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Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X44, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa, ISibalo House, Koch Street, Salvokop, Pretoria, 0002
www.statssa.gov.za, info@statssa.gov.za, Tel +27 12 310 8911

MEDIA RELEASE

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General Household Survey (GHS), 2023

Statistics South Africa has published its annual General Household Survey (GHS) for 2023, providing comprehensive data on the living conditions of households across the country.

The survey offers valuable insights into social and household service delivery, focusing on access to services, social development, education, health, housing, food security, and agriculture.

The key findings include household leadership, household composition, social grants, medical aid access, and the provisions of basic services.

In 2023, 42,3% of households were headed by females, with the highest prevalence in rural areas (47,6%), particularly in Eastern Cape (48,8%) and Limpopo (47,0%). Female-headed households were least common in Gauteng (36,5%).

In terms of household composition, nuclear households, consisting of parents and children, made up 39,0% of the total. Notably, 19,0% of children lived with neither biological parent, while less than a third (31,5%) lived with both parents. Additionally, 45,4% of children lived with their mothers, and 12,3% were orphaned, having lost one or both parents.

Meanwhile, social grants remain crucial, especially in the poorest provinces. The proportion of households and individuals benefiting from social grants increased from 12,8% in 2003 to 30,9% in 2019, and surged to 39,4% in 2023 due to the introduction of the special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant.

On medical aid access, approximately three out of twenty South Africans had access to a medical aid scheme in 2023. Coverage slightly declined from 15,9% in 2002 to 15,7% in 2023. The highest coverage rates were in Western Cape (25,7%) and Gauteng (22,4%), while the lowest were in Limpopo (9,5%) and Mpumalanga (9,8%).

The GHS 2023 continues to track South Africa's developmental progress and highlights areas where service delivery can be improved. Significant progress has been made with the provision of basic services to South African households over the past two decades. The survey found the percentage of households that lived in formal dwellings increased from 73,5% in 2002 to 83,5% in 2023.

Almost three-fifths (58,6%) of formal dwellings contained five rooms or more in 2023, compared to 42,8% in 2002. Although corrugated iron (55,9%) and tiles (29%) remained the most common roofing materials, data shows that the use of asbestos as a roofing material declined

from 16,9% in 2002 to 9,9% in 2023. The percentage of households that received a government housing subsidy increased from 5,6% in 2002 to 13,8% in 2023.

The increased quality of dwellings is also reflected in their access to drinking water and sanitation. Between 2002 and 2023 the percentage of households with access to piped or tap water in their dwellings, off-site or on-site increased by 2,6 percentage points to 87,0%. Households with access to piped water in their dwellings increased from 40,4% to 45,2%. The percentage of households with access to municipal water increased from 78,4% in 2004 to 80,4% in 2023, an increase of 6 million households.

Access to improved sanitation (flush toilets and pit toilets with ventilation pipes) increased from 61,7% in 2002 to 83,3% in 2023. The largest increases were observed in Eastern Cape (54,7 percentage points), Limpopo (35 percentage points) and KwaZulu-Natal (31,8 percentage points). Approximately two-thirds (66,0%) of households used flush toilets (up from 57,3% in 2002), while 17,3% used pit toilets with ventilation pipes (up from 4,4% in 2002). Pit latrine without ventilation pipes decreased by 15,5 percentage points to 10% in 2023. Less than one percent of households did not have access to any form of sanitation. While 45,3% of toilet facilities were located in the dwelling, 50,5% were located in the yard.

Access to mains electricity also increased notably since 2002, increasing from 76,7% to 89,8%. Improved access to electricity has had major implications for households. The percentage of households that used electricity as the main source of energy for cooking increased from 57,5% to 76,9%, while households that used paraffin decreased to 2,5% (from 16%), and households that used wood or coal decreased from 23% to 8,1%. Gas increased from 2,2% to 6,8%.

Access to electricity has unlocked the use of a number of electrical appliances. Almost nine-tenths (88,1%) of households owned an electrical stove (up from 78,7% in 2012), while 80,6% of households owned a fridge (up from 70,1% in 2012). About 58,3% of households owned a microwave oven.

Dealing with loadshedding, households employed a variety of alternative energy sources for cooking and for lighting. Nationally, 29,0% used LPG/Gas and 23,1% used open fires using a variety of materials such as wood, coal and charcoal. The use of gas was most common in Western Cape (46,0%) and Gauteng (36,3%). This increase is reflected in the fact that household ownership of gas stoves and plates increased from 19% in 2022 to 30,1% in 2023. More than three-fifths (61,7%) of households in Limpopo used open fires, followed by 51,3% of households in Mpumalanga. More than two-fifths (44,1%) of households used candles as the main alternative source of lighting.

An increase in access to alternative media, i.e. television and internet, has led to a decrease in the ownership of traditional radios. The percentage of households that owned a radio decreased from 84,2% in 2002 to 30,4% in 2023, while household ownership of television sets increased from 67,7% in 2002 to 78,4% in 2023. Pay tv subscriptions increased from 29,2% in 2012 to 58,1% in 2023.

South African households have also become more connected since 2002. While the percentage of households that used landlines decreased from 33,6% in 2002 to 5%, access to mobile phones exploded and 96,1% of households owned at least one mobile phone in 2023. The percentage of households who had access to the Internet through any other means increased from 28,0% in 2010 to 78,6% by 2023. Access to internet through fixed lines at home hovered at about 10% between 2010 and 2021, before increasing to 14,5% in 2023.

However, increased access to the Internet has contributed to a decline in the percentage of households that received physical mail. The survey shows that the percentage of households that did not receive any physical mail services increased from 9% in 2002 to 56,6% in 2023.

These improvements have not made everyone happy though. In response to a question on whether households are happier, the same, or less happy than they were ten years ago, 24,4% of households answered that they were happier, while 40,4% indicated that they were less happy.

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Technical enquiries:

Mr Niel Roux

Director: Service Delivery Statistics

Tel: 012 301 2939

Mobile: 082 904 7919

Email: NielR@statssa.gov.za

Mr Solly Molayi

[Acting] Deputy Director General: Population & Social Statistics

Mr Solly Molayi

Tel.: 012 337 6379

Cell: 083 440 7035

Email: SollyMol@statssa.gov.za

For media enquiries contact:

Felicia Sithole:

Cell: 0764300693

Email: felicias@statssa.gov.za

