

# Youth and mobility: Linking movement to opportunity

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**T**he youth stage is characterised by a high degree of mobility. Some of this movement takes place within urban or rural areas, as young people move out of family homes. But migration from rural to urban areas is high, too: Young people leave rural areas in search of better employment or income-generating opportunities, better education, and access to health care, housing and welfare services. Mobility is not only about individual choice; it is related to broader livelihood strategies of households and family networks.

Yet, it is not always associated with improved life chances or improved youth well-being. Migrant youth from rural areas have a lower chance than urban-born youth of finding employment in urban areas,<sup>1</sup> and “endemic unemployment is likely to enhance feelings of social disillusionment, frustration and boredom”,<sup>2</sup> possibly leading to an increase in risk behaviour or return migration to places with little opportunity for young people. Large numbers of young people live in the informal settlements on the peripheries of the cities and face high levels of food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Many will remain in this “informal state” with dire consequences for their well-being and that of their children. What starts as a livelihood strategy may increase vulnerability.

Migration and mobility are under-researched issues in South Africa, and very little is known about youth mobility in particular. In the absence of a strong body of empirical work, this essay provides some preliminary analysis and considers the following questions:

- Why should we be interested in youth mobility?
- What do we know about patterns of youth mobility?
- What are the main drivers of migration among young people?
- What does mobility mean for the lives and life chances of young people?
- How might youth mobility affect the lives of children and extended families?
- What are the recommendations?

This set of questions also serves as a list of issues that need further investigation. A more solid evidence base would be useful for planning services and interventions for young people on the move, and for those who are prevented from moving by poverty and other structural constraints.

## Why should we be interested in youth mobility?

For purposes of this essay, we define migration as a temporary or permanent movement across place, either within or between provinces. Mobility is a broader concept, and includes moves between households or areas within the same place or district as well as migration. Very little is known about youth migration and mobility in South Africa. Later in this essay we attempt to piece together some of the existing evidence. We start by outlining the historical context and some of what is known about contemporary patterns of migration, as these dynamics are likely to be relevant to the movement of young people, too.

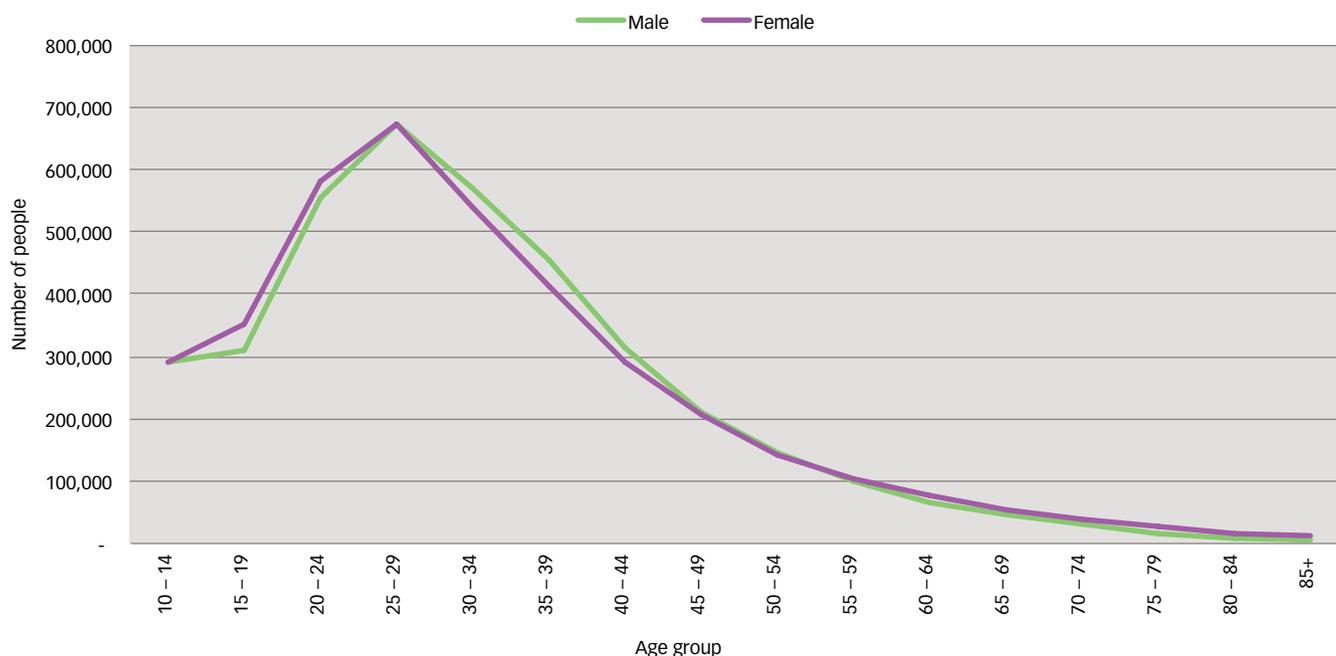
Under apartheid, population movement was restricted through an elaborate system of pass laws and taxes that enabled men to migrate from the rural areas to the cities to work, but made it very difficult for their families to join them. These patterns of labour migration frequently took a circular, or “oscillating” form, where urban migrants would return regularly to a rural family home. Despite the lifting of restrictions on population movement towards the end of apartheid, urban and rural nodes remain interlinked through migration and relationships of dependence at the household level. The reasons for this are complex and not thoroughly understood, but the existing evidence suggests that households adopt diverse livelihood strategies in the context of housing and employment shortages.

Women's migration has increased since the end of apartheid. This may be related to improved work opportunities for women, and the fact that women increasingly carry financial as well as child care responsibilities as marriage and cohabitation rates continue to decline. Much of the existing literature on migration in South Africa presents migration rates for the general population, or for people above the age of 15 because of a focus on labour migration. The 2011 Census recorded net out-flows of people from the Eastern and Northern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, while the highest in-flows were in the Western Cape and Gauteng.<sup>7</sup>

There has been surprisingly little analysis of migration patterns from the 2011 Census given the importance of migration in understanding South Africa's demography. A detailed analysis of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS),<sup>i</sup> the first nationally representative panel study in South Africa, found that in general, movers tend to be younger and better educated than non-movers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>i</sup> More detailed information on young movers can be obtained from NIDS. This is a panel study which started with a nationally representative baseline of 7,305 households (over 28,000 individuals) in 2008, and has subsequently followed up each individual in the panel every two years, even if they moved to a different household or province.

**Figure 17: Number of people who moved municipality in the past 10 years, by age group and sex, 2011**



**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2012) *Census 2011. Statistical release P0301.4*. Pretoria: Stats SA. [10% sample, weighted] Calculations by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

In the remainder of this essay we start to examine the dynamics of mobility for young people aged 15 – 24 years.

### What do we know about patterns of youth mobility?

The social and political controls under apartheid “worked against youth moving independently from their homes, and youth migration was generally concealed within married household migration or labour migration”.<sup>9</sup> Recent studies suggest that youth migration rates have increased, and that youth “now migrate on their own in significant numbers. Much of this migration is intra-urban, and youth and unmarried adults move on different circuits from married people and established couples”.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the 2011 Census, 20% of all males and 18% of all females were reported to have moved across municipal boundaries during the preceding 10 years. Young people are especially mobile: Figure 17 shows that migration increases sharply amongst youth in their late teens and peaks amongst those in their late 20s. These migration rates include all directions of migration: from rural to urban areas and vice versa, as well as moves within urban and within rural areas – provided they are moves across municipal boundaries.

An analysis of data across the first three waves of NIDS (2008 – 2012) differentiates between young people who moved household and those who did not move. The moves were not necessarily across municipal boundaries. The results therefore reflect patterns of youth mobility, rather than migration, and show that the highest rates of youth mobility occur in the Eastern Cape, Free State and Limpopo provinces. Table 4 shows the proportion of movers and stayers aged 15 – 24.

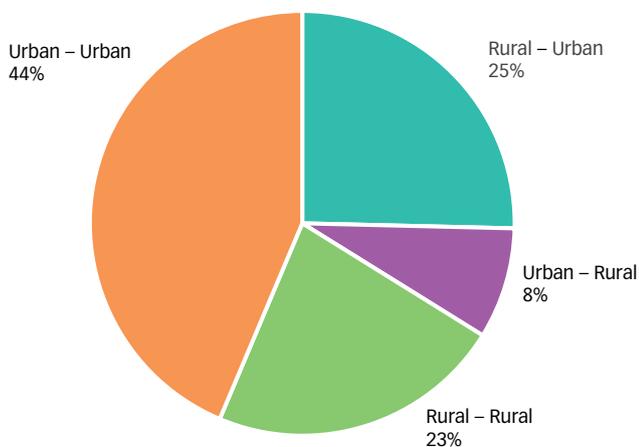
**Table 4: Percentage of young movers and stayers (age 15 – 24), by province**

Province	Movers (%)	Stayers (%)	Total (%)
Eastern Cape	27	73	100
Free State	29	71	100
Gauteng	19	81	100
KwaZulu-Natal	14	86	100
Limpopo	26	74	100
Mpumalanga	14	86	100
North West	16	84	100
Northern Cape	20	80	100
Western Cape	15	85	100
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (2008; 2012) *National Income Dynamics Study 2008, Wave 1; National Income Dynamics Study 2012, Wave 3*. (panel weights used). Calculations by Amina Ebrahim, SALDRU, UCT.

Figure 18 provides a breakdown of the direction of mobility among young people aged 15 – 24 years between 2008 and 2012. Almost half of the recorded moves were from one urban place to another urban place (this includes moves within the same city, and moves between different urban areas). A quarter of young movers had moved from rural to urban areas, and 20% had moved from one rural place to another.

Figure 18: Direction of movement among young movers, 2008 – 2012



Source: Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (2008; 2012) *National Income Dynamics Study 2008, Wave 1; National Income Dynamics Study 2012, Wave 3* (panel weights used). Calculations by Amina Ebrahim, SALDRU, UCT.

Of all the recorded moves made by young people in the 15 – 24 age group, 25% are moves within a 5-kilometre radius of the original household, while 33% are moves of over 100 kilometres, and 10% are over 500 kilometres. The panel study only records movement *within* South Africa – not cross-border migration (even though some of those who move may be foreign nationals already resident in South Africa in the first wave). Table 5 shows that the majority of youth movement takes place *within* each province, except for the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces.

Of the young Limpopo residents who moved between 2008 and 2012, 46% moved to Gauteng. Of the Eastern Cape youth who moved, 52% moved to a different location within the Eastern Cape, while 48% moved to other provinces. Similarly, most youth moves are over short distances (table 6).

Table 6: Youth mobility by distance of move, 2008 – 2012

Distance of move	Percentage
5km or less	25
Between 5 and 100km	32
Between 100 and 500km	33
More than 500km	10

Source: Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (2008; 2012) *National Income Dynamics Study 2008, Wave 1; National Income Dynamics Study 2012, Wave 3* (Panel weights used). Calculations by Amina Ebrahim, SALDRU, UCT.

Mobility rates vary for different population groups. Among White youth, 37% had moved in the five-year period (2008 – 2012), compared with 20% of African and 12% of Coloured youth. The race shares of young movers are shown in figure 19 on the next page. Given differences in population sizes, the majority (85%) of young movers are African.

Rural-to-urban mobility rates are similar for young men and women, while women are more likely than men to move within urban areas. Reverse migration rates, from urban to rural areas, are slightly higher for young men than young women.

### What are the main drivers of migration among young people?

There has been little research into the specific drivers of youth mobility. What little we know is derived largely from the Demographic and Health Surveillance sites in Hlabisa (KwaZulu-Natal) and Agincourt (Mpumalanga), and focuses specifically on migration. It seems that drivers of migration can be broadly divided into two types: permanent and temporary forms of migration.

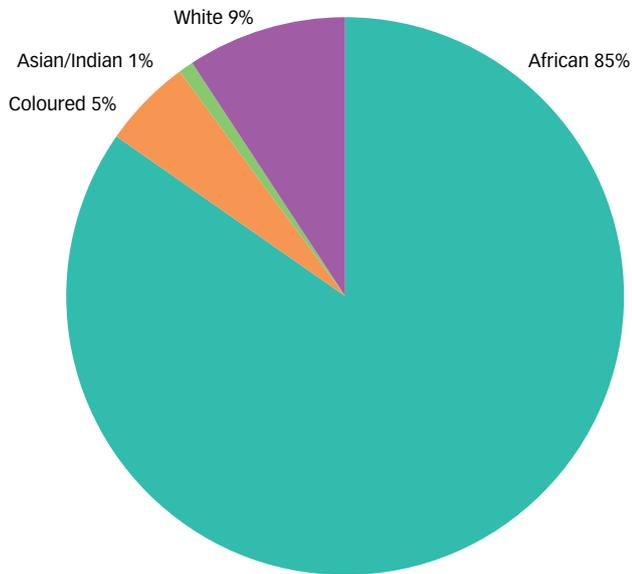
The main drivers of temporary youth migration are education (including further education) and strategies to enter the labour market. Statistics South Africa reported that, of the young people

Table 5: Percentage of youth moving within and between provinces, 2008 – 2012

		Wave 3 (2012)									
		Province	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	North West	Northern Cape	Western Cape
Wave 1 (2008)	Eastern Cape		52	0	12	14	0	0	4	0	18
	Free State		3	70	20	0	3	0	3	0	0
	Gauteng		0	0	90	6	0	0	0	0	4
	KwaZulu-Natal		1	1	15	83	0	0	0	0	0
	Limpopo		0	0	46	0	50	3	2	0	0
	Mpumalanga		0	1	20	3	3	70	3	0	0
	North West		0	4	24	0	0	0	61	5	7
	Northern Cape		0	3	5	0	0	0	0	89	3
	Western Cape		11	1	12	0	0	0	0	0	76

Source: Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (2008; 2012) *National Income Dynamics Study 2008, Wave 1; National Income Dynamics Study 2012, Wave 3* (panel weights used). Calculations by Amina Ebrahim, SALDRU, UCT.

Figure 19: Youth mobility by race, 2008 – 2012



Source: Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (2008; 2012) *National Income Dynamics Study 2008, Wave 1; National Income Dynamics Study 2012, Wave 3* (panel weights used). Calculations by Amina Ebrahim, SALDRU, UCT.

aged 15 – 34 who migrated out of Agincourt, 50% of females and 73% of males migrated for work (or work-seeking) purposes, while 22% of females and 11% of males moved for schooling or study purposes.<sup>11</sup> In another Agincourt study, both of these reasons (schooling and employment) were associated with temporary migration, which was the most common form of migration.

Permanent migration was associated with marriage, separation, and moving families from rural villages to access better services. Permanent migration was less common than temporary migration, and the gender profile of young migrants was different: women were more likely than men to be permanent migrants, while temporary migration rates were higher for males than for females.<sup>12</sup>

A study on youth mobility in the Eastern Cape found that youth and their parents saw migration as a pathway out of rural poverty and to upward social mobility.<sup>13</sup>

*Here in Bolani, there are no schools, no roads and no transport and clinics ... so I don't see myself staying for long.* (Secondary school girl, 16, Bolani, Eastern Cape)

*Many young people are running away ... I wouldn't encourage them to stay because there is no future here.* (Mother of four, Bolani, Eastern Cape)

Metropolitan areas are the major centres of employment in South Africa. Between 1996 and 2012, employment increased by 50% in the metropolitan centres, compared to 20% in smaller cities.<sup>14</sup> As a result, many young people move from various parts of the country to the metropolitan areas, with most going to Gauteng, followed by the Western Cape.<sup>15</sup> Young people with a profession or skill have a higher probability than unskilled youth of migrating to the cities.

However, not all population movement is towards places of economic growth: There are also significant movements into small

towns and rural areas.<sup>16</sup> This may be because employment-related migration is driven by the hope of employment, rather than the actual prospect of a job. Employment opportunities are increasingly limited to skilled rather than unskilled work.<sup>17</sup> The overwhelming majority of new city migrants have a low skills base (even if they have matric). Failure to find employment, coupled with the high cost of living in cities, is therefore likely to be one of the drivers of sequential migration across urban areas, or reverse migration from cities to rural areas (see Thandiswa's story in case 10).

Previous studies found that the unemployed attach themselves to households where some economic support exists. In many cases this means moving back to rural homes, where the cost of living is relatively low and where family support is available. Reverse migration is also attributed to illness. HIV/AIDS has been called a "disease of mobility": Migrants who fall sick in the cities return to their rural home to be cared for, or until they die. Others return after having contracted occupation-related illnesses like lung infections from working on the mines.

The various drivers and processes of return migration imply an enormous financial and care burden for the receiving rural households, particularly in a context where remittances (or financial support) from urban migrants appear to be declining. It is in this context that social grants play an important role. Large numbers of elderly people and children live in rural areas, and these are the primary beneficiaries of most social grants. Not only can grants help households to support the sick and unemployed, they also enable migration. Existing analyses of the relationship between grant receipt and labour migration have focused either on the effects of the Old Age Pension or on grants generally, but without differentiating the effects of different social grants. The Child Support Grant is much smaller in value than the pension (R330 compared to R1,410 per month in 2015), and so is less likely to support the migration efforts of household members.

Researchers refer to the "spatial mismatch" between where unemployed people live and where possible jobs are, pointing out that the sheer distance involved means that labour migration may be unaffordable. Social grants offset this, and so can be seen as a driver or enabler of migration. The likelihood of migration among young men increases when they are co-resident with someone who is eligible for an Old Age Pension (i.e. over 60 years), and this effect is more pronounced for young men who have completed matric.<sup>23</sup>

### What does mobility mean for the lives and life chances of young people?

Mobility and migration decisions are often part of broader household strategies, based on an evaluation of the balance between "push" and "pull" factors. Spatial mobility (moving place) often starts with the desire for upward social mobility: the wish for better education and employment opportunities. Research indicates, however, that moving does not automatically produce these benefits.<sup>24</sup>

Temporary migration of household members can be a successful livelihood strategy for rural families,<sup>25</sup> but it has also been found

## Case 10: Thandiswa's story – Mobility in search of opportunity and stability

Thandiswa (not her real name) was 28 when we first met her. She was living in her mother's house in Khayelitsha, with 10 other family members, one of whom her own son. Her second son lived with her elder sister in the Eastern Cape. She had decided it was better for him to be there, as he had a skin condition that worsened in the harsh, dusty environment of the township.

Thandiswa's family had moved from the Ciskei (one of the former homelands) to the Western Cape in the 1980s, at a time when such movement was still illegal and potentially placed the family in great danger. They moved in search of work: There were not enough opportunities for employment in the Ciskei, no means of getting an income that would allow the parents to take care of themselves and their children. They entered Cape Town first via a farm in Kuilsrivier, where Thandiswa's father found work as a labourer. Later they moved into the informal settlement of Crossroads, and a few years later into a house in Khayelitsha. Thandiswa's schooling was frequently interrupted as she moved from one township school to another. She wrote and passed her matric exams but her marks were not high enough for her to enter tertiary education.

After matric, the family asked her to return to the former Ciskei to herd the cattle, the only asset the family had managed

to accumulate. When she returned to Cape Town seven years later she was unable to find a job. Though she would have been described as a "discouraged job seeker" at the start of our study, we noticed her making numerous attempts to search for work, further education, and some sense of independence. She held a short-term job in Cape Town and also moved to Pretoria to take on a short-term position in a shop that she had been told about by one of her neighbours.

At the beginning of 2013, she had moved back to the Eastern Cape to live with her sister in an RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme] housing area in Seymour – a town that was once an economic centre with a working tobacco factory, hotel and citrus farms, but that hotel was now a shebeen, the factory a ruin, and most of the farms deserted. The closest town was Fort Beaufort, about 34 kilometres away. The days in Seymour were monotonous – another young woman described to us how all she would do was sit outside the house on a chair "just following the sun", as there was nothing else to do. But Thandiswa and her sister assured us life was better there than in crime-ridden and overcrowded Khayelitsha. Both sons were now living with Thandiswa and she was glad that she could provide them with a safer environment.

**Source:** Fieldnotes prepared for: Newman K & De Lannoy A (2014) *After Freedom, the Rise of a Post-apartheid Generation in Democratic South Africa*. Boston, US: Beacon Press.

that urban migrants need to spend more time looking for jobs than with those who were born and grew up in the city, even when controlling for different ages and education levels. When migrants finally do obtain employment, they are less able than non-migrants to continue to improve their jobs: "they don't move up the career ladder, they don't change occupations".<sup>26</sup> Census data further indicate that the majority of migrants from the Eastern to the Western Cape who do find employment are involved in elementary and low-paying occupations: street vendors, domestic workers, building caretakers, farm and fishery staff, and construction, manufacturing and transport labourers.

Patterns of social development, economic growth and the provision of services in the cities also raise other, complex problems for young city dwellers. In cities and towns that are on the receiving end of large numbers of in-migrating youth, the infrastructure may not be able to accommodate the continuous inflow of people, resulting in escalating deprivation: "When young people leave home to migrate to another place, the new households that result are both smaller and more insecure than the parent households. This phenomenon drives down the average size of the South African household, and also raises the risk of spreading poverty. What distinguishes youth migration is its temporary and unstable character. ... Much... migration appears to be into shack accommodation, from where the new smaller families that result are likely to find no feasible way out again".<sup>27</sup>

Amongst youth aged 15 – 24, the proportion living in urban areas increases with age, while the rural share of the population decreases (shown in figure 20 on the next page). There is also a small but significant increase in the likelihood of living in informal areas as youth get older.

The majority of the urban poor, including most in-migrants, live in formal townships or informal settlements that are far from the city and from most employment opportunities and information hubs. Transport is often unreliable, dangerous and expensive, rendering job search all the more difficult. Life in informal settlements, with its limited access to sanitation, high impact of adverse weather conditions, often high levels of substance abuse and violence, also impacts negatively on physical and emotional well-being.<sup>28</sup>

These challenges make young migrants very vulnerable, both to exploitation and to increased risk behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

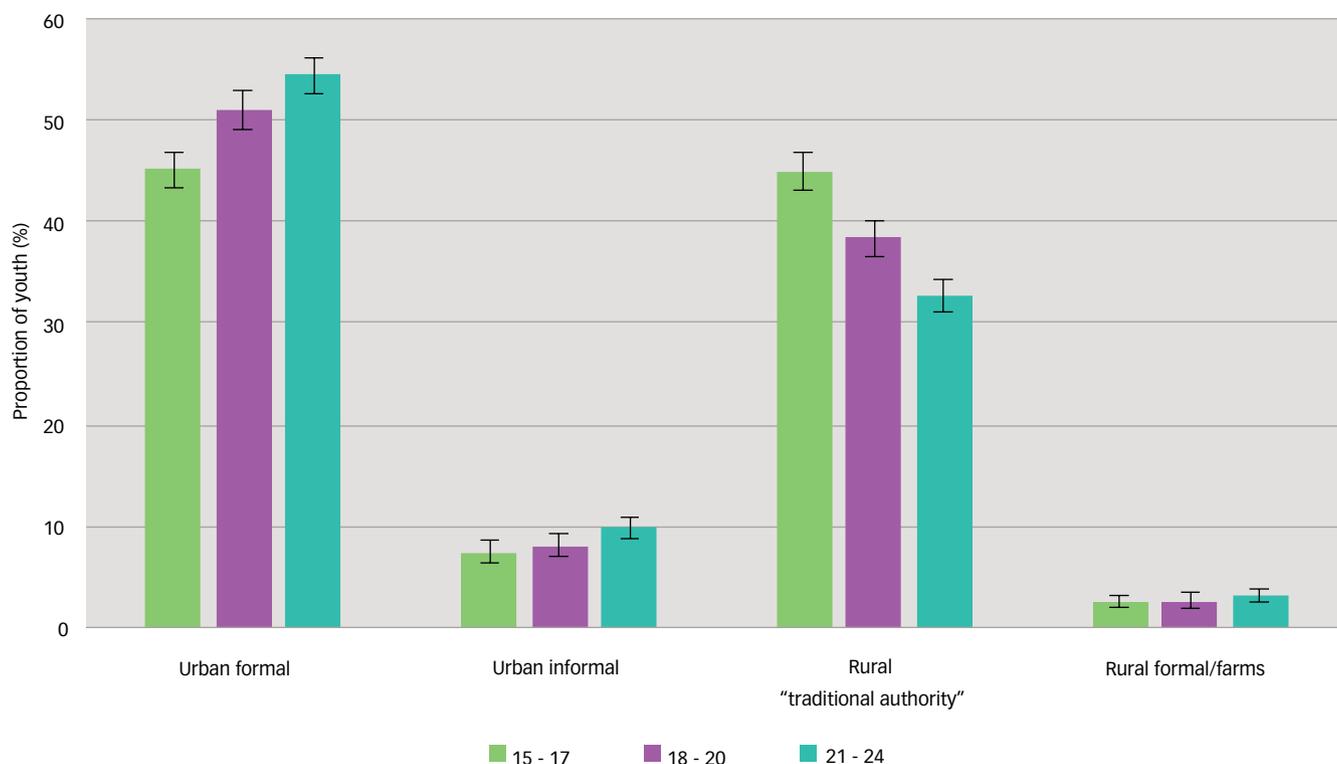
### How might youth mobility affect the lives of children and extended families?

Patterns of population movement lead to a higher concentration of youth in some areas of the country while other areas become devoid of youth, leaving behind a larger proportion of younger children and older people. The effects of these dynamics on extended families and communities are not well understood.

The relationship between mothering and migration also needs further investigation. On the one hand, having children may

**Figure 20: Type of residential area by youth age group, 2013**

(Y-axis reduced to 60%)



**Source:** Statistics South Africa (2014) *General Household Survey 2013*. Pretoria: Stats SA. [person weights used]. Calculations by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

discourage women from migrating: "Moving from a rural village to a city may be a necessary strategy to improve employment opportunities, but can further marginalise women and their children by removing them from established chains of care. A lack of child care options can in turn limit the caregiver's freedom to seek work and earn income."<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the existence of substitute caregivers (such as grandmothers) at the home of origin is associated with higher rates of female migration.<sup>31</sup> Research is currently underway to investigate the relationship between adult female labour migration and patterns of child mobility.<sup>32</sup>

Migration patterns may result in a widening physical and social distance between generations and potentially therefore a further loss of "social cohesion" and sense of belonging. Research on mobility shows, however, that the increased accessibility and use of mobile phone technology has become a vital communication tool between parents and their children.<sup>33</sup>

Migration studies over many decades have described patterns of circular or oscillating migration.<sup>34</sup> However, analyses from the post-apartheid period have not conclusively established the extent to which circular migration persists. In particular, there is a lack of evidence about the dynamics of youth migration and whether young in-migrants keep contact with their places of origin, sending remittances back to their families in the rural areas.

Although remittances have declined overall as a share of household income, they remain an importance income stream for rural households: In 2010 – 2011, the National Income

Dynamics data showed that remittances contribute to 35% of rural households' income. The contribution of remittances to the rural economy is more than that of social assistance. The increase in the number of women who move to cities has been associated with a more regular flow of remittances to rural areas, and women are more likely to send remittances on a more regular basis than men.<sup>35</sup>

## What are the recommendations?

This essay has attempted to draw together some of the available evidence on youth mobility, but it is clear that this is a very under-researched issue. In the absence of a solid evidence base it is hard to make clear recommendations for intervention or policy response. It is even difficult to clearly differentiate the positive and negative drivers and outcomes of migration and mobility: Youth mobility may in some cases signify risk and vulnerability, while in others it may be a sign of social mobility and improved opportunity – in which case failure to move may be understood to be a form of vulnerability. Researchers on migration have commented: "What may not always be understood and appreciated is the fact that migration and urbanisation are processes that offer hope for the future."<sup>36</sup>

In light of the patchy and diverse evidence on patterns and outcomes of youth mobility, we offer the following tentative recommendations:

### **Undertake further research on youth migration and urbanisation**

From a policy perspective, there is a need for an expanded and rigorous evidence base on patterns, predictors and outcomes of youth migration, so that these dynamics can be considered in urban planning processes. "Urbanisation is widely regarded as inevitable and in many ways desirable. Cities need improved models of planning and service delivery so that future generations have better opportunities. Without appropriately informed planning that provides for growing populations, urbanisation could exacerbate inequality, trap young people in poverty at either the urban or rural end, and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality."<sup>37</sup>

### **Consider scaling up social housing options**

In the absence of affordable and adequate urban housing opportunities, many migrants remain trapped in insecure tenure arrangements and risky environments on the periphery of cities. These are also environments which are not conducive to the establishment of families or raising children. Low-cost housing backlogs and notoriously long waiting lists make RDP housing a virtually impossible option for young in-migrants to cities, especially as the eligibility criteria are oriented to those who are married or in permanent partnerships, or already have children living with them.<sup>38</sup> It is worth revisiting the idea of scaling up social housing and subsidised rental housing for young urban migrants, and particularly those who wish to start families or already have children living elsewhere.

### **Invest in youth-friendly cities**

Cities need to be re-imagined as places where young people have opportunities to get ahead. UN Habitat and others have promoted the idea of child- and youth-friendly cities: Cities that support all aspects of a young person's development, including "self-efficacy, education, recreation, the experience of cultural harmony and a sense of connection to urban environments."<sup>39</sup> Being youth-friendly includes an increased focus on civic participation among youth, increased digital access, easy and affordable transport within

the city, access to education and employment. These are general aspirations to which the government – and society – has committed itself. Using the lens of "youth", regular and reliable information about the situation of young people, including new urban migrants, may help in identifying critical areas and prioritising the delivery of services and interventions.

### **Improve services, social infrastructure and access to information**

Informal housing dwellers of all ages have expressed the need for improved delivery and maintenance of basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, storm-water drainage) and more frequent refuse removal. However, residents also refer to the need for better and more social services that would allow them to access information about resources, programmes and other opportunities for growth and advancement, which would enhance their social and cultural capital. Community centres or cultural centres, where various services to residents could be clustered, would help. These could take the form of the "Lighthouses of Knowledge" such as those built in Curitiba, Brazil, and "citizenship streets" which, allocated next to transportation nodes, can provide access to a range of local government services.<sup>40</sup>

### **Develop a comprehensive social security programme**

Often, migration is not only an individual decision, but a household strategy. The fact that many young migrants are sent to cities to provide income to remote rural households means that, for those lucky enough to find work, a substantial proportion of money is sent elsewhere. This is the model on which the apartheid system relied. In the absence of rural employment opportunities, it will be important to continue considering the development of a comprehensive social security programme. Social grants are currently targeted to those who are too young, too old or too disabled to work. Social assistance for the chronically unemployed would alleviate the burden on a younger generation struggling to enter the city and the labour market, and increase their chances of breaking poverty traps for themselves and their children.

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