%) ELPs are registered or conditionally registered with DSD as a partial care facility or ELP, and another 16% are in the process of registering.

A large proportion (41%) however are not registered, or their registration has lapsed, and they also have not started the application process. Registration with DSD includes both registration as a partial care facility or as an ELP.

Some respondents were not sure whether their ELP was registered as one or the other but knew that they were registered with DSD in some way.

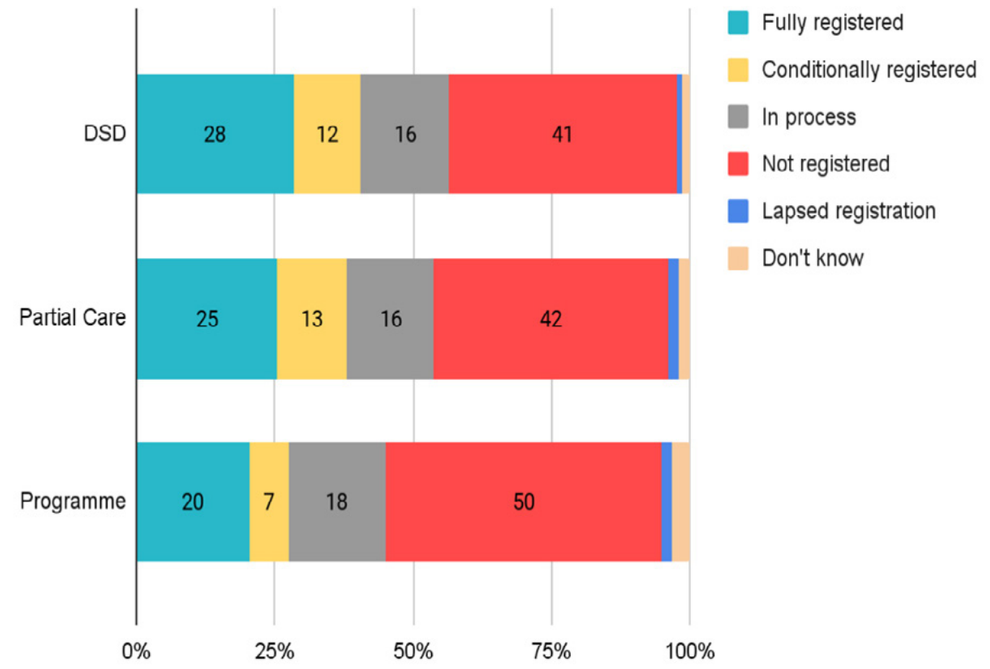


Figure: Registration with DSD

Registration Status and DSD Subsidy

Registration with DSD fluctuates significantly between provinces though as the Northern Cape tops the list with 43% of the province's ELPs fully registered (either as an ELP or partial care facility or both) vs 17% in Gauteng.

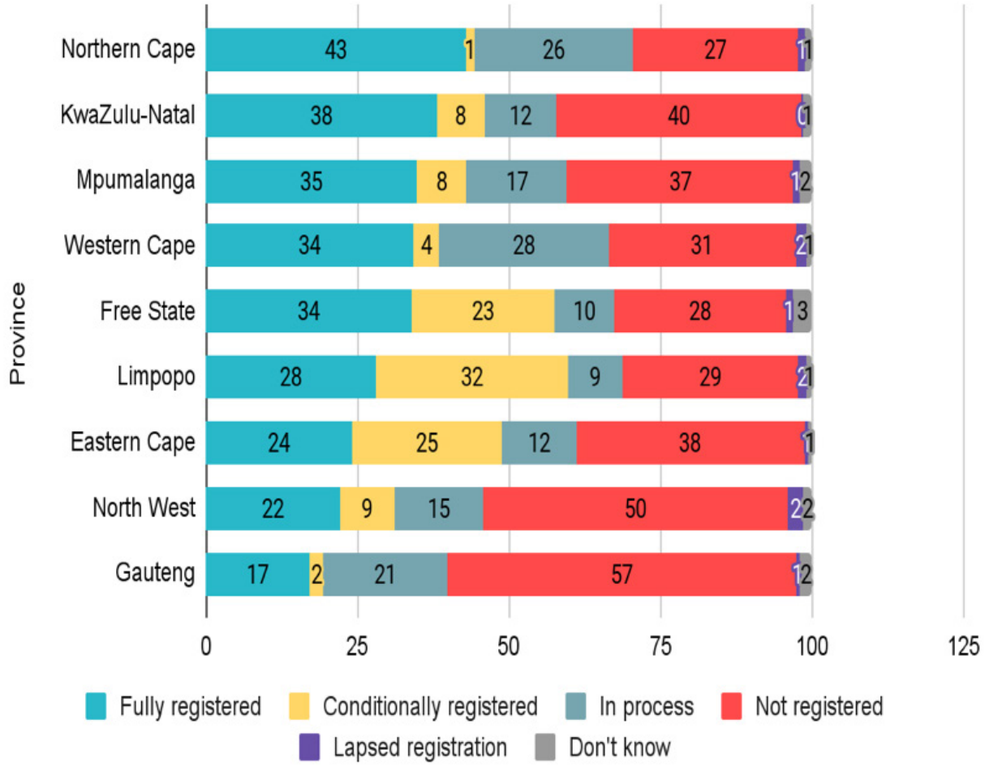


Figure: Registration with DSD by Province

Registration Status and DSD Subsidy

A third (33%) of ELPs receive a subsidy from the Department of Social Development (DSD). It is noteworthy that 3737 (25%) of the 15123 ELPs fully or conditionally registered as a partial care facility with DSD, claim not to receive a subsidy from DSD, while 1269 (5%) of 23636 programmes not registered as a partial care facility claim to receive the subsidy.

Similarly, 333 (3%) of 12220 programmes that are not registered as an NPO supposedly also receive the subsidy although registration as an NPO is another prerequisite to receiving the subsidy. There are also 1166 ELPs that claim not to receive the DSD subsidy but their primary funding source are government subsidies (although it is not clear whether these might include other types of subsidies distributed locally or provincially).

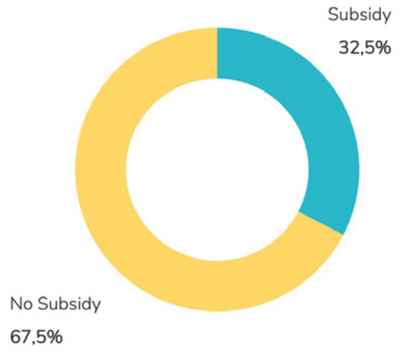


Figure: DSD Subsidy

The highest poverty rates for young children are in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape (Hall et al., 2019). While a large proportion of centres in these provinces do receive DSD subsidy support, a higher proportion of ECD centres in the Free State also report receiving DSD subsidies.

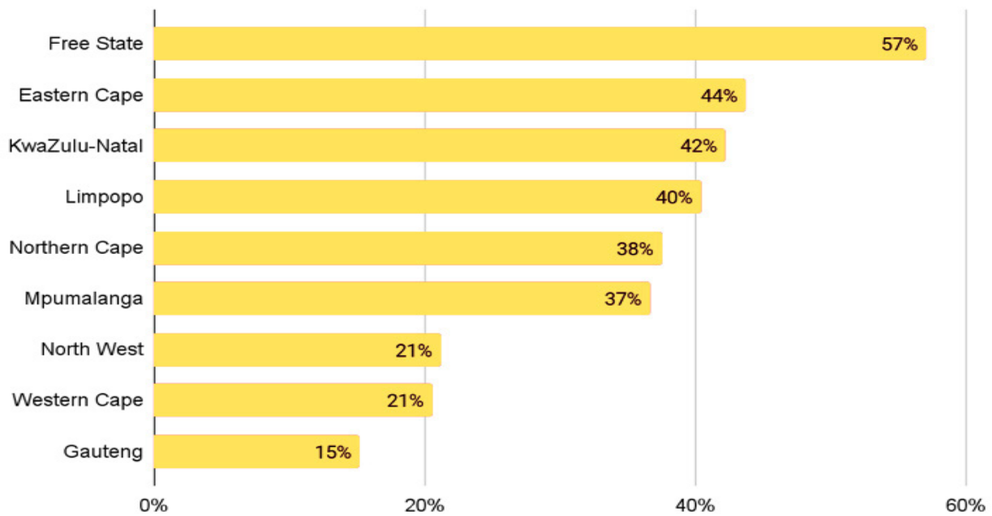


Figure: Subsidised ELPs by Province

Enrolment and Attendance

Enrolment and Attendance

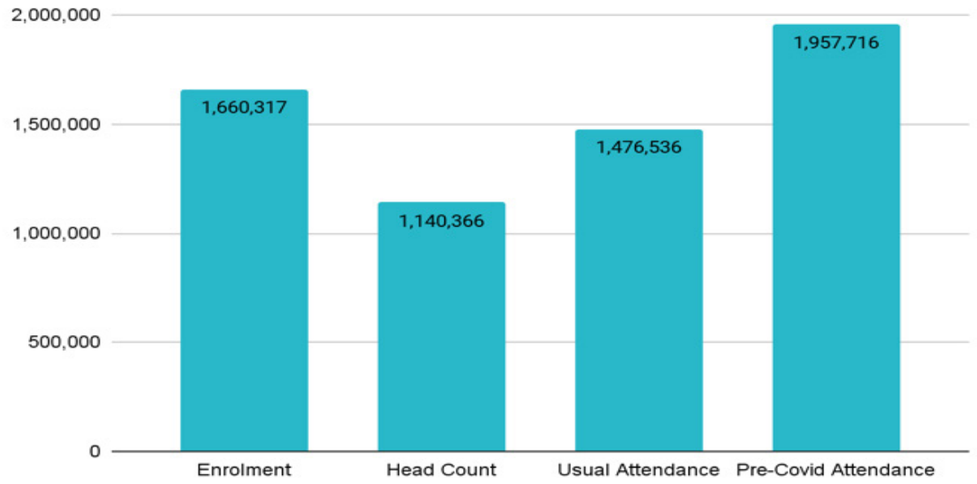
In total, 1,660,317[3] children are enrolled in the 42,420 ELPs counted for the Census. This means that the average number of children enrolled in an ELP is 39. The gender distribution of enrolled children is an almost perfect 50/50 split between male and female children.

Enrolment figures do not necessarily translate into attendance rates though. Given the fact that attendance fluctuates depending on the day of the week or time in the month and is impacted by external factors such as weather conditions and social unrest, especially in the context of a pandemic, three additional measures of attendance were employed:

1. Head count conducted by the enumerator. This is arguably the most objective measure but is impacted by external factors as well as the time of the day when the count was done as children might not have yet arrived or already left the site.

2. The ECD practitioner's estimate of how many children usually attend the ELP (if different from the head count). As a self-reported measure there might be a subjective bias in the responses.

3. The ECD practitioner's estimate of how many children usually attended the ELP before the start of the Covid pandemic. This measure is also self-reported and there might be a recall bias in the responses.



[3] Absolute figures throughout the report, such as total enrolment and children present as well as staff counts, usually include imputed values for missing observations (e.g. "Don't know"). The imputed estimates use other, non-missing, children and staff counts, municipality, quintile, and geotype (urban/rural) as predictors.

Figure: Enrolment and Attendance

Enrolment and Attendance

The actual average daily attendance of children at the time of the Census arguably lies somewhere between the head count of 1.14m children and the usual attendance of 1.48m children.

It is also likely that attendance has increased during the months since the end of data collection in line with the broader opening up of society after the fourth Covid wave, with the current figure closer to the “usual” attendance rate.

It is unlikely, though, that current attendance is close to the estimated precovid-attendance count, which is closer to 2m children.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that enrolment does not necessarily reflect attendance and that actual attendance is 10%-30% below enrolment.

Close to three quarters (71%) of the children enrolled in ELPs are between the ages of three and five years at the time of the Census (born between 2016 and 2018). A small number of children of school-going age (those born in 2013, 2014, or part of 2015) were also enrolled in ELPs.

Possible reasons for children of school-going age still being enrolled in ELPs included devel-opmental difficulties and disabilities preventing them from progressing to schools.

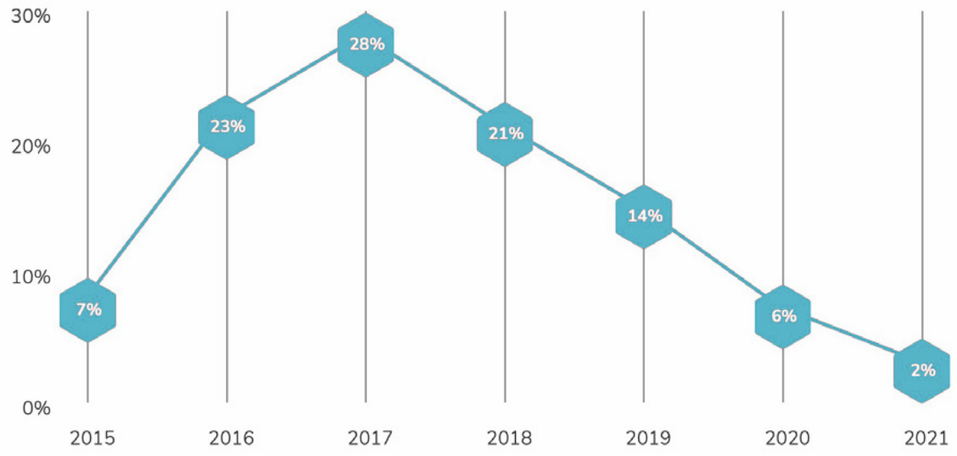


Figure: Year of Birth of Enrolled Children

Fees and Funding

Fees and Funding

Although the great majority (94%) of ELPs charge fees, most (62%) of them also allow at least some children to attend the ELP without having to pay a fee.

The average[4] monthly fee charged by ELPs is R509. However, significant differences exist between provinces, with monthly fees in Western Cape and Gauteng more than three times higher than fees in the Eastern Cape.

It is important to note though that while the fees are higher in some provinces, fees amounts vary strongly within those provinces. For example, in the Western Cape, half of the programmes charge R450 or less per month.

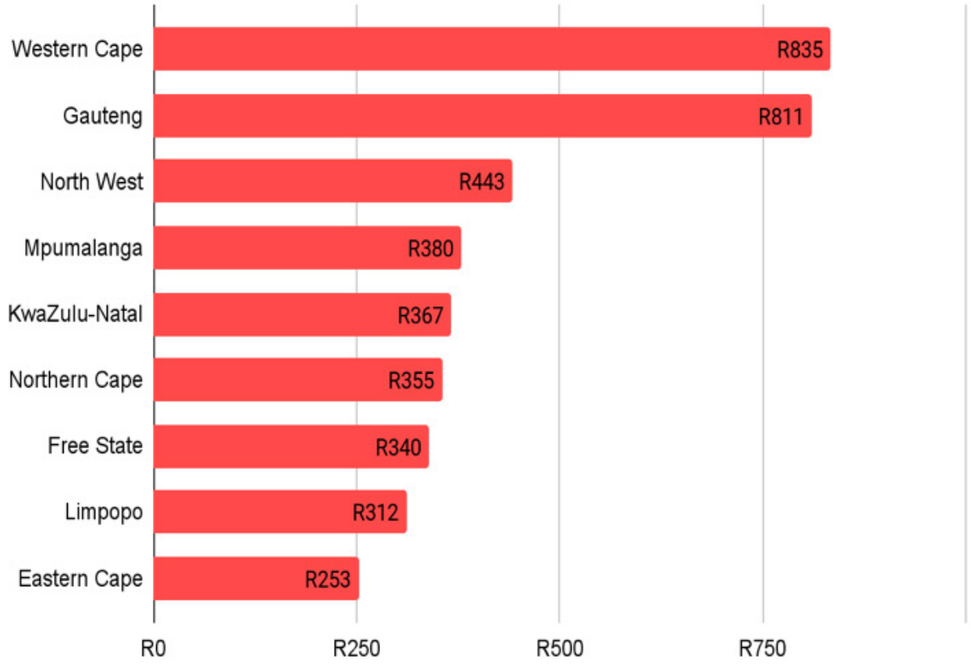


Figure: Average Maximum Monthly Fee Amount by Province

Differences in fee amounts are also clearly discernible between socio-economic quintiles. In particular, primary caregivers of children attending quintile 5 programmes are paying significantly higher fees compared to the other primary caregivers. The average quintile 1 and 2 caregiver, pays approximately half of the value of the Child Support Grant, at the time of the Census.

[4] Question: What is the maximum monthly fee per child?

Fees and Funding

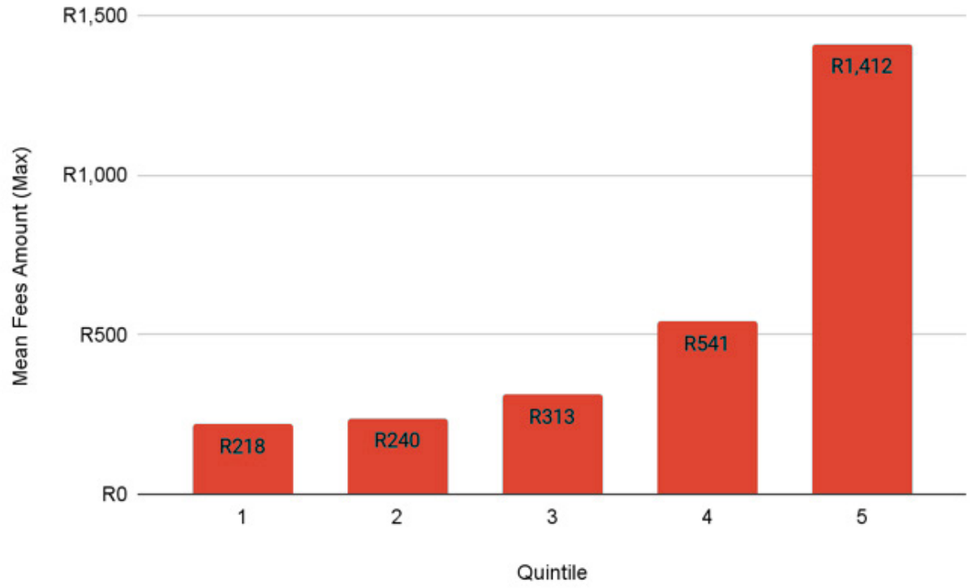


Figure: Average Maximum Monthly Fee Amount by Quintile

ELPs subsidised by DSD charge significantly lower fees (average of R208) than ELPs that are not subsidised (average of R649).

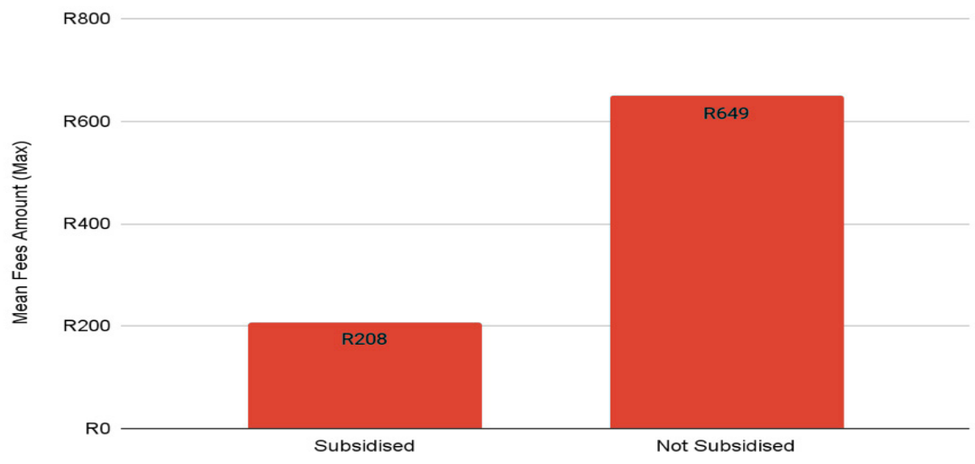


Figure: Average Maximum Monthly Fee Amount by Subsidy

Fees and Funding

The primary funding source for ELPs are fees (69%), followed by government subsidies (27%). The remaining 4% depend on donations, fundraising and other sources of income.

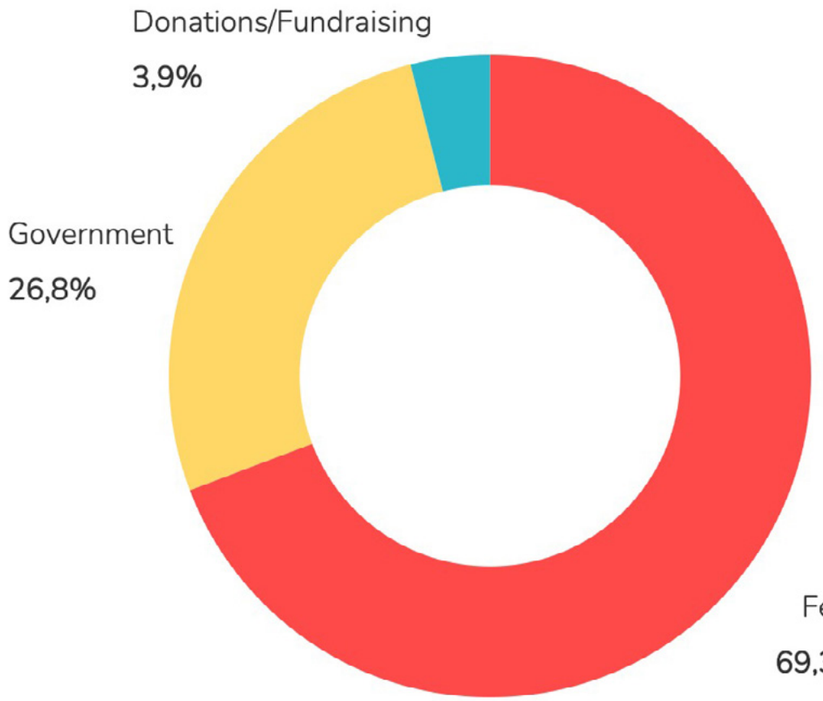


Figure: Primary Funding Source

Qualification of Staff

Fees and Funding

About half (49%) of those working in the ECD sector are ECD practitioners. More than a quarter (28%) are support staff (e.g. security, cleaners), and about one out of five (21%) are in managerial positions. However, in 89% of cases at least some of the managers also work as ECD practitioners.

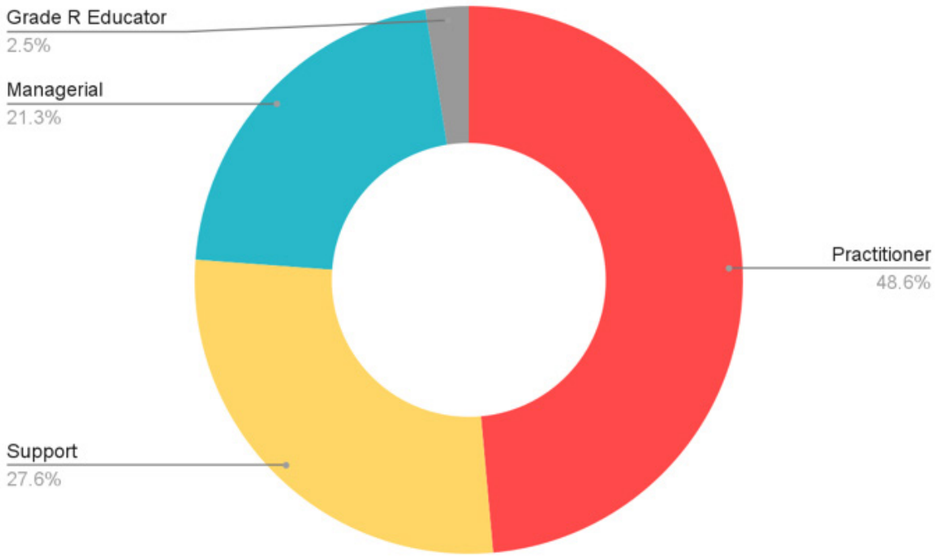


Figure: Staff Categories

Close to a quarter (22%) of the teaching and managerial staff[5] working in the ECD sector do not have a relevant ECD qualification. Over a quarter (27%) participated in an accredited skills programme, about four out of ten (42%) have an NQF Level 4 or 5, and 10% an NQF Level 6 or higher.

[5] For these calculations we used the total staff count and subtracted the support staff count.

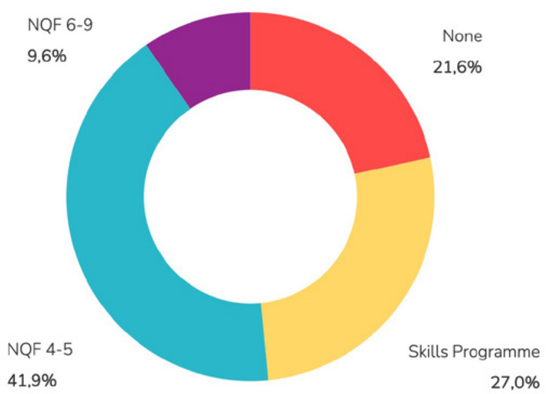


Figure: Qualification of Teaching Staff

Learning through Play

Learning through Play

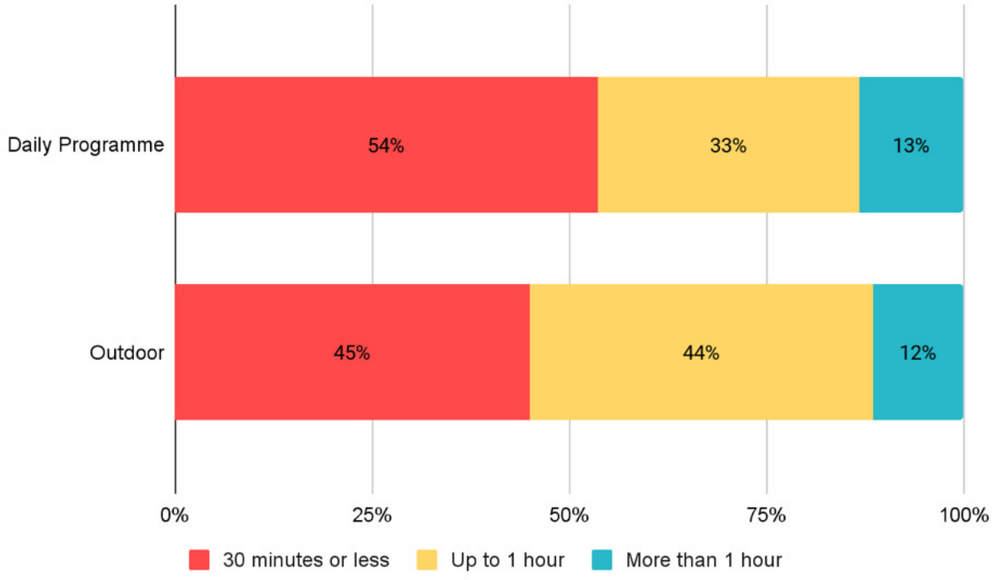
Two separate questions were asked about the amount of time available for free play during the day:

1. How much time is there for free play as part of the daily programme?

2. How much time is there for free play when the children are outside?

Generally, more time is spent on free play outdoors, with 44% of respondents saying that children spend up to an hour on free play outside compared to 33% for free play as part of the daily programme.

But in both instances, around half (54% and 45%, respectively) of the ELPs allow less than 30 minutes for free play per day.



Learning through Play

Generally, higher quintile ELPs dedicate more time to free play as part of the daily programme than lower quintile ELPs. For example, 65% of quintile 5 programmes have more than 30 minutes of free play per day, compared to 38% of quintile 1 programmes.

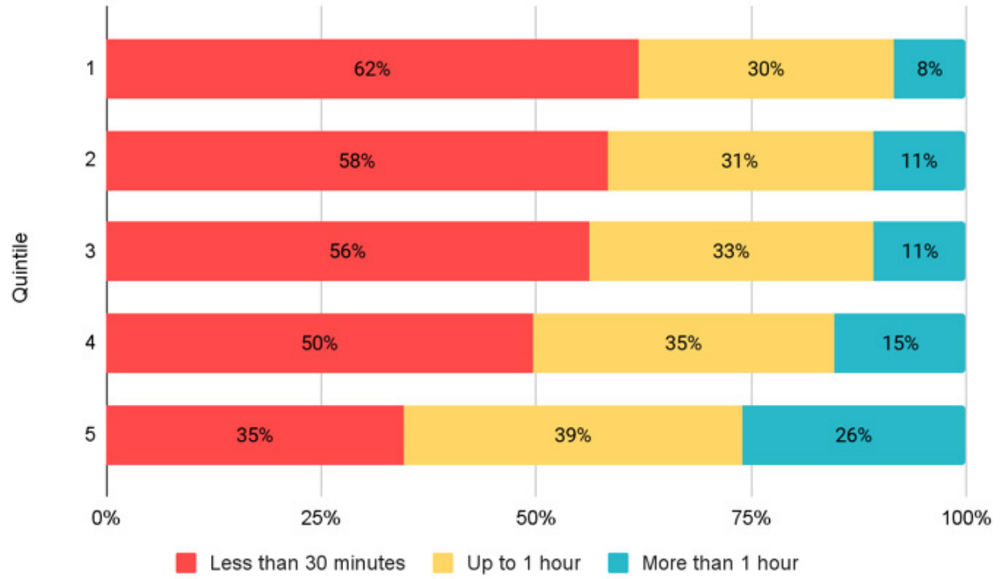


Figure: Free Play by Quintile

Materials for Learning and Playing

Materials for Learning and Playing

The enumerators were required to look out for a wide range of materials at the ELP. The table below shows the relative frequency of each category of materials.

Materials	%	Materials	%
Picture cards, posters, charts	84	Wooden or plastic blocks	52
Furniture for children	84	Clay, play dough or similar	52
Paint, crayons	84	LEGO or similar	50
Pencils, pens, chalk	79	Skipping ropes, Scooters	48
Books	77	Toys from recycled materials	44
Carpets or sleeping mats	73	Theme tables	41
Glue, paper, scissors	72	Fantasy toys	38
Games with numbers or shapes	71	Instruments for rhythm	37
Dolls, stuffed animals, toy cars	64	Buckets, spades, sand moulds	37
Balls, Hula-hoops, Sandbags	53	None of these	2
Materials for counting	52		

On average, an ELP has twelve of these categories of items, with half of the ELPs having up to and including twelve and the other half having more than twelve. Higher-quintile ELPs have access to a wider range of materials though, compared to lower quintiles. For example, ELPs in quintile 5 had, on average, items in 15 different categories, whereas programmes in quintile 1 had items in 11 categories.

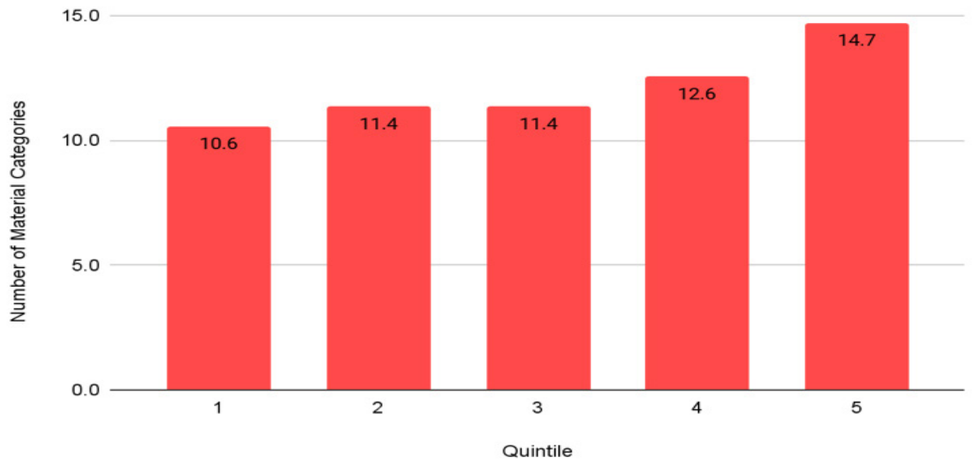


Figure: Number of Materials by Quintile

Materials for Learning and Playing

ELPs subsidised by DSD are also able to present a wider selection of learning and playing materials, with, on average, 13 or 14 categories vs 11 categories for those with no DSD subsidy.

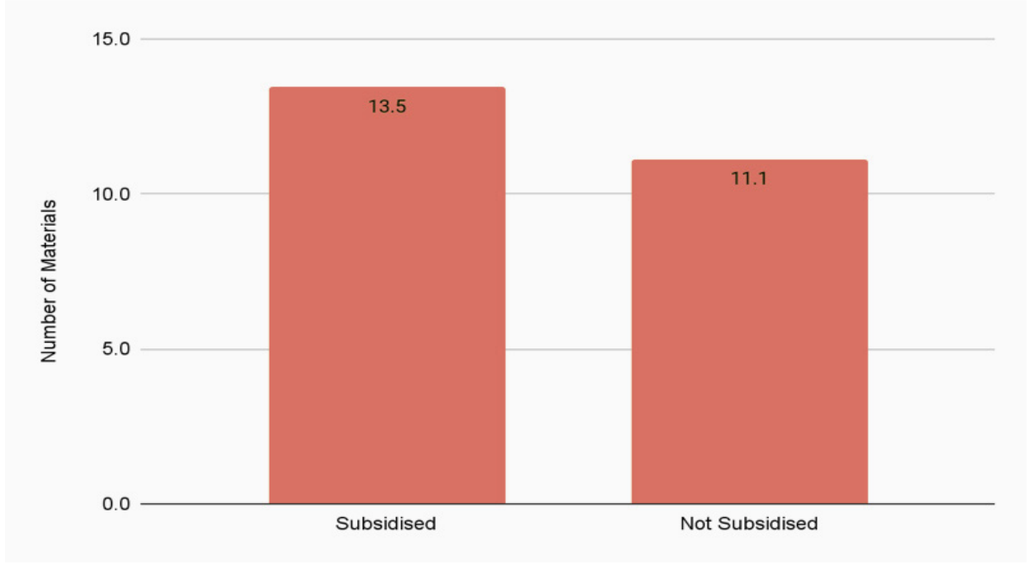


Figure: Number of Materials by Subsidy

While 77% of ELPs have some sort of collection of books, only 61% have at least 10 children's books to engage with, and only 56% have age-appropriate books for different age groups.

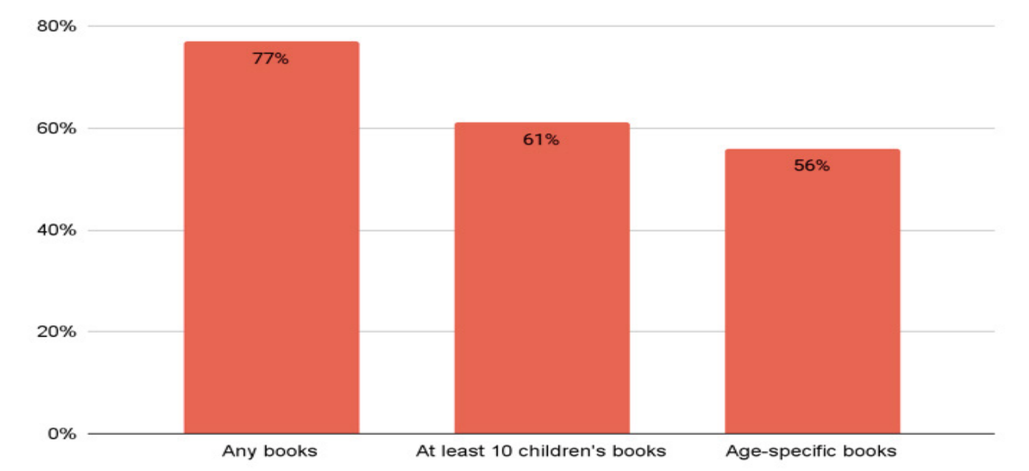


Figure: Books

Meals and Cooking

Meals and Cooking

Virtually all (99%) ELPs incorporate at least one meal time into the daily programme, usually lunch (94%), breakfast (88%) or snacks between meals (81%).

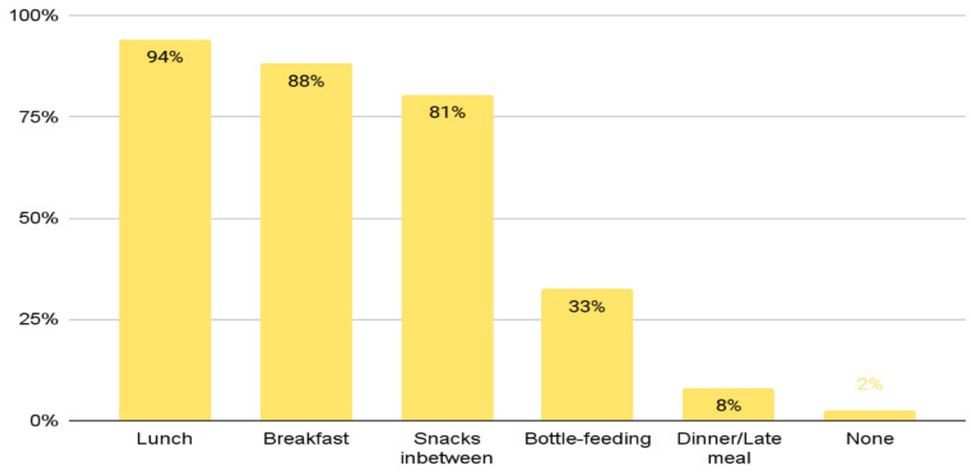
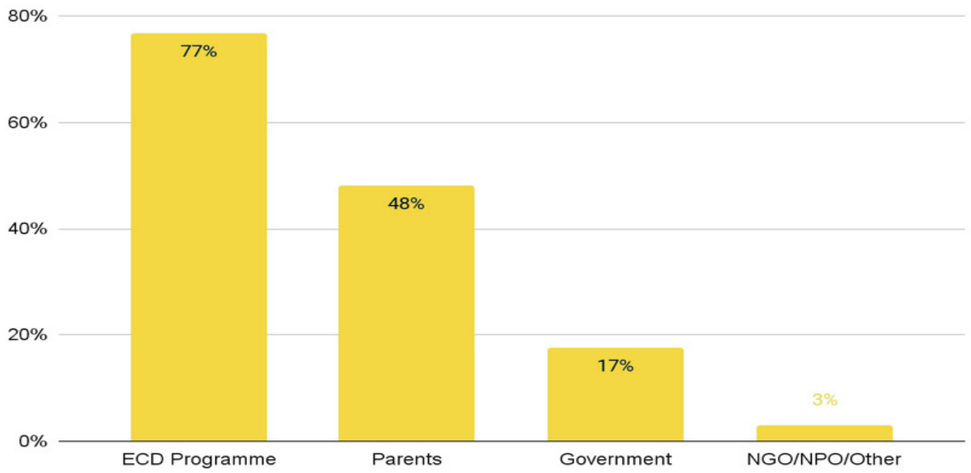


Figure: Meals

Usually (77% of the time) the ELP provides at least some of the meals, but about half of the time (48%) primary caregivers also contribute. Less than two out of ten (17%) ELPs receive support in the form of food from the government.



Water and Sanitation

Water and Sanitation

The majority (55%) of ELPs have access to running water inside the building. Less than 1% do not have access to any water. Almost all (98%) ELPs with access to water say that the water is drinkable.

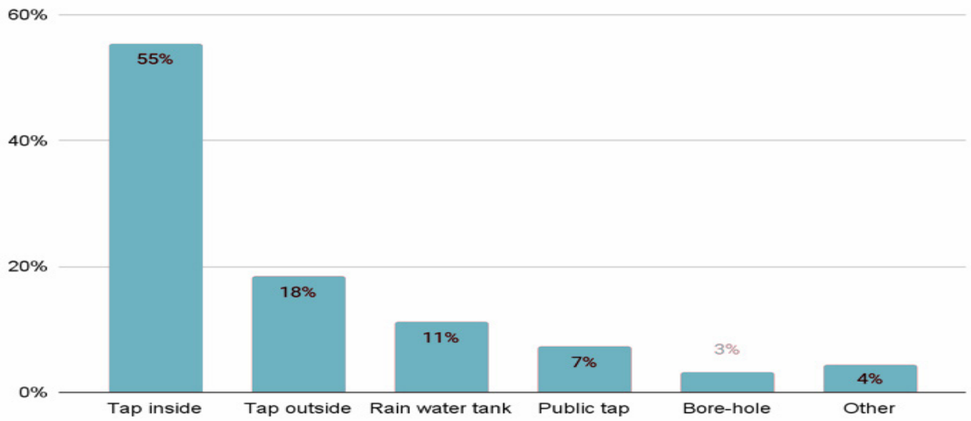


Figure: Source of Water

The children at the majority (59%) of ELPs use taps to wash their hands. At almost a quarter (22%) of ELPs the children exclusively use a bowl or bucket to wash their hands.

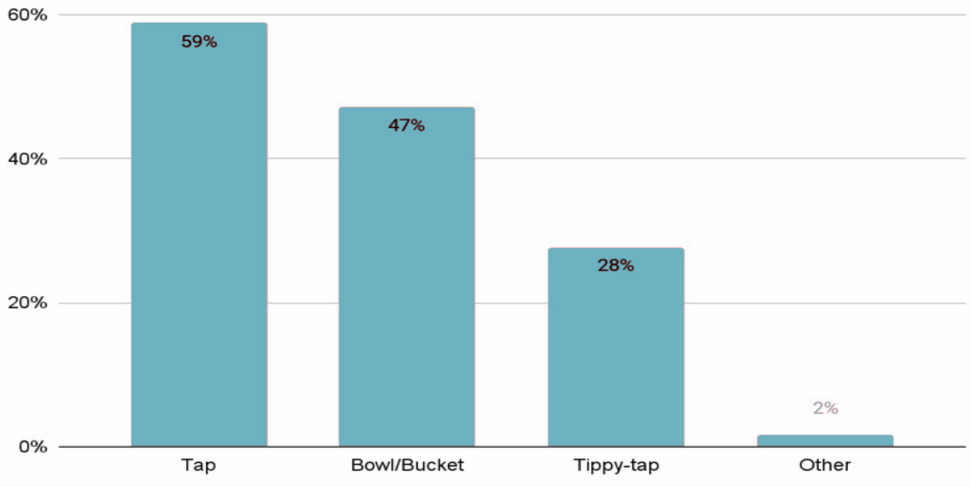


Figure: Handwashing Facilities

Water and Sanitation

On average, 16 children share one toilet at an ELP, not counting toilets for staff members. However, four out of ten (40%) ELPs are not connected to a sewage system.

While the majority of programmes (60%) have flush toilets connected to sewage, about 13,234 ELPs still have pit latrines with (12%) or without ventilation (22%). Flush toilets connected to septic tanks (3%), chemical toilets (2%), and bucket latrines (4%) can also be found.

Between one and two percent (1.5%) do not have any toilet facilities. Only a third (35%) of programmes have potties for small children. It is further noteworthy that less than one percent (0.5%) of programmes offer toilets for people with disabilities.

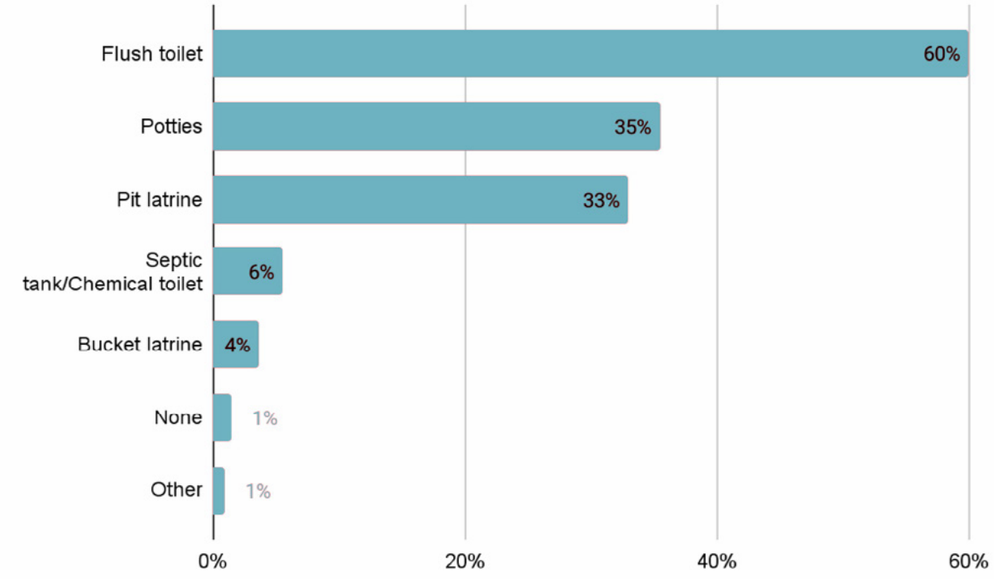


Figure: Types of Sanitation

Next Steps

The ECD Census marks a crucial milestone on the way to a better functioning ECD system in South Africa but there is a lot of important work still ahead. One of the first tasks will be the integration of the list of ELPs into DBE's Education Management Information System so sites of early learning for young children can receive the same attention as schools.

This will dovetail with an effort to build out and pilot a tailor made ECD MIS at both national and provincial levels. Ultimately, this MIS will incorporate modules for registration, funding, and quality assurance and support. Provinces will play a central role in the continuous effort to maintain the database of ELPs.

The Census data is already being used to inform policy decisions and resource planning. We expect that it will lead to an expansion of the existing support programmes to ELPs as decision makers both in government and civil society will be able to target the allocation of resources more effectively.

An anonymised version of the dataset will be made available to the public via DataFirst at the University of Cape Town, which, together with other recently published datasets such as the Thrive by Five Index, we hope will spark a new wave of research into ECD in South Africa.

The dataset will be made available in June 2022 along with the full census report, and a detailed set of provincial profiles. This will be complemented by policy briefs and a basic dashboard where the public will be able to engage with the data and insights.

Notes

Notes

ECD Census 2021

because children count