



**The Aging Readiness &
Competitiveness Report**

SOUTH AFRICA

Overview

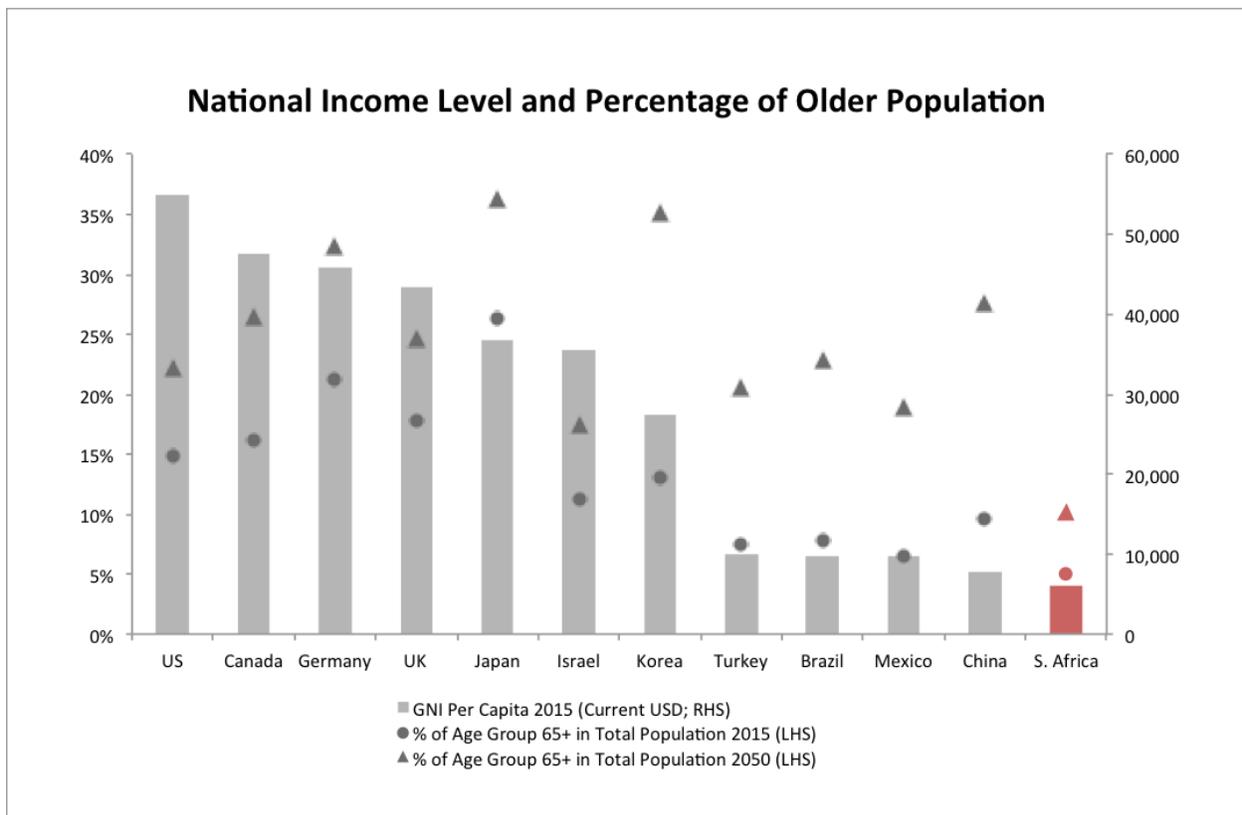
Today, people age 65 and above account for just 5 percent of South Africa's population¹ – equivalent to just one-sixth of the population aged 0 through 14. Thanks to a consistently high fertility rate, by 2050, this is projected to just double to reach 10.2 percent – a pace of change about one-third slower than other upper-middle-income countries.² This lack of demographic pressure has given the

government little incentive to prioritize aging-related issues on its policy agenda. Instead, it is focused on broader societal challenges – including poverty, crime, and racial disparity – to which older people are particularly vulnerable.

The legacy of Apartheid is still prominent in South Africa, particularly among the older population, where race remains an important factor in determining socioeconomic status. While overall poverty rates are consistent with the

¹ The World Bank. Population Ages 65 and Above (Percentage of Total).

² UN World Population Prospects.



(Source: OECD, United Nations, World Bank)

general population (in fact, it is South Africa's children who are the most impoverished), black South Africans are disproportionately less well off. Ninety-eight percent of older adults living in poverty are black South Africans, even though they make up only 65 percent of those age 60 and older.³ This is in part due to unequal access to education – only 2.5 percent of black South Africans age 60 and older have had some level of higher education beyond the secondary level. In contrast, white South Africans make up 65 percent of those age 60 and older who are considered wealthy, and almost one-third of white older adults have had some level of post-secondary level education.⁴

The tradition of multigenerational households remains strong in the country, with 50.6 percent of all people age 60 and

³ Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of older persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

⁴ Ibid.

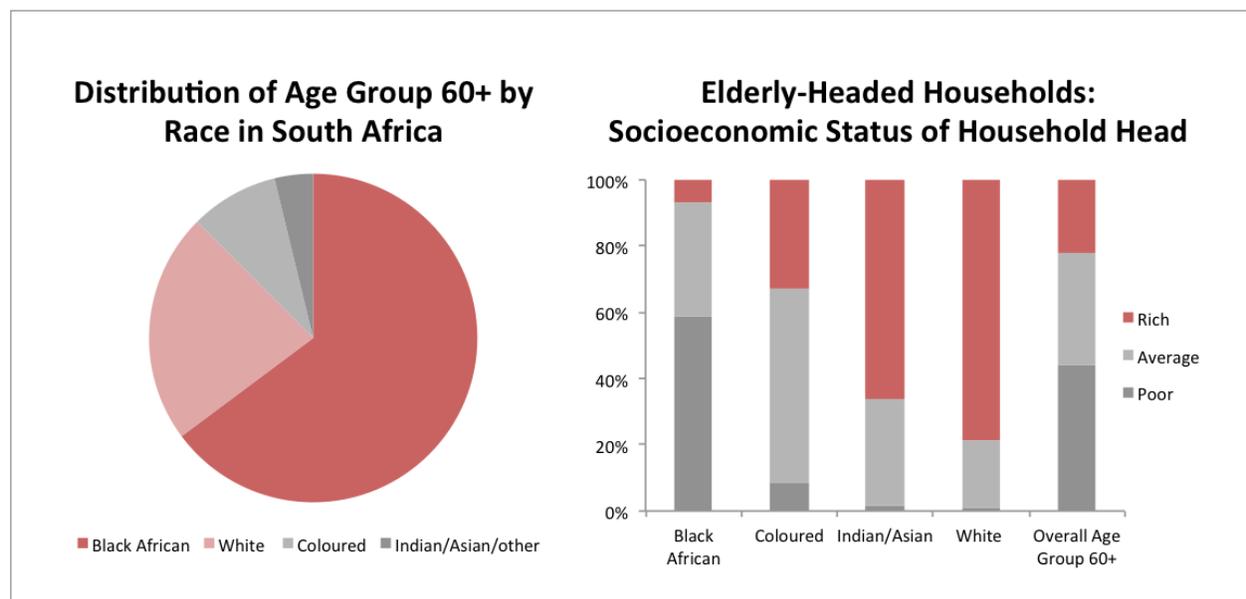
older living in extended households as of 2011, according to the government's latest census. Rampant youth and working-age unemployment, coupled with the high levels of HIV/AIDS among young people, has led older adults to take on greater responsibility in households, including caring for younger family members. People age 60 and older headed nearly three million households in 2011, compared to just 1.7 million in 1996.⁵ This has contributed to the low level of 6.6 percent of those age 65 and older who participated in the labor force in 2015.⁶

Another factor is the Old Age Grant,⁷ a non-contributory pension system that serves as a poverty-alleviation mechanism

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ OECD Statistics. According to Statistics South Africa, which is responsible for the country's labor force survey, labor force survey statistics include all of those who are employed in the country, both formally and informally.

⁷ Also known as the Old Age Pension, or the Older Person's Grant.



(Source: Statistics South Africa)

for older people once they reach 60. Given the need to address old-age poverty, enabling the development of productive skills for older adults has not been a priority of the South African government, and virtually no steps have been taken to increase their labor force participation rate or to provide training programs for them, with the exception of those aimed at boosting the literacy rate.

Just as there is a lack of education and training programs for older adults to gain productive skills, there are also very few efforts specifically targeting seniors to help them obtain the knowledge to utilize basic forms of technology. However, while Internet penetration among older people remains lower than in OECD countries, they have begun to engage with mobile technology at much higher rates in recent years. In response to these trends, private-sector companies have designed cell phones specifically tailored to the older population, and the government introduced a long-term strategy in 2016 to improve accessibility to basic technologies for those who historically have been

unable to acquire them, specifically older adults and those living in underserved communities.

Accessibility has also been an issue for older adults in South Africa seeking both medical and long-term care (LTC). Healthy life expectancy at age 60 has improved slightly in the past 10 years but remains lower than the regional and global averages. There is a severe deficit in the availability of specialized care options for older people, with only 13 registered geriatricians practicing in the entire country. Further, long-term care resources remain scarce, and many struggle to access general public healthcare resources due to limited transportation options in rural areas. The government is attempting to address the health-related issues experienced by the older population through a comprehensive, large-scale reform of the whole system set for implementation by 2030 that will include prioritizing older adults at the primary care level.



Community Social Infrastructure

South Africa is struggling to provide community support to older people nationwide, particularly in rural areas. Families remain a crucial system of support for older adults, as the majority live in households composed of extended family members, though the share of older people living alone has increased significantly in the past decade. Due to a lack of national resources and other urgent issues, the government has operated indirectly through NGOs to make community support services more available. So far, the government itself has focused primarily on improving physical infrastructure like housing and transportation.

Social Connection

Multigenerational family structures are still prominent in South Africa. Over 75 percent of older adults live with children or other family members, and over half live in extended households.⁸ More than 80 percent of adults age 50 and older feel that they have relatives and/or friends they could count on during times of need.⁹

While family members play an important role in supporting and caring for older

adult relatives, the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS and unemployment among the younger population is turning this around. A growing number of older people have taken on a supportive role caring for family members who have been negatively affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and/or are out of work. From 1996 through 2011, the number of households headed by people age 60 or older grew by 71 percent to 2.9 million, equivalent to 19.4 percent of all households,¹⁰ and further increased to 20.2 percent of all households by 2015.¹¹

The country's rapid urbanization is also driving young families to move away from their older parents. The share of older adults living alone increased from 14.6 percent in 1996 to 20.2 percent in 2011.¹² As a result, there is concern that personal safety and housing issues will arise as this trend continues. Concerns are particularly acute for older black adults, who more frequently reside in low socioeconomic and under-resourced areas.

⁸ Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of Older Persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

⁹ HelpAge International. (2015). South Africa: AgeWatch Report Card.

¹⁰ Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of older persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

¹¹ Statistics South Africa, (2017). The Social Profile of Older Persons, 2011-2015. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

¹² Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of older persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

Physical Safety and Crime

Crime is a significant problem, and older adults are particularly vulnerable. Only 31 percent of people over the age of 50 feel safe walking alone at night.¹³ Moreover, according to ADT Security Services in South Africa, petty criminals are increasingly preying on the older population, whom they see as easier targets.¹⁴ Fraud is also a concern. According to experts from both local NGOs and academic institutions,¹⁵ older people are frequently targeted by companies and organizations hoping to take advantage of their lack of education and financial literacy. TAFTA, an NGO dedicated to older adults in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region, reports that in the past two years there have been cases of fraud in the form of illegal deductions from pensioners' Old Age Grants. Many companies also target pensioners in an attempt to convince them to spend their pension money on their goods and services instead of providing for their basic needs. The government has sought to mitigate fraud by encouraging pensioners to submit formal complaint statements to the South African Social Security Agency, but this remains an issue.¹⁶

¹³ HelpAge International. (2015). South Africa: AgeWatch report card. HelpAge International.

¹⁴ ADT South Africa. Residential Tips for Seniors.

¹⁵ Interview with Femada Shamam, Divisional Manager of Social Services at TAFTA, December 2016.

¹⁶ South African Government News Agency. (2015). Report pension grant fraud.

Physical Infrastructure

Older adults, along with young children, are most prone to suffering caused by mobility and accessibility issues in their home, transportation, and public facilities. The efforts made by the government and NGOs to improve physical infrastructure for older people have been concentrated on improving basic living conditions, increasing access to housing, and making transportation more age-friendly in some municipalities.

The majority of older people live in their own home or a family-owned home, but the nature of homes ranges from brick houses to rudimentary structures in an informal settlement, the latter being very common, particularly in rural areas.¹⁷ Significant racial disparities, a product of the Apartheid era, are also apparent in older adults' access to quality housing. Older black South African households are far more likely to lack access to indoor plumbing than white, Indian, or coloured South Africans.¹⁸ Since the end of Apartheid, the government has provided nearly three million fully subsidized housing opportunities to people at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale,¹⁹ which the CEO of South Africa's Institute for Race

¹⁷ Ferreira, Monica. Housing and Older People in South Africa. International Longevity Centre South Africa.

¹⁸ Van der Pas, Ramklass, S. O'Leary, B. Anderson, S. Keating, N. Cassim, B. (2015). Features of home and neighbourhood and the liveability of older South Africans. *European Journal of Ageing*.

¹⁹ Interview with Dan Smit, Owner of Dan Smit Development Capacity, March 2017.

Relations called one of its most successful policy initiatives of the past 20 years.²⁰

A report released by the South African government in 2017 observes that the share of older black adults with access to basic household services increased significantly from 2011 through 2015, as did the percentage of those with access to electricity and improved sanitation in particular – rising from 84.9 percent and 60.5 percent, respectively, to 75.9 percent and 91 percent, respectively.²¹ However, despite government efforts, there are still many older people who have not been able to access affordable housing. According to Abbeyfield South Africa, a non-profit organization that provides affordable family-style group homes for older adults around the country, facilities are always at capacity, with long waiting lists, and they are unable to keep up with the demand.²² While reforms are under way, they do not specifically address the needs of the older population, offering little hope of improvement.

In order to further increase access to housing and satisfy this demand, South Africa's Department of Human Settlements presented the Social Contract for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements, signed by banks, developers, and other large employers in 2014. In order

²⁰ Chiumia, Sintha (2014). Mr. President, S. Africa is not the only country giving free housing to the poor. Africa Check.

²¹ Statistics South Africa, (2017). The Social Profile of Older Persons, 2011-2015. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

²² Interview with Henriette van Rooyen, Abbeyfield South Africa, February 2017.

to centralize and efficiently coordinate housing development, it outlines a commitment to create 1.5 million homes by the end of 2019, 100,000 of which must be affordable housing units, and 70,000 of which must be affordable rental units. However, local experts report that the development of these new units is behind schedule and that there are no specific regulations in place to prioritize the older population.²³

Inadequate public transportation presents one of the most important challenges for older people in South Africa today.²⁴ The national government has taken no specific policy actions to adapt public transportation to suit the needs of older people, and a total of 13 cities, including Gauteng, Tshwane, and Johannesburg, are now investing billions of Rand to create the Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network to benefit all South Africans, but they do not specifically include age-friendly features for older adults. Establishing such practices in these other municipalities that are in the process of further developing their transportation networks would go a long way toward increasing the mobile capabilities of older South Africans across the country.

One potential model is Cape Town's MyCiTi Bus Service, launched in 2007, which was designed specifically with the needs of older adults and the disabled in

²³ Interview with Dan Smit, Owner of Dan Smit Development Capacity, March 2017.

²⁴ Interview with Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.

“Unfortunately, the MyCiti Bus Service only covers two major areas and mostly caters to popular locations and places of business. Mass transport is still not structured in a way that accommodates older adults and people with disabilities. Everyone has to be able to manage a high step to board trains, and to successfully use the minibuses that are so popular in South Africa, you have to quickly jump on and off in order to arrive at your destination and avoid traffic.”

– Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing

mind, with age-friendly features, including tactile paving to help those with visual impairment locate stations and platforms and boarding bridges on buses. This is having a positive impact, especially as it is a far superior alternative to the minibus system in the country that is very inaccessible to older adults.²⁵ Sebastiana Kalula, a Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, notes, “Unfortunately, the MyCiti Bus Service only covers two major areas and mostly caters to popular locations and places of business. Mass transport in South Africa is still not structured in a way that accommodates older adults and people with disabilities. Everyone has to be able to manage a high step to board trains, and to successfully use the minibuses that are so

²⁵ Interview with Pius Tanga, Qualitative Social Researcher at the University of Fort Hare, November 2016.

popular in South Africa, you have to quickly jump on and off in order to arrive at your destination and avoid traffic.” With the goal of ensuring that 75 percent of all homes within city limits have access, the network for the bus service has been expanding. The most recent route additions were completed in 2013, and it is expected to take around 20 years to be fully completed.

Community Support

A lack of national resources has led the government to operate largely through NGOs to provide community support for older adults. The Older Persons Act of 2006 gave the Department of Social Development the authority to register NGOs that work with older people and provide subsidies for some of the services they provide. Today, it funds and collaborates with various other NGOs across South Africa. There are over 60 NGOs around the country dedicated to assisting older adults with specific issues ranging from combating loneliness to raising awareness of elder abuse. Combined, these organizations cover a wide variety of community support services, but they are small and highly localized and thus have limited impact.²⁶

One of the most active NGOs registered with the Department of Social Development is TAFTA, which operates primarily in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region, the province with one of the

²⁶ Interview with Femada Shamam, Divisional Manager of Social Services at TAFTA, December 2016.

highest shares (19 percent) of people age 60 and older in the country.²⁷ The organization provides a variety of support services, including a “meals on wheels” program that serves an average of one million meals each year. As population aging has progressed, and demand has increased, TAFTA has begun to expand the scope of services. It launched a program called “Ageing in Place” in 2013, which is designed to enable older adults in the region to live in their homes for as long as possible by offering services, including handymen to fix household issues; advice for equipment installation to make homes age-friendly; “care companions” to assist with errands; telephone check-ins; and 24/7 emergency response. TAFTA provides its services to an average of 5,500 older people each month. All of these initiatives are successful for those who have access to them, but senior staff at the organization make it clear that TAFTA does not have the capacity to meet the increasing demand for its services, and that more government and non-

²⁷ Van der Pas, Ramklass, S. O’Leary, B. Anderson, S. Keating, N. Cassim, B. (2015). Features of home and neighbourhood and the liveability of older South Africans. *European Journal of Ageing*.

government support will be necessary to keep up with population aging.²⁸

One promising project that could be replicated is AgeWell. Piloted in Cape Town in 2014, AgeWell was able to successfully employ older adults as caregivers for other older adults in two communities, including Khayelitsha, one of the poorest areas of the city. The project was developed based on the model used by AgeWell Global, a for-profit enterprise based in the U.S. Participants were trained as peer supporters and made a total of 211 home visits. The program yielded a number of positive results, including a 60 percent improvement in its measures of older adult well-being and a significant increase in the satisfaction of those who were visited.²⁹ However, the pilot project in South Africa was heavily reliant upon the philanthropic support, much of which came from donors in the U.S., and lack of continuing funding caused the project to be terminated.³⁰

²⁸ Interview with Femada Shamam, Divisional Manager of Social Services at TAFTA, December 2016.

²⁹ World Health Organization. (2015). World report on ageing and health.

³⁰ Interview with Mitchell Besser, Founder of Mothers2Mothers, February 2017.



Productive Opportunity

Older adults in South Africa participate in the labor force at very low levels, due to a range of factors, including the provision of the a non-contributory pension, low levels of educational attainment, and growing household caregiving responsibilities. While the government has endeavored to improve literacy and education of the entire population, it has neglected the productive opportunity among the older population and has yet to provide them with assistance gaining skills and employment.

Labor Force Participation of Older Adults

The labor force participation rate for older South Africans (age 65 and older) was only 6.6 percent in 2015 – the second lowest among countries covered in this study, less than half of the OECD average, and only approximately one-third of that of Brazil and China.³¹ The overwhelming majority of South Africans begin receiving the Old Age Grant once they reach the pensionable age of 60.³² In order to receive the grant, one must apply through the government and pass a means test. As of 2015, nine out of ten older adults were recipients of

“Older adults receiving the social pension are not likely to keep their job once reaching the pensionable age, especially those in low-paying jobs. It is traditional for older people working in urban areas to move back to a rural area once they reach the age of 60, where the cost of living is lower.”

– Morne Oosthuizen, Deputy Director of the Development Policy Research Unit UCT

the grant, and 80 percent of all households headed by older people report it being their primary source of income.³³ While receiving this pension does not require recipients to exit the labor force, Morne Oosthuizen, of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, contends, “Older adults receiving the social pension are not likely to keep their job once reaching the pensionable age, especially those in low-paying jobs. It is traditional for older people working in urban areas to move back to a rural area once they reach the age of 60, where the cost of living is lower.” Since the eligibility age was lowered from 65 to 60 for men in 2008 to match the age for women, labor participation rates for men aged 60 though 64 fell from

³¹ OECD. (2017). Labour force participation rate (indicator). OECD. doi: 10.1787/8a801325-en.

³² Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of older persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

³³ Statistics South Africa, (2017). The Social Profile of Older Persons, 2011-2015. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

2008 through 2011 by one-third. The participation rate has slowly begun to rise again,³⁴ which may have to do with the grant's failure to adjust its monthly payment to inflation properly.³⁵

Issues affecting the younger and working-age populations, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic and rampant youth and younger adult unemployment, which have forced so many older adults to become heads of their households, have also led to older people's early withdrawal from the labor force once they start to receive the Old Age Grant. Further, the cost of education and training programs are often prohibitive. Despite not paying its beneficiaries very

much money,³⁶ the grant is often used to support their grandchildren and/or sick and unemployed children, which leaves them with little money to pursue their own skills development that would enable them to re-enter the labor force.³⁷

Education/Literacy

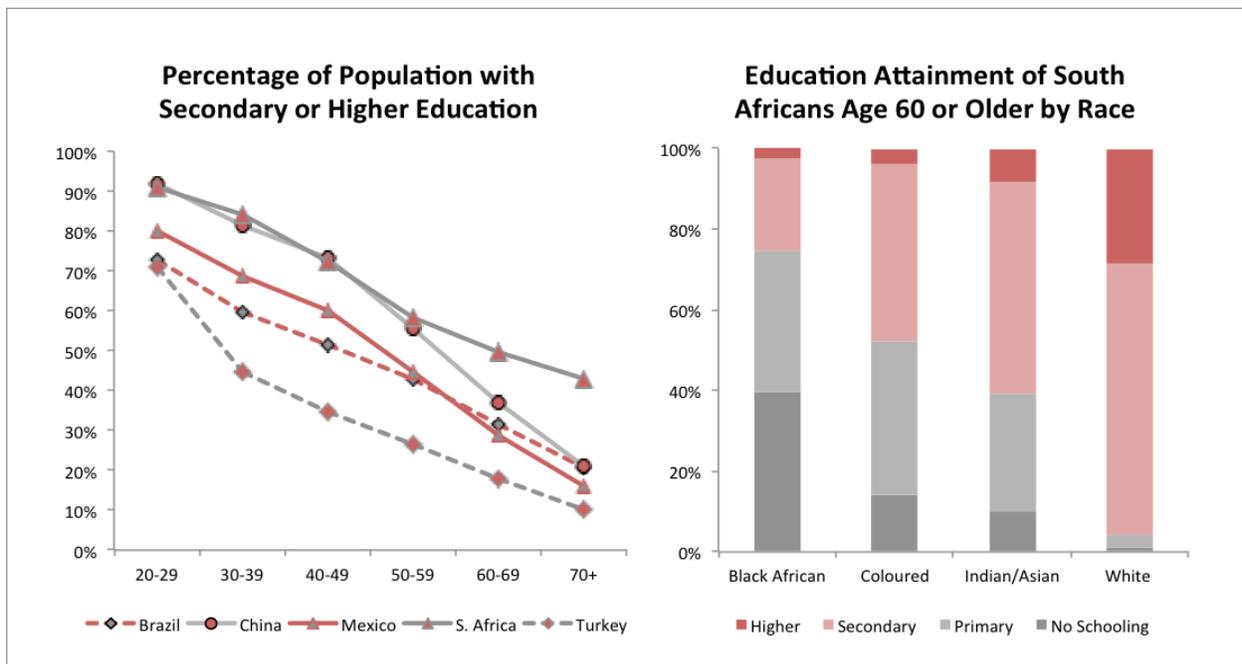
Education is an area where South Africa's racial inequality remains significant due to the legacy of Apartheid, which prevented black South Africans from accessing quality education through the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Despite its comparatively high education attainment of the overall older population, compared

³⁴ OECD Statistics. (2017). LFS by sex and age. OECD.

³⁵ Interview with Morne Oosthuizen, Director of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, November 2016.

³⁶ Net replacement rate of pension was only 12 percent of pre-retirement earnings in 2014, according to the OECD.

³⁷ Interview with Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.



(Sources: Statistics South Africa; Barro R. & J. W. Lee Feb. 2016)

with other major developing countries like China, Brazil, Turkey, and Mexico, it is the drastic inequality in South Africa that has made educational attainment such a significant barrier to the employability of older people. According to the latest census in 2011, while 96 percent of white South Africans age 60 and older had attained secondary or a higher level of education, only one-quarter of older black South Africans had done the same. While only 1 percent of older white people had never received schooling, the rate among older black adults was nearly 40 percent.³⁸

Since 1994, the education system has undergone significant reforms and budget increases in order to address the inequality imposed by Apartheid. In 2008, the government established the Kha Ri Gude (“Let Us Learn”) Adult Literacy Programme, which operates throughout the country through the Department of Basic Education.³⁹ This program specifically targets marginalized segments of the population, with 15 percent of the 163,833 South Africans enrolled in the program over the age of 60 in 2016.⁴⁰

³⁸ Statistics South Africa. (2014). Census 2011: Profile of older persons in South Africa. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

³⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2016). Kha Ri Gude (Let Us Learn) Adult Literacy Program (KGALP).

⁴⁰ Interview with Morongwa Ramarumo, CEO of the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Program, February 2017.

In 2016, Kha Ri Gude reached its target of serving 50 percent of all the illiterate adults in South Africa.⁴¹ From 1996 through 2016, the older adult functional illiteracy rate fell from 62.6 percent to 47 percent.⁴² However, academics acknowledge that recovering from this system has been extremely challenging for the country, and the education system remains riddled with quality issues and inequalities.⁴³

While NGOs are also dedicated to adult education, they do not focus on older people, because their sponsors do not believe it to be the most productive use of their funding. One significant NGO in this field is an organization called Project Literacy, which works to provide adults with a basic education and to increase family literacy. Specifically, it focuses on improving socioeconomic development in black communities through high-quality education and training programs. However, its CEO, Steve le Roux, notes, “When our organization started, that was our intention – to be able to serve the grandparents, and all those in that age group – and we are still able to help some of them. However, government funding specifically for education and training has

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Statistics South Africa, (2017). The Social Profile of Older Persons, 2011-2015. Pretoria, South Africa: STATSSA.

⁴³ Interview with Pius Tanga, Qualitative Social Researcher at the University of Fort Hare, November 2016.

actually put age limits on the beneficiaries. They say the future of the country and the economy exists in people below the age of 55.”⁴⁴

While there is no training available to enter the formal economy, Project Literacy also

⁴⁴ Interview with Steve le Roux, CEO of Project Literacy, February 2017.

engages with small, community-based organizations that provide older people with caregiving skills for their children and grandchildren, as well as basic skills training in areas where they might already have a familiarity, such as making crafts or growing things for basic small-scale farming purposes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid.



Technological Engagement

Older people in South Africa are engaging with basic technologies at higher rates than ever before, yet there is still a significant digital divide. Much like in the case of education, government efforts have been long-term endeavors geared toward the entire population, without a focus on older adults. Some local companies have made efforts to adapt mobile technology to the needs of older consumers, but the lack of training options perpetuates the digital divide.

The Digital Diffusion among Older People

The mobile penetration rate is currently over 100 percent in South Africa, meaning that some people own more than one phone – cell phones have become the most commonly embraced form of basic technology among those age 60 and older.⁴⁶ Older adults are gaining greater access to mobile devices, now that their children and grandchildren are beginning to pass along their old cell phones to them once they no longer need them. However, a study conducted jointly by the University of South Africa and the University of Glasgow determined that the older population is being neglected and marginalized by the technological transition process. The study

⁴⁶ Interview with Judy van Biljon, Researcher at the University of South Africa, December 2016.

revealed that 37 percent of older adults who do have cell phones do not use them on a daily basis. It noted that barriers for older people in keeping up with the nationwide transition to mobile telephony include vision problems, physical weakness, and hearing loss.⁴⁷ However, studies around the world have demonstrated that comfort with technology is often the primary barrier and one that can be overcome with tailored training.

While there is little financial incentive within the private sector to address these barriers,⁴⁸ some larger companies have designed devices specifically for older people. Vodacom has made efforts to help older adults in South Africa transition technologically along with the rest of the population. Vodacom recently released a phone called the Vodafone V155, specifically designed for older customers experiencing vision loss and for those with limited hand functionality. Some of its features include a big-button keypad, general compatibility with hearing aids, a noise-cancellation feature, a voice-reminder feature, and an SOS key alert

⁴⁷ Van Biljon, J. Renaud, K. van Dyk, T. (2013). Accessibility Challenges Experienced by South Africa's Older Mobile Phone Users. *The Journal of Community Informatics*.

⁴⁸ Interview with Judy van Biljon, Researcher at the University of South Africa, December 2016.

function.⁴⁹ Additionally, the company has set up the Disabled and Elderly Specific Needs Strategy for Vodacom South Africa and has recruited staff who are responsible for setting up kiosks at various organizations for the disabled, making these older-adult and disabled-specific products more accessible to them.

Unlike the mobile telephony boom, the overall Internet penetration in South Africa remains low compared to OECD countries, and older adults have been particularly excluded from the technological transition. As of 2016, only 48.7 percent of all households had access to the Internet,⁵⁰ and only 5.4 percent of all Internet users were 60 years old or older – well below their proportion of the total population, which stands at 8 percent.⁵¹

Like many developing countries, the South African government has focused its effort to promote technology diffusion in the society on increasing infrastructure accessibility. While the local governments of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni have increased public Internet access by adding hundreds of Wi-Fi hotspots and dozens of free Wi-Fi zones,⁵² a lack of skills and comfort has prevented older adults from productively utilizing such services. The few programs available that

⁴⁹ South African Council for the Blind. (2016). Vodafone V155 (for the elderly).

⁵⁰ Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services. (2016). National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper.

⁵¹ MyBroadband. (2014). South African Internet Users: Age, Gender, and Race.

⁵² ITWeb News. (2016). SA's Internet user numbers surge.

“It’s really a difficult thing, designing a phone for older people, now that people want to send pictures and do more than just make calls. There’s also not much advertisement for the Vodacom initiative, and I don’t think there is a big financial incentive for most companies to design and advertise these products.”

– Judy Van Biljon, Researcher, University of South Africa

would allow them to gain these skills are typically too expensive, and experts argue that many would not be able to afford food if they were to choose to enroll in such programs.⁵³ According to Judy Van Biljon, Researcher at the University of South Africa, “It’s really a difficult thing, designing a phone for older people, now that people want to send pictures and do more than just make calls. There’s also not much advertisement for the Vodacom initiative, and I don’t think there is a big financial incentive for most companies to design and advertise these products.”⁵⁴

Long-Term Government Plan to Develop ICT

In order to help increase competitiveness while reducing the digital divide, the South African government approved the National Integrated ICT Policy in September of

⁵³ Interview with Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.

⁵⁴ Interview with Judy van Biljon, Researcher at the University of South Africa, December 2016.

2016 as a part of its National Development Plan. It is an all-inclusive policy that covers the ICT and postal sectors, and lays out the framework for enabling greater access to modern communications infrastructure to all citizens, with particular emphasis on those in rural areas, where over 40 percent of older adults still live today.⁵⁵ The Policy includes a section specifically dedicated to establishing universal access to the benefits that ICTs offer regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status, and it lays out several smaller goals to achieve this. The government plans to focus on providing technology-related skills for those who do not have them, and the development of digital identity verification systems to promote trust and security.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ UN Population Aging and Development Database 2014.

⁵⁶ Government of South Africa. (2016). Minister Siyabonga Cwele: Approval of National Integrate ICT Policy White Paper.

The National Integrated ICT Policy is a long-term government effort intended to benefit the entire population and therefore refrains from explicitly targeting any particular demographic of the population, and because it was so recently approved, the results of any actions taken on its behalf remain unclear. However, according to experts at the World Bank, similar large-scale policies employed by the national government have been successful in terms of raising awareness and mobilizing regional and municipal governments, which often end up responsible for the majority of implementation – one example being the local movements to provide free Wi-Fi access.⁵⁷

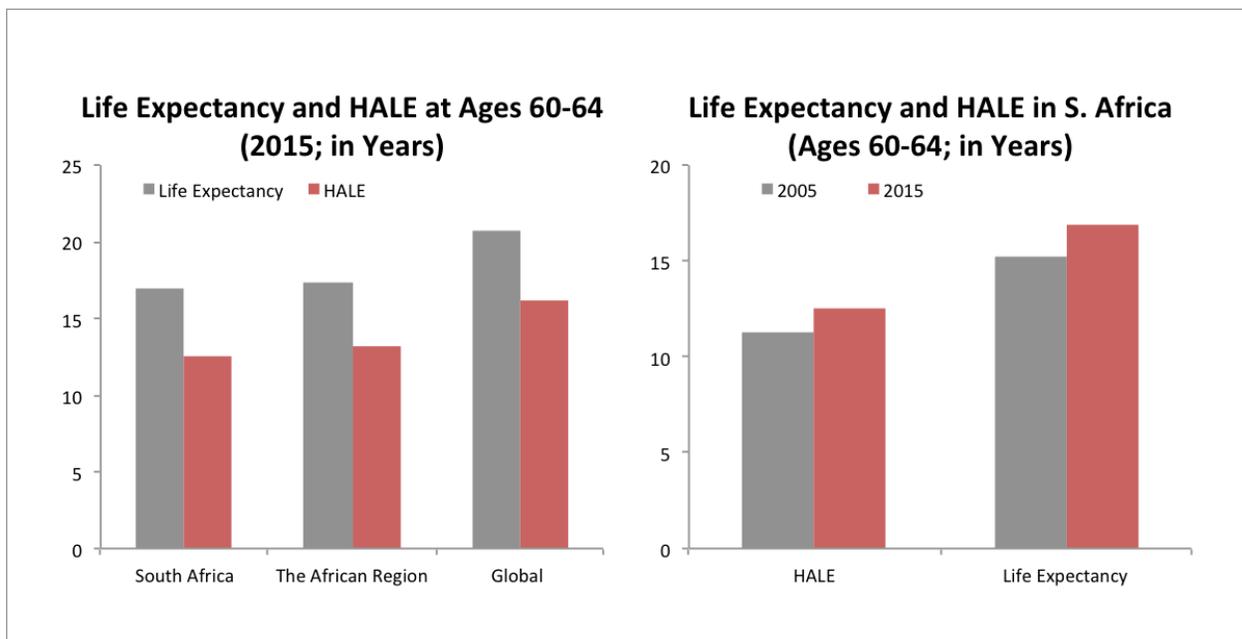
⁵⁷ Interview with Ilari Lindy, Senior ICT Policy Specialist at the ICT Sector Unit of the World Bank, March 2017.

Healthcare and Wellness

Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy for older adults have both improved in the last decade in South Africa, although the figures are still lower than both the regional and global averages. The government has made reforming the healthcare system its primary focus in order to provide the entire population with better-quality healthcare, but there are still very limited resources available to provide older people with long-term care. In order to make up for this, some NGOs have begun to provide health and LTC services for older people in the provinces and municipalities in which they operate, as well as transportation services so that they have easier access to medical facilities.

Like in many countries, while people in South Africa are living longer, the extension of healthy lives is lagging. As of 2015, South Africans ages 60 through 64 lived 1.7 years longer than one decade ago, but their healthy life expectancy improved by just 1.2 years.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that recipients of the country's Old Age Grant are afforded free access to public health services up to but not including tertiary, specialized care, experts partially attribute poor health status of older people to overcrowding at health clinics, poor quality of primary care, long

⁵⁸ Global Burden of Disease Study 2015. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.



(Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation 2016)

wait times at doctor and hospital visits, and unequal resource distribution between rural and urban areas.⁵⁹

Barriers to Accessing Healthcare

One of the most important barriers to accessing quality medical care relates directly to the general unavailability of specialized treatment. While geriatrics is a registered sub-specialty in South Africa, it is not a very attractive field to aspiring doctors or specialists, because there is no real career path in the country.⁶⁰ Only four of South Africa's eight medical schools provide training in geriatric medicine,⁶¹ and today a nationwide total of only 13 registered geriatricians are expected to serve a population of 2.7 million aged 65 and older.⁶² The majority of these geriatricians work in the private sector,⁶³ which serves only 20 percent of the population. Some NGOs do what they can to fill the gap – TAFTA, for example, has a service center that functions as a full geriatric clinic – but there has been no significant progress in boosting geriatric capacity nationwide.

Additionally, the public healthcare system has a number of quality and organizational issues that deter older adults from seeking

care. According to experts, many of them put off doctor or hospital visits because receiving primary care usually involves extremely long wait times. Only those above 80 years old are prioritized when waiting to receive treatment.⁶⁴

Accessing healthcare for older adults is also a question of transportation, which can make it exceptionally difficult for the 42 percent who are living in rural areas.⁶⁵ However, there are NGOs that attempt to provide services to make up for the major lack of accessible transportation to medical facilities, in addition to the select municipalities mentioned earlier that are working to make public transportation more age-friendly. One of these is HelpAge International in South Africa, which has worked with its local partner Muthande Society for the Aged to provide over 8,000 older adults with regular transportation to health clinics. However, as with other community support efforts, these services can only make a small dent in the need.⁶⁶

Healthcare System Reform

Healthcare operations in South Africa have a number of broad challenges that are particularly damaging to older patients, including the overburdening on the public system, which is expected to deliver services to 80 percent of the

⁵⁹ Interview with Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2012). Preventative Care and Healthy Ageing: A Global Perspective – South Africa.

⁶² Interview with Jaco Hoffman, Senior Research Fellow at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Interview with Morne Oosthuizen, Director of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, November 2016.

⁶⁵ UN Population Aging and Development Database 2014.

⁶⁶ Interview with Sebastiana Kalula, Senior Specialist at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, October 2016.

population; the curative nature of care; and the disproportionate impact of out-of-pocket payments on the poor. In response, the South African government has been working since 2012 on a massive healthcare system reform that aims to establish National Health Insurance (NHI), a health-financing system that would provide universal healthcare to all South Africans. The NHI is striving to unite public and private healthcare resources into a single healthcare scheme in which everyone will be covered. Pooling resources this way is intended to improve coverage quality by including access to preventative and curative care for all South Africans, and to improve affordability by financing through mandatory prepayment rather than out-of-pocket payments and co-payments.⁶⁷ As a part of the NHI implementation, the Department of Health is working to re-engineer its primary care policy to provide treatment priority to all older adults in primary care facilities, with the final phase of the plan expected to yield significant results by 2030.⁶⁸

According to Jaco Hoffman, Coordinator of the African Research Network on Ageing and Fellow at the International Longevity Centre Africa, “In the past, older adults have been crowded within the healthcare system as a result of its emphasis on caring for the country’s youth. Therefore, as a part of the implementation of National Health Insurance, the Department of Health is developing a ward-based outreach

“In the past, older adults have been crowded within the healthcare system as a result of its emphasis on caring for the country’s youth. Therefore, as a part of the implementation of National Health Insurance, the Department of Health is developing a ward-based outreach system to send outreach teams to those in need of care. This will definitely have a positive impact for older adults on a macro-systemic level.”

– Jaco Hoffman, Coordinator of the African Research Network on Ageing, Fellow at the International Longevity Centre Africa

system to send outreach teams to those in need of care. This will definitely have a positive impact for older adults on a macro-systemic level.” However, there are differences of opinion concerning its feasibility. While some academics believe that the level of commitment the government has shown to NHI will result in its full implementation, others are more skeptical and feel that it would be best to prioritize improving the quality of care itself before attempting to restructure the entire system.⁶⁹

Long-Term Care

The widening gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is driving a growing need for care among older people. Although the Older Persons Act of 2006

⁶⁷ Department of Health. (2015). National Health Act, 2003: White Paper on National Health Insurance.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interview with Morne Oosthuizen, Director of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, November 2016.

states that older adults have the right to receive LTC in South Africa, there are still nowhere near enough resources to provide such care, in the form of either residential facilities or home-based care, to all those in need.

The government's LTC support has come mainly through the Department of Social Development's funding of residential facilities for older people around the country, but capacity is limited. The entire LTC industry only has accommodations for about 2 percent of the population age 65 and older.⁷⁰ One who wishes to submit an application to live in one of these facilities must be in need of 24-hour care, be over 60 or 65 years old (whether a woman or a man, respectively), and receive the Old Age Grant.⁷¹ Each residential facility has

⁷⁰ Eden Alternative. (2014). Long Term Care, South Africa.

⁷¹ Government of South Africa. (2016). Admission of older persons to residential facilities.

its own requirements and fee structure, though there are subsidies available for the very frail and disabled.⁷² As a result, the majority of older adults in need of long-term care do not have access to it. Residential facilities are extremely scarce in rural areas, where 42 percent of older adults reside. While some of the Apartheid-era old-age homes, which were reserved for white people, are being converted to accommodate all races,⁷³ 98 percent of the individuals with access to those accommodations are still white South Africans, who tend to be wealthy enough to afford the expenditure.^{74 75}

⁷² Department of Social Development. (2017). Admission to an old age home.

⁷³ Ferreira, Monica. Housing and Older People in South Africa. International Longevity Centre South Africa.

⁷⁴ Eden Alternative. (2014). Long Term Care, South Africa.

⁷⁵ Department of Social Development. (2017). Admission of older persons to residential facilities.