

**Since the end of apartheid in 1994, Khayelitsha—a large township on the Cape Flats of Cape Town—has undergone substantial change in population, housing conditions, and local governance practices, though many development challenges remain.**

### **Population & Housing Growth**

At its foundation in 1983 Khayelitsha was planned to house a few hundred thousand people; by the 2001–2011 period, estimates put the population around 400,000.

The 2011 Census recorded about 391,749 residents in the “Main Place” Khayelitsha.

Since then growth has continued, partly driven by migration from rural areas and by expansion of informal settlements.

### **Recent Population Estimates**

- In 2022, the official estimate for Khayelitsha was about **451,616** people.
- More recently, in 2025, Khayelitsha is estimated to have around **520,000 residents**.
- There remains some contention over the exact numbers—some local civil society sources have suggested much higher counts due to migration, informal settlement growth, people not captured fully in census counts.

Housing delivery has increased: many formal houses (often RDP/state-subsidised) have been built, reducing the proportion of households living in shacks compared with early 2000s.

Yet the absolute number of informal dwellings has not necessarily dropped, because as formal housing improves, inflows of people unable to afford formal housing lead to new informal settling.

### **Informal Settlements, Evictions & Bond-Housing**

Informal settlements such as Enkanini, TR, QQ Sections remain large, and many of these lack basic services like reliable sanitation, water, or formal recognition.

During the COVID-19 lockdown there were high-profile cases of eviction (or demolitions) of informal structures, some of which were ruled unlawful by courts.

On bond housing (i.e. houses purchased with mortgages), there have also been evictions of homeowners who default on their payments. Community organisations have raised concerns in Thembokwezi, Ilitha Park, Govan Mbeki etc., where people paying bonds are still being evicted when they fail to meet repayments.

These evictions often exacerbate insecurity and push people into informal housing or instability.

### **Urban Design, Street Lighting & Policing Effects**

Street lighting and urban design play important but underappreciated roles in security, policing, and the lived experience of safety in Khayelitsha. Poor or absent lighting in informal areas has been acknowledged by the City as contributing to higher crime risk.

For example, shadows from structures, poorly positioned lights, or areas entirely unlit become spots for crime, intimidation or violence.

Moreover, the layout of informal settlements—narrow, winding pathways, lack of proper road infrastructure—makes policing access more difficult, which can reduce both the deterrent effect of law enforcement and the ability to respond swiftly. Residents in various reports have noted that, in many informal-settlement areas, law enforcement units (including anti-land invasion units) struggle to access certain plots or reach areas after dark due to poor lighting or blocked access.

### **Effects and Impacts**

All of these dynamics have combined effects: evictions (both from informal dwellings and bond houses) tend to increase vulnerability, displacement, loss of property, psychological stress, and interruption of children's schooling. Informal settlements lacking services suffer hygiene, health, safety deficits. Poor lighting in such areas increases risk of crime (especially gender-based violence) and undermines residents' sense of safety, which in turn may affect social cohesion.

In sum, since 1994 Khayelitsha has seen progress in formal housing delivery and infrastructure, but population pressures, informal settlement growth, legal and illegal evictions, and deficits in urban design and street lighting remain major constraints on equitable service delivery and safety.

**Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry** (chaired by Kate O'Regan & Vusi Pikoli) identified or recommended, especially as they relate to policing, spatial design, lighting etc., together with updates on what's been done:

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## **What the Commission Stated Must Be Fixed (Structural / Physical Design)**

### **1. Police Station Infrastructure**

- One of the key recommendations (Recommendation 19) was the establishment of a new police station in **Makhaza**, a large part of Khayelitsha which was underserved, to help relieve burden on existing stations.
- Also, improvement and better resourcing of existing police station physical infrastructure and facilities so that they are fit for purpose.

### **2. Street Lighting and Public Lighting Design**

- The Commission heard witnesses about how dark pathways, insufficient street lighting contributed to vulnerability (crime risk, especially walking to communal toilets etc.).
- The need for effective lighting (not only high mast "area lights" which cast large shadows, but more "streetlights" that light paths at human scale, coverage throughout informal and formal areas).

### **3. Roads, Layout, Access & Signage**

- Evidence showed that many informal settlement paths are narrow, winding, unplanned; policing vehicles often cannot access crime scenes effectively, especially after dark or in bad weather.
- Also lack of street signs / wayfinding was raised, complicating navigation, addresses and speed of response.

### **4. Sanitation & Communal Facilities**

- Walking long distances in the dark to communal toilets, which may be padlocked or inaccessible, increases risk of crime for residents, especially women and children. The commission called for better sanitation infrastructure closer to dwellings.

### **5. Lighting & Urban Form as Part of Crime Prevention**

- The Commission recommended that SAPS (police) develop provincial guidelines for "visible policing in informal neighbourhoods" which includes physical infrastructure concerns (access, lighting, paths).

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## What Has (or Hasn't) Been Done / Progress

- The **Makhaza police station** (Recommendation 19) has seen slow progress. As of **2024-2025**, a temporary/prefabricated station has been established in Makhaza **while a permanent building is being planned or built.**
- **Street lighting:** there have been complaints and reports that the lighting situation is still poor in many parts, especially in informal settlements. Some improvements have been made: for example, the City has installed many new public lights (both high mast and conventional) under a Lighting Master Plan; some lighting repairs and LED upgrades have also been rolled out. **In many areas street lighting remain a challenge as the lights are not functional which increase the burden of crime in areas that are not properly lighted up in the evening.**
- However, high-mast lighting remains common, **though the Commission and civil society consider them less effective in many instances due to the shadows they cast and poor coverage of pedestrian paths.**
- **Road and path access:** less evidence of systematic upgrades of informal settlement layouts to improve vehicle access for police. **Many of the problems the Commission raised (narrow paths, little street signage, dark or unlit paths) appear still to persist.**

## What we know about child-headed households

- Child-headed households are those where minors, often due to the death or absence of parents, take responsibility for younger siblings, caring for household needs, finances and often surviving without an adult caregiver.
  - In Khayelitsha according to reported statistics is that there are **14 000 orphans** that account for the various child-headed homes from each of the **12 wards.**
  - These households are more vulnerable to poverty, food insecurity, lack of basic services, malnutrition, poor health, and mental health issues (stress, depression, anxiety).
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## **How child-headed households contribute to / are affected by:**

### **Poverty & Unemployment**

- Because child heads are minors, their ability to work is limited, often illegal, or unstable. They may need to leave school to care for siblings or generate income. This reduces their skill accumulation and employment prospects in the future.
- With no adult income earner, such households often depend on social grants, charity or informal work. But grants may be insufficient, delayed, or not always accessible.
- In Khayelitsha more broadly, unemployment is high ( $\approx 46\%$  of working-age people unemployed) and many adults lack completed secondary education. These systemic features worsen the situation for child-headed households, making them more likely to be trapped in poverty.

### **Education Disruption**

- Child heads often must de-prioritize school to handle household chores, sibling care, earning income, etc. This leads to school dropout or poor educational performance, which then limits future job opportunities.

### **Mental Health & Social Isolation**

- Heavy burdens placed on children can lead to psychological distress, anxiety, depression. These may make them more at risk of substance abuse or engagement in risky behaviour as coping or survival strategies.

### **Substance Abuse & Crime**

- The evidence from Khayelitsha shows that substance abuse is quite prevalent among youth. One study among 15-24 year olds found high rates of using alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine, driven by unemployment, peer pressure, lack of opportunities.
- Children in child-headed homes are especially vulnerable to peer influence, lack of supervision and may have greater exposure to unsafe environments, which could increase the risk of both using substances and becoming involved in crime (either as victims or perpetrators). This is not always well-documented but is logically consistent with risk factors identified.

### **Crime**

- Crime is higher in areas with high poverty, informal settlements, weak urban design, poor lighting, etc. Khayelitsha has these challenges. Child-headed households often live in more marginal, poorly served areas, which are more exposed to crime.

- Also, children forced into economic survival may resort to illicit means (petty theft, drug dealing) when they see no legal prospects, or be drawn into gangs.
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### Specific likely effects in Khayelitsha

Putting this together, in Khayelitsha:

- Child-headed households likely exacerbate the unemployment statistics (they remove potential adult-led households that might have more stable income). Even though child heads themselves are unlikely to be formal employees, the ripple effect is that they have reduced chances for education, and thus contribute to long-term cycles of unemployment in the community.
- **Poverty is intensified:** these households often cannot afford basic services, food, school uniforms, transport; their living conditions are more precarious (informal housing, lack of water or sanitation, etc.).
- Substance abuse may be both a coping mechanism for children under pressure, and more available given the environment: peer influence, unsupervised time, lack of recreational alternatives. The study in Khayelitsha of youth addiction links unemployment, limited opportunity and social disconnection to substance use.
- **Crime:** child-headed households may suffer more victimization (the children have to move around unsafely, collect water, etc.), and may be more exposed to criminal influence. Some may resort to crime as survival. Also, communities with many child-headed households can have weaker social supervision.