

Service delivery

Steady rise in service delivery but quality concerns remain

While the percentage of South African households that have access to basic water and sanitation services is growing steadily, challenges remain to serve the country's most far-flung, rural communities. This is according to the results from the General Household Survey 2015, released by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) in June.



Stats SA has been undertaking annual household surveys since 2002. All nine provinces are covered. The surveys are an omnibus household-based instrument aimed at determining the progress of development in the country. It measures, on a regular basis, the performance of programmes as well as the quality of service delivery in a number of key service sectors in the country.

The General Household Survey covers six broad areas, namely education, health and social development, housing, household access to services and facilities, food security and agriculture. According to Stats SA, the findings of the General Household Survey provide a critical assessment of the levels of development in the country as well as the extent of service delivery and the quality of services in a number of key service sectors, including access to and use of water and sanitation.

Access to water

Important to readers of this magazine, the General Household Survey reports that nearly 90% of South African households currently have access to safe water supply. As with most services in South Africa, access is proportionally higher in some provinces compared to others. The Western Cape has the highest number of people with access to piped water, namely 99.2%, followed by Gauteng (97.7%), the Northern Cape (96.5%) and the Free State (96.1%). 'Piped water' is defined as water supplied either in the home, in the yard, or off-site.

In comparison, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo are struggling to reach all of its constituents. In the Eastern Cape, 75% of households have access to water, with the figure dropping slightly compared to the previous household survey, when a water access percentage of 79% was reported. Similar results are reported for Limpopo, where water access has dropped from 80% in 2014 to 79% in 2015 (the date of the latest survey).

All the metropolitan areas reported access rates that are considerably higher than the national average. A significantly high proportion of households have access to piped water in the City of Cape Town (99.5%), Mangaung (99%), Nelson Mandela Bay (98.9%), the City of Johannesburg (98.5%) and Ekurhuleni (98.5%). The City of Tshwane (95.6%) recorded the lowest percentage of households with access to water in 2015 in a metropolitan area.

It is encouraging to note that almost half of the South African population now enjoys access to piped water inside their homes (45.8% of households). A further 27% of households access water inside their yards, while another 14% rely on communal taps. The household survey further reports that 2.7% of South African households rely on water from their neighbours' taps.

Although generally households' access to water improved, 4.4% of households still have to fetch water from unsafe sources such



About 4.8% of households reported experiencing blockages in their municipal system.

as rivers, streams, stagnant water pools, dams, wells and springs. While the proportion of people with access to safe water has been growing steadily since the first household survey in 2002, payment for services is decreasing. In 2015, only 43.9% of households were paying for water, compared to 62% in 2002. The latest household survey also includes a perception of the quality of services households are receiving from water service authorities. The survey reports an inverse relationship between the perceived quality of services and the number of water service interruptions households are experiencing.

The provinces with the lowest percentage of households that reported interruptions with water services, namely Western Cape (3%), and North West (6.6%), also reported the highest satisfaction with water delivery services (86.4% for Western Cape and 76.8% for North West). Conversely, the provinces in which interruptions were most frequent were less likely to rate water service delivery as 'good'. Whereas 61% of households in Limpopo and 60% of households in Mpumalanga reported having had interruptions, only 32.4% of households in Limpopo and 40% of households in Mpumalanga rated water service delivery as 'good'.

Access to sanitation

Proper sanitation is a key barrier to disease. Safe sanitation is considered on-site sanitation such as a ventilated improved pit (VIP) toilet, or a flush toilet connected to a sewerage system or a septic tank. Nationally, the percentage of households with access to safe sanitation increased from 62% in 2002 to 80% in 2015.

The highest number of households with access to sanitation are in the Western Cape (93.3%) and Gauteng (91%). The worst performing provinces are Mpumalanga and Limpopo, where only 66% and 54% of households respectively have access to safe sanitation. The Eastern Cape has shown an astonishing improvement in the number of households with access to safe sanitation facilities. Between 2002 and 2015 the province managed to grow sanitation access by 48%. In 2015, 82% of households in the Eastern Cape had access to safe sanitation.

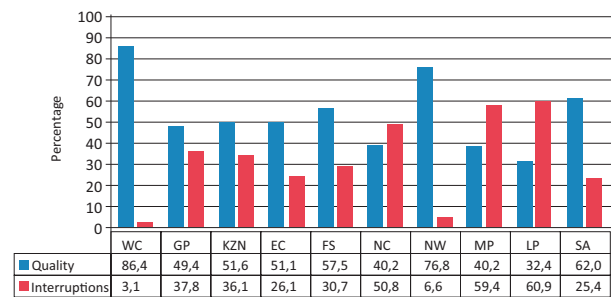
While access to safe sanitation has steadily increased, there has been a concomitant decrease in the number of households making use of the bucket toilet system or having no sanitation at all. Nationally, 4.7% of households used the bucket system or had no toilet. Looking at the figures from the different provinces, the highest number of people without access to a toilet are in the Eastern Cape (7.7%), followed by the Northern Cape (7.4%), North West (6.7%) and Limpopo (6.7%).

The General Household Survey also assessed the quality of the sanitation facilities to which households had access to. Questions revolved around the number of households sharing toilet facilities, breakages in the municipal system, aspects of physical safety, access to water to wash hands, and so on.

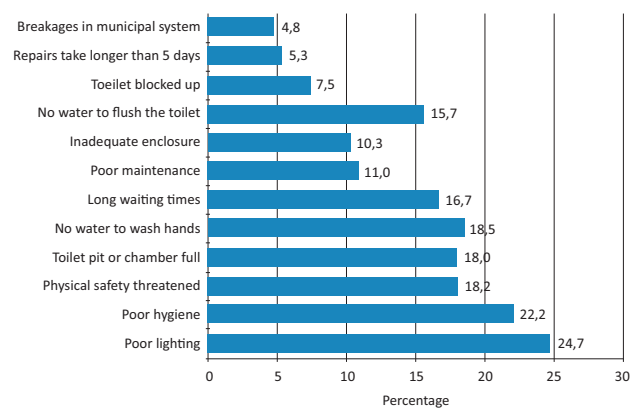
About one third of households surveyed expressed concern regarding poor lighting and inadequate hygiene, while 18% felt that their physical safety were threatened when using the toilet. About a fifth complained that there was no water to wash their hands after they had used the toilet, and another 17% pointed to long waiting times. Only 10% of households complained that the toilets were not properly enclosed. Only 4.8% of households complained that there were breakages in the municipal system and 7.5% of the households had blocked up toilets.

Responding to the results of the survey, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) said it would continue to work with municipalities to improve access to water and sanitation services, and especially to the quality of services households were experiencing. "We are further cognisant of the fact that as this latest survey indicates, 4.4% of households still fetch water from rivers, streams, stagnant water pools and dams, wells and springs... DWS is intent on reducing the numbers of those that are unserved."

Access to dignified sanitation is another primary ideal for the department. "We are aware that access to dignified sanitation lags behind access to other services. Provision of dignified sanitation should and must impact positively on the livelihoods of all South Africans, but especially on women and girl-children."



Percentage of households rating the quality of water services provided by the municipality as good, and those that reported water interruptions, by province, 2015



Problems experienced by households that share sanitation facilities during the six months before the survey