



Free facts

**A population boom – but
only in some provinces**

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SA population boom – but only in some provinces

The population of South Africa has boomed in recent years – but only in some places, with provincial population growth being uneven.

This edition of *FreeFACTS* looks at South African demographic trends and shows that some provinces had seen marked increases in the number of people living there, while other provinces have seen relatively slower jumps. It also looks at issues such as life expectancy, nationally and by province, as well as at issues like child and infant mortality.

Between 2001 and 2024 the overall population of South Africa increased by just over 40%, to 63 million. The provinces which saw their populations grow by more than this over the same period were Gauteng (nearly 70% increase), Mpumalanga (50%), and the Western Cape (66.5%). Population growth was slowest in the Free State, which saw its population grow by only 12%.

The increase in population in Gauteng and the Western Cape has primarily been because of migration of people from other provinces and from outside South Africa. They are the only two provinces where fertility is estimated to be below replacement level (replacement level fertility is 2.1 – each woman has on average 2.1 children in her lifetime).

This has serious implications for planning and development, these provinces are the ones where there will be greater issues around infrastructure and so.

At the same time, South Africa's overall fertility rate is 2.4 and has been on a broad downward trend for decades now. South Africa is not far off a problem facing much of the developed world – that of a shrinking population with people not having enough children to keep the population steady.

South Africa could have to rely on migrants to keep the population steady, as many developed countries already have to. Where countries have low levels of migration, such as East Asian countries, like Japan and South Korea, their populations could halve by the middle of the century, with dire consequences for the economy, and which could, in the long-term, face a serious existential threat. In time, South Africa could too.

— Marius Roodt

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The IRR is an advocacy group that fights for your right to make decisions about your life, family and business, free from unnecessary government, political, and bureaucratic interference. *FreeFACTS* publishes evidence that communities are better off when individuals are free to make decisions about how they want to live, be educated, work, access healthcare, think, speak, own property, and protect their communities. If you agree with the issues we stand for, welcome to the team. There are millions of people just like you who are tired of South African politicians, activists, and commentators attempting to rein in your freedom to decide. Take control and make sure your voice is heard by becoming a friend of the IRR.

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Demographics

Fertility rate ^a , 2002-24		
Year	Rate	GDP per head ^b
2002	2.55	65 118
2003	2.48	66 121
2004	2.62	68 391
2005	2.74	71 186
2006	2.77	74 292
2007	2.77	77 299
2008	2.78	78 709
2009	2.74	76 407
2010	2.65	77 568
2011	2.64	78 811
2012	2.61	79 464
2013	2.56	80 191
2014	2.52	80 077
2015	2.45	79 917
2016	2.33	79 264
2017	2.28	78 988
2018	2.34	79 017
2019	2.38	78 061
2020	2.42	72 269
2021	2.42	75 069
2022	2.42	75 743
2023	2.42	75 548
2024	2.41	N/A
2002-24	-5.5%	—

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Table 2, p4; South African Reserve Bank (SARB), www.resbank.co.za, time series data, accessed 17 November 2024

a The average number of children born alive to a woman during her child-bearing span (15-49 years) if she were to bear children. For example, a girl born in 2002 would be expected to have, on average, 2.45 children in her lifetime if she bore children.

b At constant 2015 prices.

N/A — Not available.

Demographics

Infant and under-five mortality rate, 2002-24		
Year	Infant mortality rate ^a	Under-five mortality rate ^b
2002	57.0	79.7
2003	57.1	82.3
2004	57.2	81.3
2005	56.2	80.9
2006	55.1	78.2
2007	49.4	71.0
2008	48.9	63.8
2009	44.7	55.9
2010	41.9	50.6
2011	37.1	44.0
2012	34.6	40.4
2013	32.9	38.5
2014	30.9	37.4
2015	29.2	36.7
2016	28.2	36.2
2017	27.3	35.7
2018	25.6	33.4
2019	25.4	32.5
2020	24.5	31.4
2021	24.5	31.3
2022	24.9	31.2
2023	24.0	30.5
2024	22.9	28.6
2002-24	-59.8%	-64.1%

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Appendix 2, p28

a The number of deaths of infants under one year of age, per 1 000 live births.

b The number of children who die by the age of five, per 1 000 live births.

Demographics

Life expectancy at birth by sex, 2002-24			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2002	52.9	56.3	54.7
2003	52.4	56.0	54.2
2004	52.0	55.6	53.9
2005	51.8	55.3	53.6
2006	51.8	55.3	53.6
2007	52.0	56.6	54.4
2008	52.9	57.6	55.3
2009	54.2	59.2	56.8
2010	55.3	61.2	58.4
2011	57.3	62.6	60.0
2012	58.6	64.2	61.4
2013	59.5	65.3	62.5
2014	60.5	66.1	63.3
2015	61.0	66.6	63.8
2016	61.2	66.8	64.0
2017	61.6	66.9	64.3
2018	62.3	67.3	64.9
2019	62.7	67.8	65.3
2020	62.8	68.3	65.6
2021	60.3	65.0	62.7
2022	61.3	66.5	63.9
2023	63.4	69.0	66.3
2024	63.6	69.2	66.5
2002-24	20.2%	22.9%	21.6%

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Appendix 2, p28

Demographics

Life expectancy by sex and province, 2001-26					
Province	2001-06	2006-11	—Male—		
			2011-16	2016-21	2021-26
Eastern Cape	51.5	53.5	59.3	60.5	61.4
Free State	43.3	45.5	53.9	55.5	57.0
Gauteng	55.1	56.7	62.2	63.8	65.1
KwaZulu-Natal	45.6	48.1	56.2	57.4	59.1
Limpopo	52.9	54.5	59.9	61.4	63.2
Mpumalanga	50.9	53.0	59.3	61.4	62.8
North West	46.1	48.5	56.2	57.6	59.6
Northern Cape	50.1	51.1	56.8	58.2	59.5
Western Cape	58.3	60.7	64.4	66.2	67.4

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Figures 10 and 11, pp17-18



Life expectancy by sex and province, 2001-26					
Province	2001-06	2006-11	—Female—		
			2011-16	2016-21	2021-26
Eastern Cape	55.2	58.6	64.7	65.4	67.2
Free State	47.5	51.8	60.7	61.9	63.8
Gauteng	58.8	61.8	67.7	68.6	70.6
KwaZulu-Natal	49.7	53.7	62.7	63.3	65.3
Limpopo	56.6	59.3	65.4	66.3	68.3
Mpumalanga	54.5	57.6	64.4	66.1	67.4
North West	50.0	53.9	62.7	63.5	65.8
Northern Cape	54.3	57.0	63.3	64.3	66.0
Western Cape	61.7	64.9	69.0	70.5	71.6

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Figures 10 and 11, pp17-18

Demographics

Internal migration ^a by province, 2016-21						
Province	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga
Eastern Cape	—	14 286	139 395	106 258	15 065	17 825
Free State	8 695	—	77 030	9 295	6 859	11 122
Gauteng	52 757	44 887	—	103 395	84 864	85 004
KwaZulu-Natal	27 674	13 928	185 425	—	9 930	39 655
Limpopo	4 839	6 283	314 938	8 869	—	50 634
Mpumalanga	5 497	5 679	127 137	13 749	25 514	—
North West	5 200	13 062	93 962	5 486	20 637	11 918
Northern Cape	4 703	9 690	18 360	6 173	2 856	4 889
Western Cape	52 562	8 342	64 546	13 526	5 979	7 534
Outside SA (net migration)	35 358	29 745	431 929	71 409	101 861	67 315



Internal migration ^a by province, 2016-21						
Province	North West	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Out-migration	In-migration	Net migration
Eastern Cape	20 861	8 727	172 097	494 515	197 285	-297 230
Free State	21 024	9 429	13 086	156 539	145 902	-10 637
Gauteng	99 989	11 653	104 834	587 383	1 452 721	865 338
KwaZulu-Natal	12 783	9 171	36 598	335 165	338 160	2 994
Limpopo	34 509	2 769	12 565	435 406	273 565	-161 841
Mpumalanga	14 609	2 532	10 657	205 374	295 898	90 523
North West	—	23 647	9 134	183 047	295 574	112 528
Northern Cape	13 834	—	19 409	79 914	88 004	8 090
Western Cape	8 696	13 177	—	174 363	491 324	316 962
Outside SA (net migration)	69 269	6 898	112 943	—	—	—

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Table 8, p19
^a The figures in the table show the number of people moving in and out of each province. For example, 14 286 people moved from the Eastern Cape to the Free State, while 145 902 moved in to the Free State from elsewhere.

Demographics

Internal migration ^a by province, 2016-21						
Province	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga
Eastern Cape	—	14 573	142 281	110 130	15 374	18 183
Free State	9 003	—	79 817	9 629	7 100	11 521
Gauteng	52 656	45 766	—	115 060	90 826	91 259
KwaZulu-Natal	29 414	14 795	164 329	—	10 554	42 177
Limpopo	5 123	6 649	313 712	9 394	—	53 607
Mpumalanga	5 954	6 149	137 861	14 883	27 641	—
North West	5 648	14 186	101 954	5 958	22 417	12 950
Northern Cape	4 997	10 296	19 533	6 564	3 037	5 198
Western Cape	55 147	8 832	67 846	14 214	6 285	7 946
Outside SA (net migration)	28 923	24 341	353 690	58 416	83 339	55 076



Internal migration ^a by province, 2021-26						
Province	North West	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Out-migration	In-migration	Net migration
Eastern Cape	20 876	8 901	175 615	505 932	196 864	-309 068
Free State	21 732	9 768	13 555	162 126	145 587	-16 539
Gauteng	111 293	12 430	116 557	635 846	1 381 024	745 177
KwaZulu-Natal	13 598	9 745	38 890	323 502	344 247	20 745
Limpopo	36 540	2 936	13 295	441 256	266 572	-174 684
Mpumalanga	15 828	2 744	11 541	222 601	297 917	75 316
North West	—	25 685	9 920	198 716	300 471	101 755
Northern Cape	14 705	—	20 627	84 957	91 686	6 729
Western Cape	9 210	13 841	—	183 322	492 427	309 105
Outside SA (net migration)	56 687	5 637	92 428	758 538	—	—

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Table 9, p20

Demographics

Population (mid-year estimates), 2000-2024

Year	Total
2000	43 685 699
2005	46 888 200
2010	49 991 300
2015	54 956 920
2016	55 908 865
2017	56 521 948
2018	57 725 606
2019	58 775 022
2020	59 622 350
2021	60 142 978
2022	60 604 992
2023	62 180 391
2024	63 015 904
Change:	44.2%

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates*, Statistical release P0302, 1991-2024 data

Demographics

Population by province, 2001-2024

Province	— 2001—		— 2024—		
	Population	Proportion of total	Population	Proportion of total	Change in population numbers
Eastern Cape	6 278 651	14.0%	7 176 230	11.4%	14.3%
Free State	2 706 775	6.0%	3 044 050	4.8%	12.5%
Gauteng	9 388 854	20.9%	15 931 824	25.3%	69.7%
KwaZulu-Natal	9 584 129	21.4%	12 312 712	19.5%	28.5%
Limpopo	4 995 462	11.1%	6 402 594	10.2%	28.2%
Mpumalanga	3 365 554	7.5%	5 057 662	8.0%	50.3%
North West	2 984 098	6.7%	4 155 303	6.6%	39.2%
Northern Cape	991 919	2.2%	1 372 943	2.2%	38.4%
Western Cape	4 524 335	10.1%	7 562 588	12.0%	66.5%
South Africa^a	44 819 778	100.0%	63 015 904	100.0%	40.6%

Source: Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2024*, Statistical release P0302, 30 July 2024, Figure 1, pvii; www.census.statssa.gov.za, accessed 11 November 2023

a Figures may not add up vertically, owing to rounding

Population by province, 2024

