

Press Release

For immediate release

16 May 2018



South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

Media contact: Michael Morris Tel: 066 302 1968 Email: michael@irr.org.za

Kelebogile Leepile Tel: 011 432 7221 ext: 2018 Email: kelebogile@irr.org.za

Infant mortality rate at its lowest in almost two decades

South Africa's infant mortality rate is at its lowest in almost two decades, having fallen by 32% between 2002 and 2017.

This improvement aligns with a sharp increase in the rate of antenatal first visits by pregnant women.

These findings are featured in the 2018 *South Africa Survey* published by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

Analyst Tawanda Makombo says the drop in the infant mortality rate – which measures the deaths of infants under 1 year per 1 000 live births in a year – coincides with a 96% improvement in the rate of antenatal first visits since 2006.

The rate of antenatal first visits measures the proportion of pregnant women who visit antenatal clinics for the first time before 20 weeks of their pregnancy over the number of women who had at least one antenatal visit before delivery.

The IRR notes that:

- Between 2002 and 2017, the infant mortality rate decreased from 48.1 per 1 000 live births to 32.8 per 1 000 live births.
- The rate of antenatal first visits increased by 96% between 2006 and 2016, from 31.3% to 61.2%.

Makombo says the statistics reveal telling gains in the health sector in South Africa, but argues that more can be done to further reduce the infant mortality rate.

“The national Department of Health must intensify public awareness efforts, and persuade more pregnant women to visit health practitioners for regular check-ups before and after giving birth, as this is essential for their babies' health.”

Ends.