

MEASURING FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA:
**APPLYING THE FOOD INSECURITY
EXPERIENCE SCALE**

Report: 03-00-19



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



stats sa

Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Measuring Food Security in South Africa:
Applying the Food Insecurity Experience Scale

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Preface

This report discusses the prevalence of food insecurity in South Africa based on the results of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module. South Africans who are affected by food insecurity are classified into two categories, namely those who experienced moderate to severe food insecurity and those who experienced severe food insecurity. It also provides information on households' involvement in agricultural activities, sources of income, and unemployment status. Data used in this report are sourced from the General Household Survey (2017–2020) and a survey conducted by the South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee (SAVAC) in 2020, of which Statistics South Africa is a member.

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Definition of terms

Dwelling unit refer to various types of structures used for accommodation. Such structures include houses, townhouses, flats/apartments, hostels, huts, informal dwellings such as shacks, semi-detached houses, etc.

Food insecurity is defined as a state which exists when people are undernourished due to the physical unavailability of food, their lack of social or economic access, and/or inadequate food utilisation.

Food security is defined as a state which exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active life.

Household is a group of persons who live together and provide themselves jointly with food and/or other essentials for living, or a single person who lives alone.

Household head is a person recognised as such by the household, usually the main decision-maker or the person who owns or rents the dwelling, or the person who is the main breadwinner.

Rural areas are farms and traditional areas characterised by low population densities, economic activity and low levels of infrastructure.

Settlement type is a classification according to settlement characteristics.

Unemployed persons are those (aged 15–64 years) who:

- a) Were not employed in a specified reference period; and
- b) Actively looked for work or tried to start a business in the four weeks preceding the survey interview; and
- c) Were available for work, i.e. would have been able to start work or a business in a specified reference period; or
- d) Had not actively looked for work in the past four weeks, but had a job or business to start at a definite date in the future and were available.

Urban areas refer to formal cities and towns characterised by higher population densities, high levels of economic activities and high levels of infrastructure.

Abbreviations

FAO –	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIES –	Food Insecurity Experience Scale
GHS –	General Household Survey
HFIAS –	Household Food Insecurity Access Scale
IFAD –	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NDP –	National Development Plan
QLFS –	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
SAVAC –	South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee
SDGs –	Sustainable Development Goals
Stats SA –	Statistics South Africa
UNICEF –	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
WFP –	World Food Programme
WHO –	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

Food insecurity has been at the centre of global attention for some time now, as it exists in many countries around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious implications for global food security and nutrition. According to the 2021 edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, approximately 720 to 881 million people faced hunger in 2020, resulting in an increase of 161 million people. The report further states that 2,37 billion people globally did not have access to adequate food in 2020, representing an increase of 320 million from 2019 (FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNICEF & WHO, 2021). This was mainly due to lockdowns triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused major disruptions to food supply chains and contributed to loss of livelihoods and income. There has been a global economic slowdown as a result of these global health crises (World Bank, 2022).

South Africa, like many countries around the world, has not been spared. The proportion of South Africans affected by moderate to severe food insecurity were 17,3% and those affected by severe food insecurity were 7,0% in 2019 according to the FIES results; however, these proportions likely increased in 2020. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic denied many South Africans their right to adequate food as enshrined in the South African Constitution, and undermined the efforts that have been made to meet the National Development Plan's goals and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of "zero hunger" by 2030.

Given South Africa's vulnerability to global shocks and events, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) has been working on improving its measurement of food security and recently introduced the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module in the 2019 General Household Survey (GHS). FIES is one of the official indicators adopted by the United Nations in context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2) that calls for ending hunger and achieving food security for all people by 2030. FIES analysis allows for cross-country comparisons while other experiential scales of food insecurity employ national thresholds, which limits their ability to monitor progress towards the SDGs. Since food insecurity is a global phenomenon it is important to measure it using tools that guarantee comparability across countries and equally across time (Onori et al, 2021).

2. Purpose of the report

Stats SA published a report on food security in 2019 which shed light on the state of food and nutrition security in South Africa. It provided information on households' experience of hunger and inadequate access to food, and where those affected households were located. A detailed profile of those households was presented using the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS). This report will provide findings derived using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module. For this report, we worked with FAO to develop these estimates using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale. Both the HFIAS and FIES are experience-based indicators used by Statistics South Africa; however, the FIES indicator is a global scale that can be used to provide national thresholds that can be compared with other countries.

2.1. Outline of the report

This report is presented in six sections. The introduction (Section 1) and the purpose of this report (Section 2) offer a brief overview on the context of this report. Section 3 explains the methodology by describing the FIES module in detail and how the results are interpreted. The sources of data are also explained in this section. Section 4 provides the FIES analysis results. Section 5 presents the report's results on factors that likely contributed to food insecurity. It begins by discussing household unemployment statistics and continues to present household sources of income and households' involvement in the agricultural production of food from 2017 to 2020 using GHS data. All the discussed themes of analysis are disaggregated by population group, sex of the head of the household, settlement type and province. Section 6 presents the key findings and conclusion.

3. Methodology

3.1 Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is designed to estimate the prevalence of individuals or households experiencing food insecurity in a population at regional, national and international levels (Ballard et al, 2014). Respondents are asked eight questions about their access to food (see Table 3.1.1), which are used to produce estimates of the prevalence of food insecurity at different levels of severity.

Table 3.1.1: FIES questions and response options

RECALL PERIOD: 12 MONTHS	
FIES QUESTIONS	RESPONSE OPTIONS
1. WORRIED: <i>During the past 12 months</i> , was there a time when you were worried you would run out of food because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
2. HEALTHY:, was there a time when you were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
3. FEWFOOD:, was there a time when you ate only few kinds of food because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
4. SKIPPED:....., was there a time when you had to skip a meal because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
5. ATELESS:....., was there a time when you ate less than you thought you should because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
6. RUNOUT:....., was there a time when your household ran out of food because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
7. HUNGRY:....., was there a time when you were hungry but did not eat because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused
8. WHLDAY:....., was there a time when you went without eating for a whole day because of lack of money or other resources?	Yes, No, Don't know, Refused

Source: FAO

Food insecurity is in part a consequence of lack of economic resources to obtain adequate and nutritious food (Smith et al, 2017). Each question in the FIES therefore emphasises that the food insecurity situation is a result of the inability to access and afford sufficient food. These eight (8) questions are asked in order and they begin by asking questions related to uncertainty and anxiety about one's ability to access food. The following questions further ask about any changes in the diet as the condition gets worse; these changes may include a less balanced diet or a more repetitious diet. As food insecurity becomes severe, the quantity of food consumed decreases in size and some meals are skipped. The most severe situation is characterised by feeling hungry because of not being able to eat and even not eating for an entire day, due to lack of money and other resources.

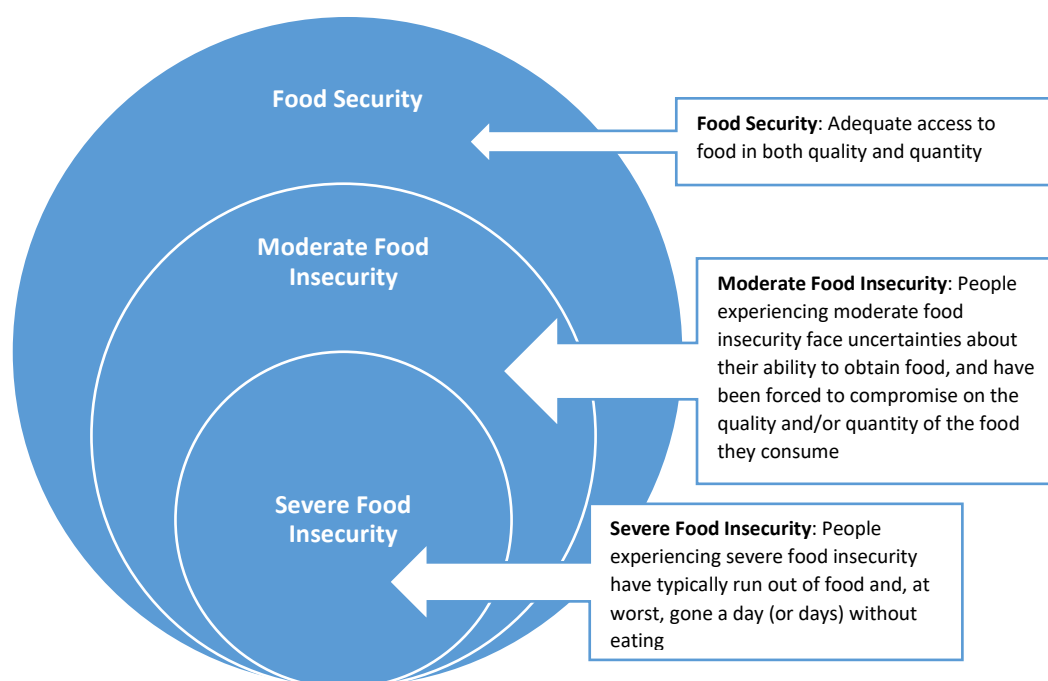
Based on these FIES questions, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) came up with two indicators used for global monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator 2.1.2, namely:

1. The prevalence of **moderate to severe food insecurity** ($FI_{\text{moderate+severe}}$) in the population; and
2. The prevalence of **severe food insecurity** (FI_{severe}) in the population.

Moderate to severe food insecurity ($FI_{\text{moderate+severe}}$) is the proportion of the population affected by both moderate food insecurity and the proportion classified as severe food insecure. Severe food insecurity (FI_{severe}) includes only those classified in the severe food insecurity category.

Figure 3.1.1 illustrates the definition of the food security indicators moderate and severe food insecurity, with each classification shown as a proportion of the total population.

Figure 3.1.1: Food insecurity severity levels measured by the FIES in SDG Indicator 2.1.2



Source: FAO

The prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity refers to the proportion of the population experiencing moderate and severe food insecurity. The prevalence of severe food insecurity means the proportion of the population experiencing severe food insecurity.

3.2 Data sources

The analyses in this report use Statistics South Africa's data from 2017 to 2020 collected through the General Household Survey. The report also highlights data from the 2020 South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee (SAVAC) Survey.

3.2.1 General Household Survey (GHS)

The General Household Survey is an annual survey that has been conducted by Statistics South Africa since 2002. It targets private households from sampled dwelling units from all nine provinces of South Africa. It assesses levels of development in the country by mainly tracking progress in service delivery and quality of service in education, living circumstances, etc. The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module was formally introduced into the GHS in 2019 as part of Stats SA efforts to improve its ability to report on food security-related issues. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this module had to be temporarily dropped from the GHS series when trying to shorten the questionnaire to enable the remote data collection methods used in 2020 and 2021. Thus, the FIES could not be generated for 2020 or 2021 for comparison against the 2019 results that will be presented in this report. However, given the significance of the 2020 data point, the report does briefly highlight some alternative results sourced from the 2020 South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee Survey which included the same FIES module. While these results are not directly comparable, they do provide an indication of the changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.2 The South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee Survey

The South African Vulnerability Assessment Committee (SAVAC) conducted a survey through GeoPoll in September 2020 funded by the FAO. The aim of the survey was to assess the prevalence of food insecurity in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey targeted 7 237 households across the whole country and it was conducted via telephone. This survey used a FIES COVID-19 module which comprised the eight FIES questions that were tailored to associate the respondents' food insecurity experience in relation to the COVID-19 crisis.

4. Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module results

The proportion of the population affected by moderate food insecurity plus those classified as severely food insecure were estimated at 17,3% (roughly 10,1 million individuals) in South Africa in 2019. The population classified with severe food insecurity was 7% (accounting for 4,1 million people). The female population was more likely to be affected by both moderate to severe food insecurity and severe food insecurity compared to their male counterparts (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Percentage of the population by the sex of household head affected by food insecurity in 2019

Sex	Moderate to Severe (FI _{mod+sev})	Severe (FI _{sev})
Female	19,7	7,9
Male	15,2	6,2
South Africa	17,3	7,0

Source: GHS 2019

Almost one in every five black Africans (19,1%) was affected by the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity, closely followed by coloureds with 16,14% in 2019. Indians/Asians and whites reported much lower levels of food insecurity compared to the other population groups (Table 4.2).

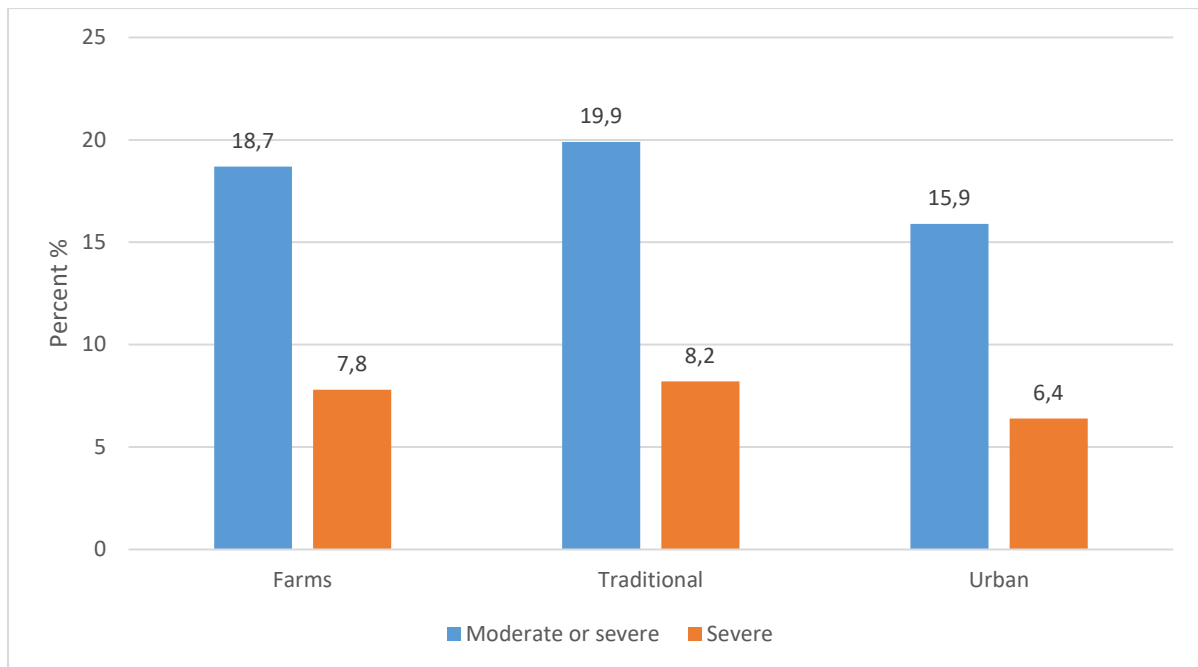
Table 4.2: Percentage of the population affected by food insecurity in 2019 by the population group of the household head

Population group	Moderate to Severe (FI _{mod+sev})	Severe (FI _{sev})
Black African	19,1	7,8
Coloured	16,1	6,6
Indian/Asian	2,5	1,1
White	2,3	0,4
South Africa	17,3	7,0

Source: GHS 2019

Figure 4.1 shows that people residing in rural areas were the worst affected by the prevalence of moderate to severe and severe food insecurity.

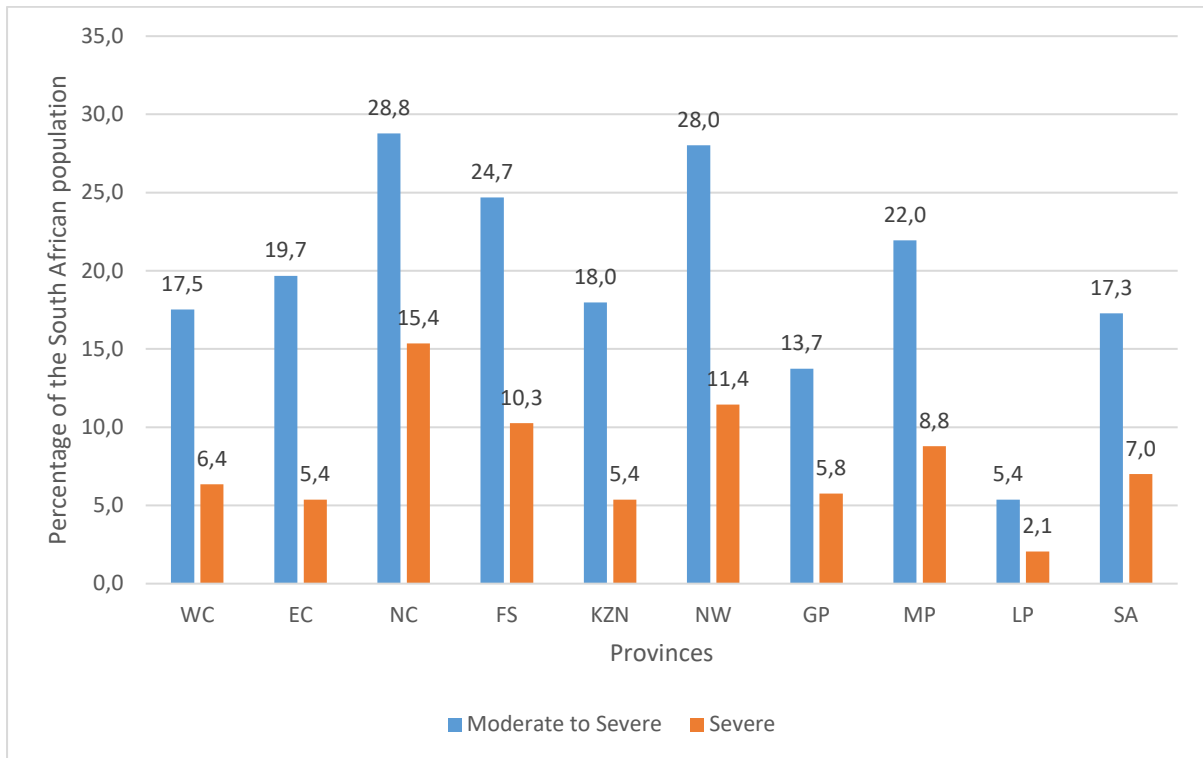
Figure 4.1: Percentage of the population affected by food insecurity by settlement type in 2019



Source: GHS, 2019

In 2019, 17,3% of South Africans were affected by moderate to severe food insecurity and 7,0% by severe food insecurity. The populations residing in Northern Cape (28,8%), North West (28,0%), Free State (24,7%) and Mpumalanga (22,0%) were the most affected by food insecurity in 2019 as they all had estimates that were notably above the national average (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Percentage of the population affected by food insecurity by province in 2019



Source: GHS, 2019

The SAVAC survey data show how food insecurity has changed since the pandemic started, as that survey was done in September 2020. The survey used the same FIES module questions adapted for the COVID-19 environment. Table 4.3 shows that 23,6% of the South African population was affected by moderate to severe food insecurity, while 14,9% reported severe food insecurity in 2020. The high food insecurity levels were mainly driven by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates that the prevalence of food insecurity, in particular severe food insecurity was higher in South Africa in 2020 compared to 2019. However, it is important to note that the 2019 and 2020 estimates were derived from different data sources with different samples and survey designs. Nevertheless, what can be observed is that food insecurity levels likely increased in South Africa over this period.

Table 4.3: Percentage of the population affected by food insecurity in South Africa in September 2020

Province	Global monitoring	
	2020	
	Moderate to severe ($FI_{mod+sev}$)	Severe (FI_{sev})
Western Cape	21,4 ($\pm 4,5$)	13,7 ($\pm 3,5$)
Eastern Cape	16,6 ($\pm 5,5$)	10,2 ($\pm 4,6$)
Northern Cape	17,6 ($\pm 5,1$)	9,7 ($\pm 3,8$)
Free State	21,8 ($\pm 4,3$)	13,0 ($\pm 3,5$)
KwaZulu-Natal	26,4 ($\pm 2,1$)	16,4 ($\pm 4,6$)
North West	21,7 ($\pm 6,3$)	12,9 ($\pm 4,9$)
Gauteng	24,5 ($\pm 3,1$)	16,6 ($\pm 2,6$)
Mpumalanga	23,5 ($\pm 5,6$)	14,3 ($\pm 4,7$)
Limpopo	28,9 ($\pm 2,7$)	18,2 ($\pm 5,0$)
South Africa	23,6 ($\pm 1,8$)	14,9 ($\pm 1,5$)

Source: FAO and SAVAC, 2020

Table 4.3 shows that all provinces were negatively affected by a rise in food insecurity prevalence rates as a result of COVID-19. However, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape were less impacted by moderate to severe food insecurity and severe food insecurity compared to the other provinces in 2020. Limpopo (28,9%) and Kwazulu-Natal (26,4%), on the other hand, were the worst affected provinces by moderate to severe food insecurity and severe food insecurity in 2020. It is interesting to note that the food insecurity estimates for Limpopo vary significantly between 2019 and 2020. While Limpopo had the lowest levels of food insecurity in 2019 according to the GHS, it had the highest level of food insecurity in 2020 according to the SAVAC survey. This deviation may be partly due to the variations between the two data sets.

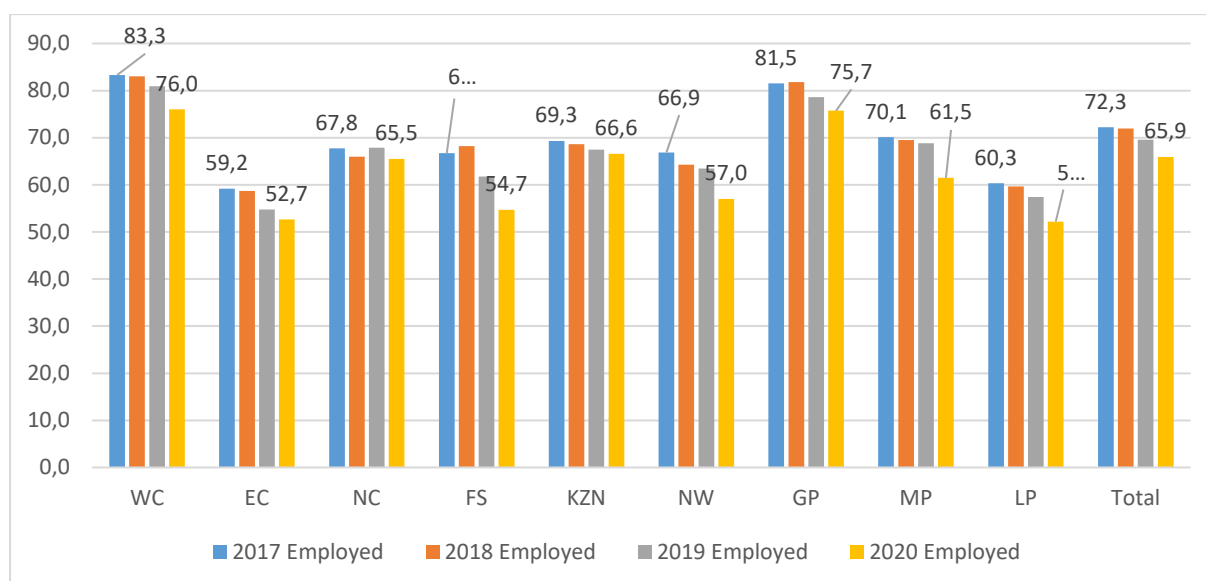
5. Factors that contribute to food insecurity

Food insecurity may be influenced by a number of factors including income, employment, and the ability to produce food. This section discusses the report results on employment status at household level, household sources of income, and households' involvement in agricultural activities to provide context for the interpretation and understanding of the FIES results.

5.1 Employment status within households

While the GHS cannot derive official unemployment and employment rates like the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), it does collect limited employment information that allows us to better understand the employment status of households in the GHS series. For this analysis, we consider the number of households with members who are employed and unemployed. Figure 5.1.1 indicates the proportion of households with at least one employed member. These figures indicate that the number of households with employed household members has been decreasing in South Africa between 2017 and 2020 both at national and provincial levels.

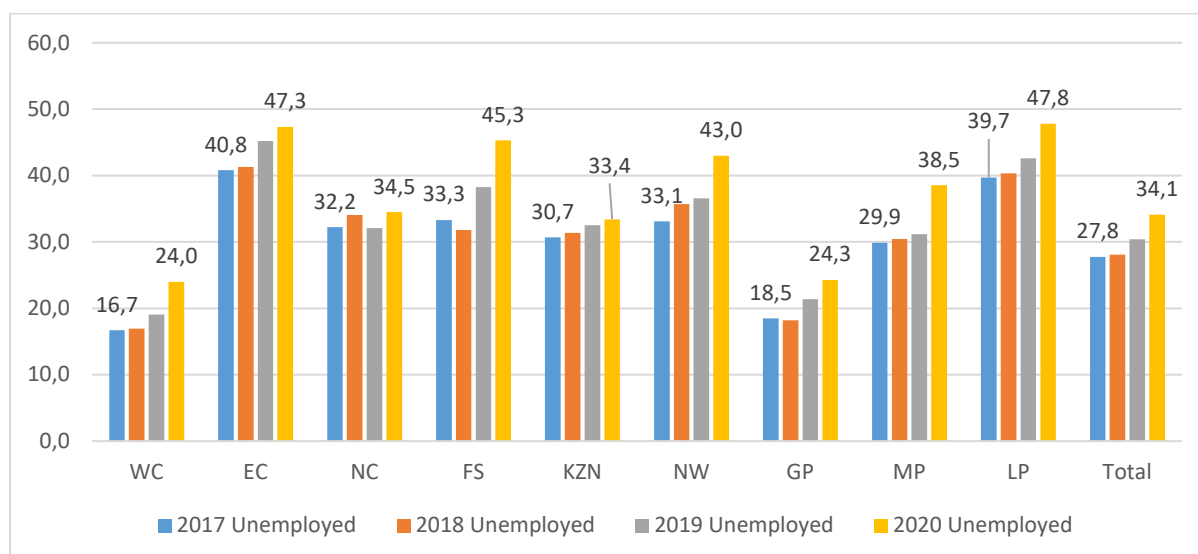
Figure 5.1.1: Proportion of households with at least one employed person by province in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

Gauteng (75,7%) and Western Cape (76,0%) were the two provinces with the highest proportion of households with at least one member who is employed. On the contrary, Limpopo (52,2%) and Eastern Cape (52,7%) had the lowest proportion of households with an employed household member. Figure 5.1.2 indicates the proportion of households without any employed household member between 2017 and 2020.

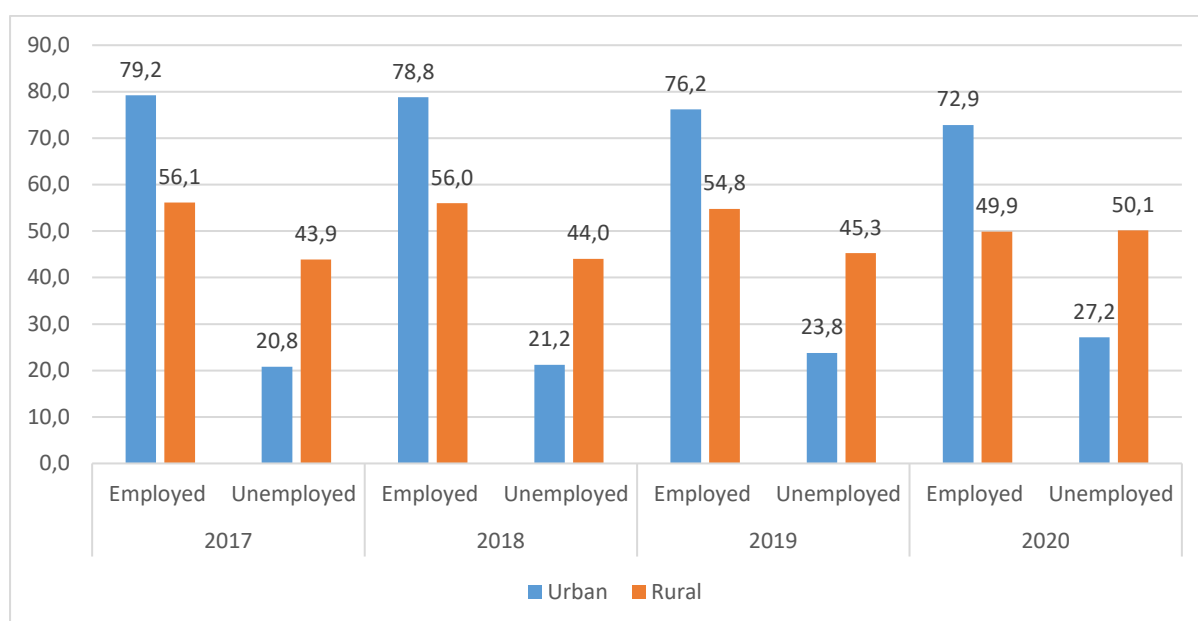
Figure 5.1.2: Proportion of households with no employed persons by province in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

In 2020, provinces with the highest proportion of households that did not have an employed person living in them were Limpopo (47,8%), Eastern Cape (47,3%), Free State (45,3%) and North West (43,0%). Gauteng (24,3%) and Western Cape (24,0%) were the only provinces below the national average (34,1%). Figure 5.1.3 indicates that rural areas were generally the worst affected by unemployment compared to urban areas.

Figure 5.1.3: Proportion of households with at least one employed person by settlement type in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

Between 2017 and 2020, black African-headed households represented the lowest proportion of households that had at least one employed person. The proportion of households without an employed person in them have been increasing steadily nationally since 2017, and were at their highest levels in 2020. Households headed by black Africans, followed by white-headed households reported the highest proportions. On the other hand, Indian/Asian-headed households had the highest proportion of households with at least one employed person in all four years (Table 5.1).

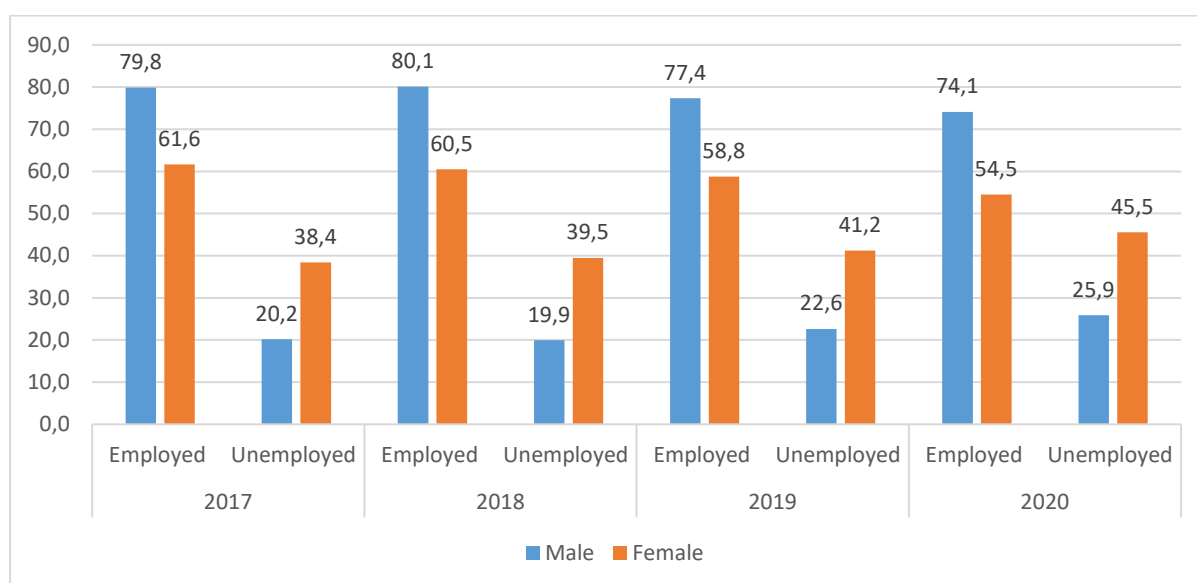
Table 5.1: Proportion of households with at least one employed person by population group in 2017–2020

Population group	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed
Black African	70,6	29,4	70,6	29,4	67,6	32,4	63,4	36,6
Coloured	80,9	19,1	78,3	21,7	80,0	20,0	75,6	24,4
Indian/Asian	83,1	16,9	79,7	20,3	87,0	13,0	83,2	16,8
White	76,9	23,1	76,9	23,1	74,5	25,5	76,0	24,0
South Africa	72,2	27,8	71,9	28,1	69,6	30,4	65,9	34,1

Source: GHS 2017–2020

Female-headed households were the worst affected by unemployment, as almost half of them did not have an employed household member in 2020 (Figure 5.1.4). Male-headed households fared better than their female counterparts. However, both female- and male-headed households experienced an increase in the proportion of households without employed persons from 2017 to 2020.

Figure 5.1.4: Proportion of households with at least one employed person by sex of household head in 2017–2020

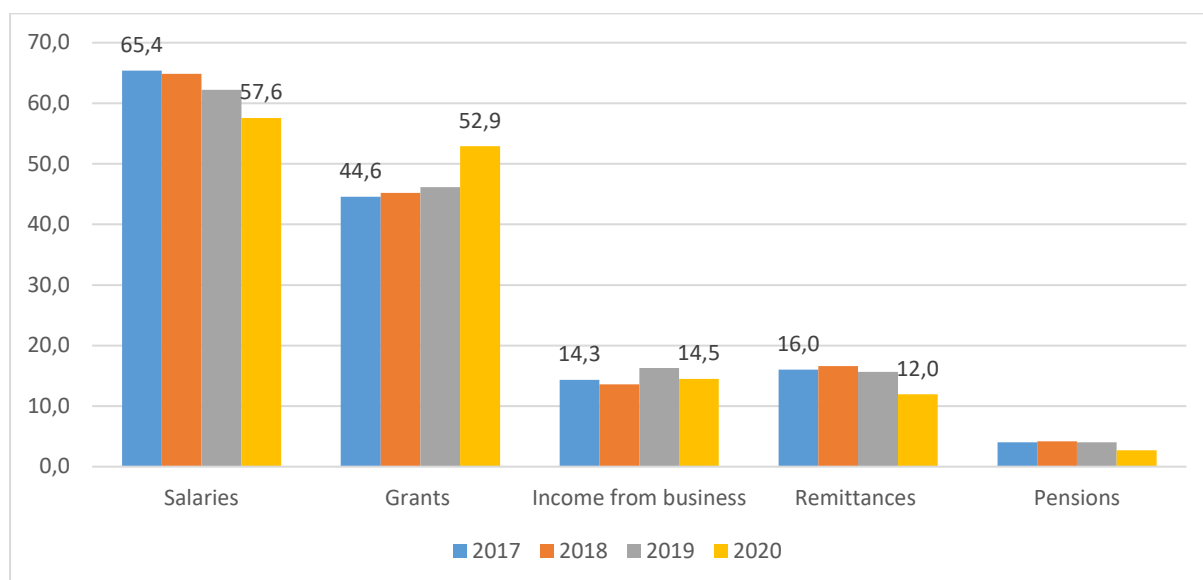


Source: GHS 2017–2020

5.2 Households' income sources in 2017–2020

Figure 5.2.1 indicates the proportion of households by their sources of income between 2017 and 2020. Households that had salaried individuals as their source of income had declined by almost 8 percentage points from 2017 to 2020, while those receiving grants have increased. Those households that received income from businesses seem to have been fairly stable over this period, while those receiving remittances had slightly decreased in 2020.

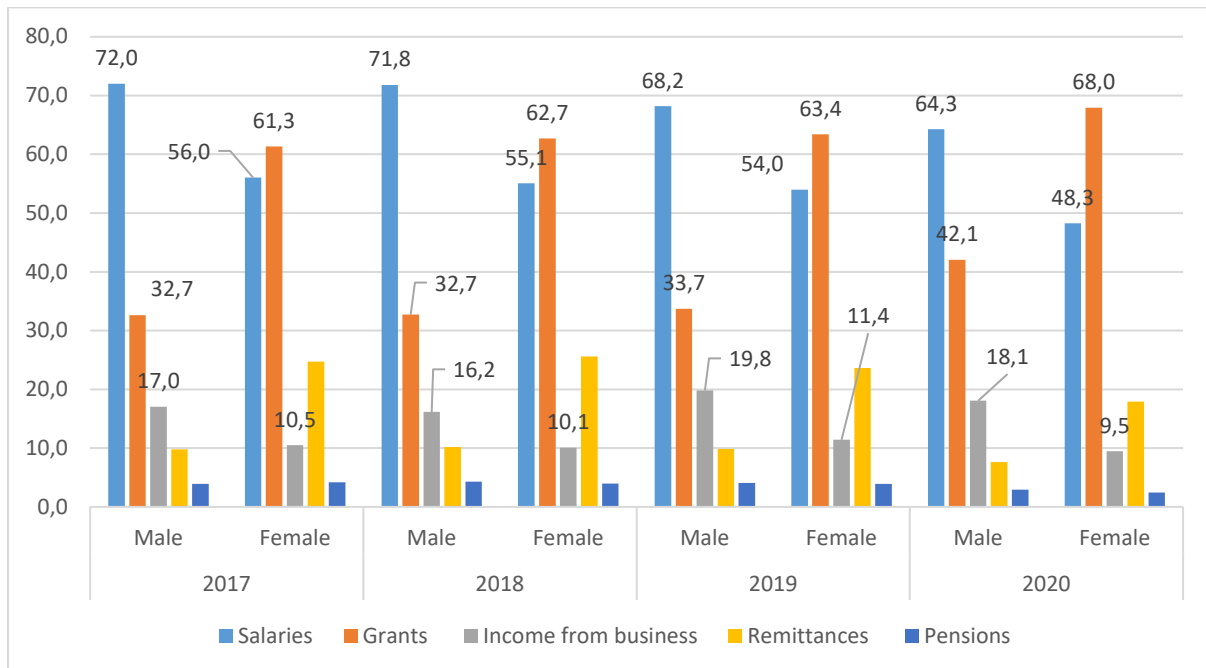
Figure 5.2.1: Proportion of households by sources of income in South Africa in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

There has always been a gap between female-headed households and those headed by men with regard to income and thus, female-headed households are always seen as poorer households compared to those headed by males. In 2017, almost three-quarters of male-headed households received most of their income from salaries compared to slightly more than half of the female-headed households (Figure 5.2.2). However, this gap narrowed slightly in 2019 as both female- and male-headed households experienced a decline in income sourced from salaries over the four years.

Figure 5.2.2: Proportion of households and sources of income by sex of the household head in 2017–2020

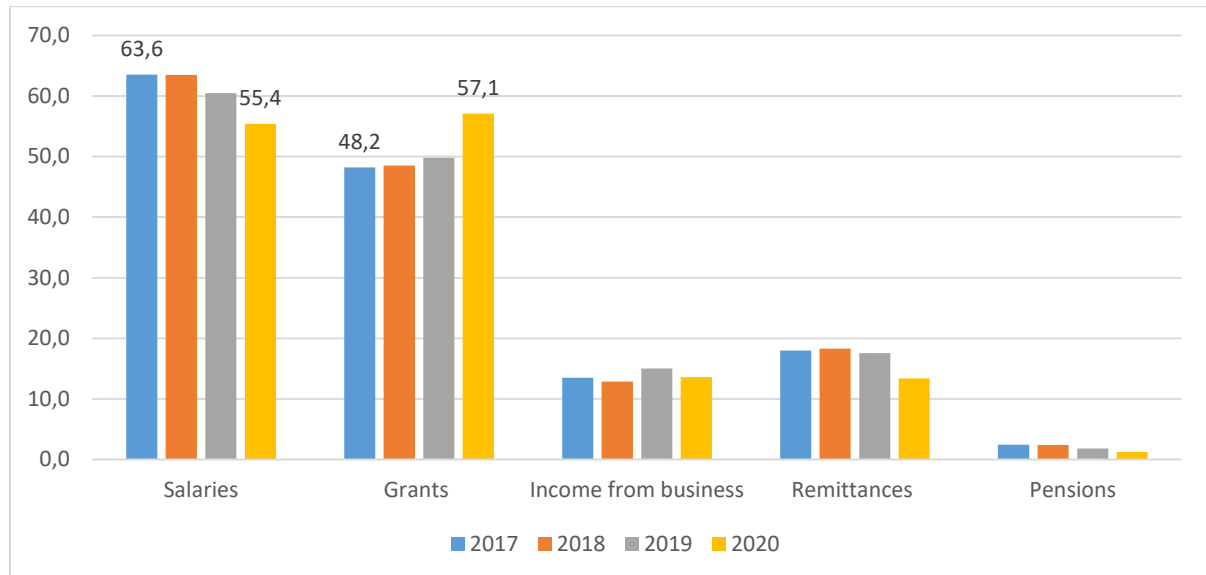


Source: GHS 2017–2020

A higher proportion of female-headed households reported receiving income from grants compared to their male counterparts, and that has been the case across the four years. In 2020 there was a noticeable increase in the proportion of female-headed households that reported receiving grants as a source of income.

Figure 5.2.3 shows that there has been a decrease in income sourced from salaries, while income from social grants as a source increased in households headed by black Africans over the four years.

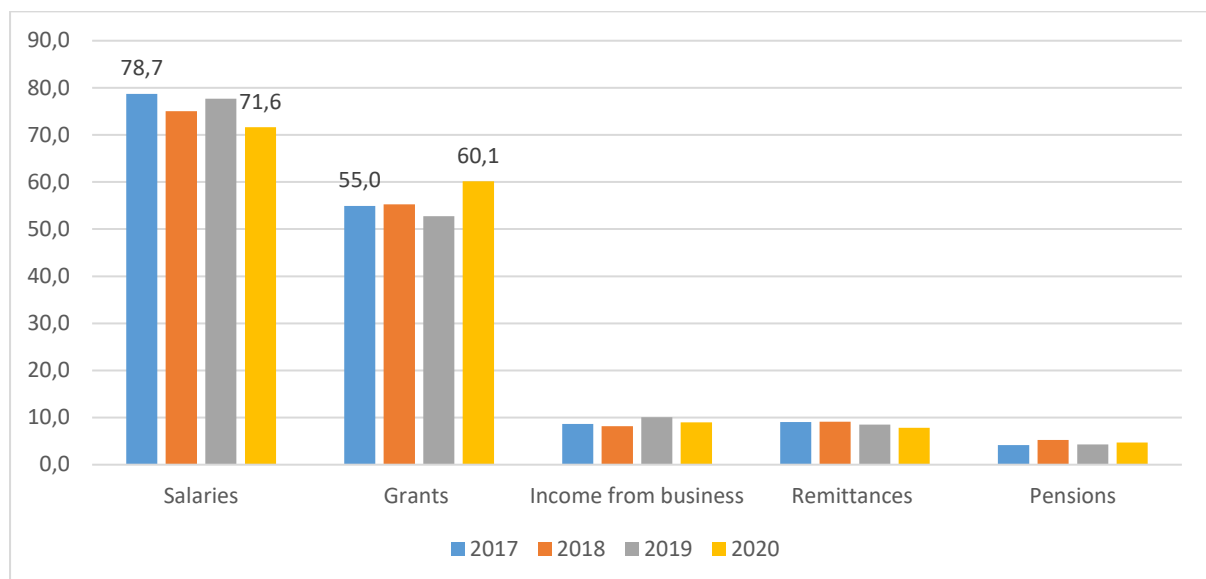
Figure 5.2.3: Proportion of black African-headed households by sources of income in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

The same observation about diminished income from salaries as a source and an increase in grants recipients is also evident among coloured-headed households (Figure 5.2.4). On the other hand, fewer coloured-headed households reported remittances as a source of income relative to black African-headed households.

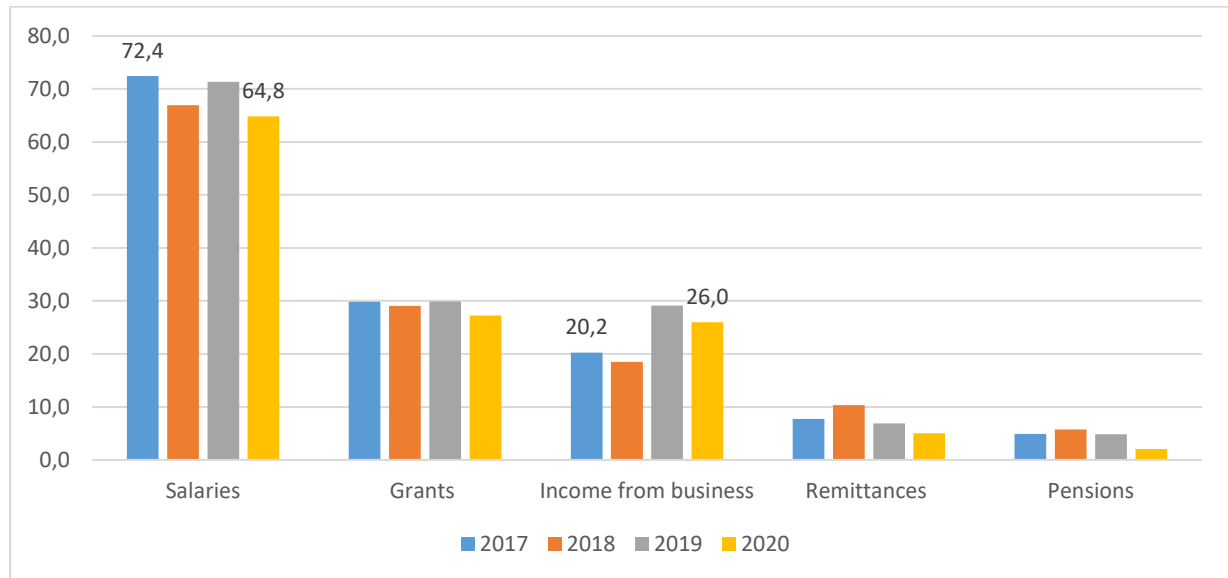
Figure 5.2.4: Proportion of coloured-headed households by sources of income in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

The proportion of Indian/Asian-headed households receiving grants as a source of income has been stable for the four years, but with a slight drop in 2020 (Figure 5.2.5). Interestingly, income sourced from business in 2019 and 2020 was notably higher than reported in 2017 and 2018.

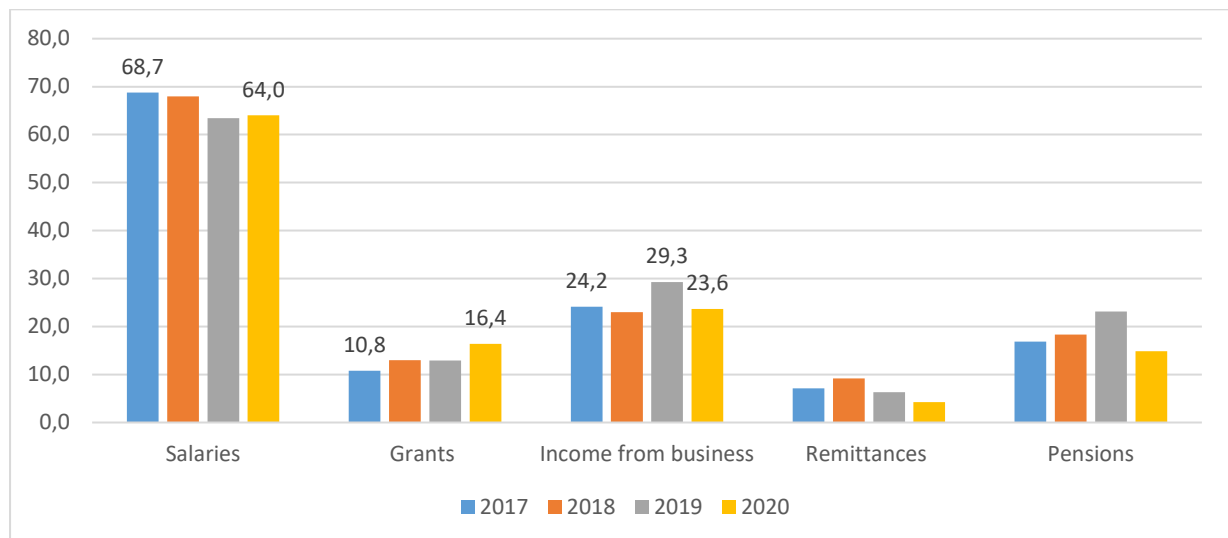
Figure 5.2.5: Proportion of Indian/Asian-headed households by sources of income in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

With the exception of Indian/Asian-headed households, the proportion of households receiving income from grants as a source have increased between 2017 and 2020 for those headed by black Africans, coloureds and whites. White-headed households also experienced a decline in the proportion of households that reported salaries as their source of income between 2017 and 2020.

Figure 5.2.6: Proportion of white-headed households by sources of income in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

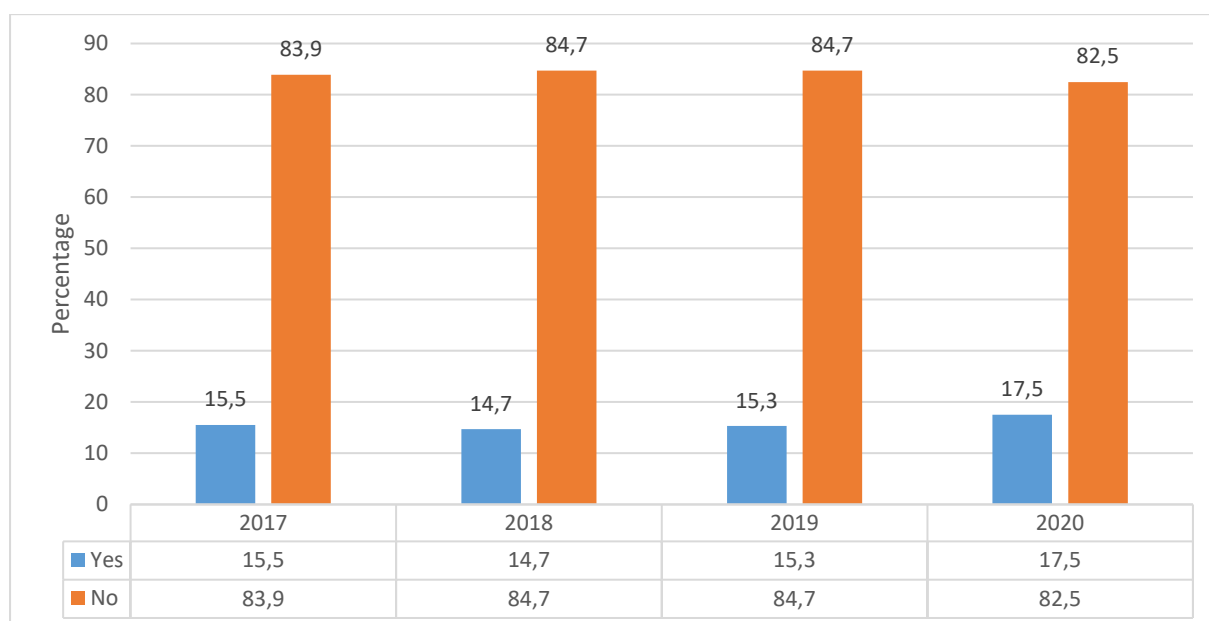
In general, South African households have experienced a decline in income sourced from salaries and an increase in income sourced from grants over the 2017 to 2020 period, which is consistent with the increasing challenges around unemployment in South Africa and a growing dependency on the state.

The South African economy has not been growing as expected. According to Stats SA’s Annual Financial Statistics Survey (2020), formal businesses’ net profit before tax fell by 33,4% in the 2020 financial year. The economy lost R209 billion as net profit was down from R624 billion in 2019 to R415 billion in 2020, which was the lowest level since 2006. Business services and manufacturing were the worst affected. In addition, many jobs were lost in different sectors of the economy in the second quarter of 2020. The formal non-agricultural sector (648 000) was hit the hardest, followed by manufacturing (85 000), construction (74 000) and transport (38 000) (Stats SA Quarterly Employment Statistics, October 2020).

5.3 Household involvement in agricultural activities in 2017–2020

Over 80% of households reported not being involved in agricultural-related activities in South Africa between 2017 and 2020. Increasing involvement of households in agricultural food production could be one way of improving food availability and thus, decreasing to some extent the level of food insecurity in the country. However, it seems that the proportion of households involved in agriculture has been low and fairly stable since 2017, with a small increase of just above two percentage points in 2020 (Figure 5.3.1).

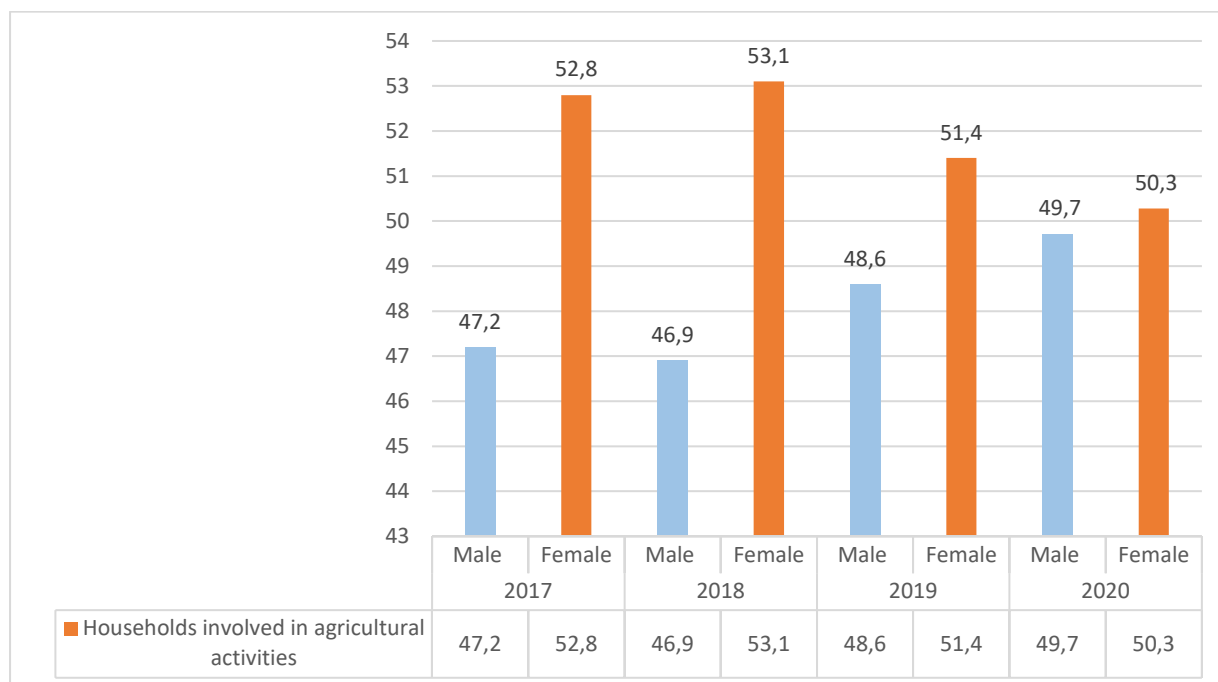
Figure 5.3.1: The percentage distribution of households involved in agricultural production activities in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

Figure 5.3.2 indicates that female-headed households represent the highest proportion of households that were taking part in food production compared to male-headed households. However, it is important to note that between 2017 and 2020, the gap between female- and male-headed households that were involved in agricultural activities had significantly narrowed and were almost equal in 2020.

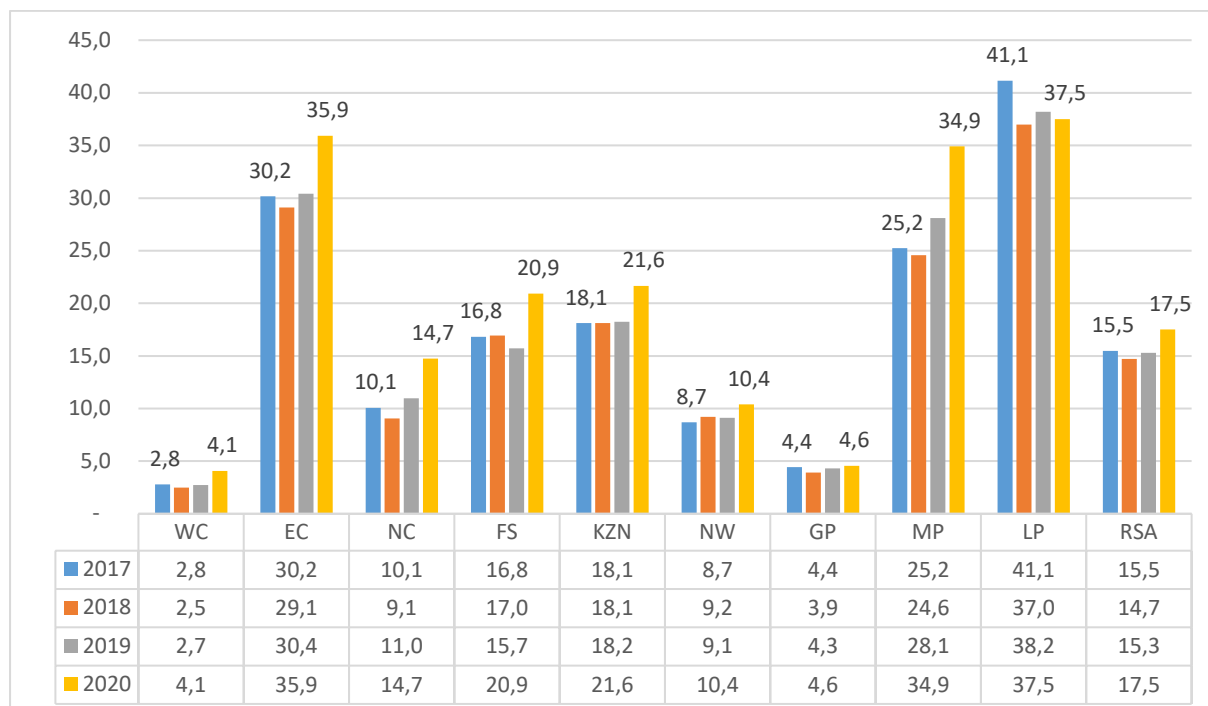
Figure 5.3.2: The proportion of households involved in agricultural production activities by sex of household head in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

Provinces with large rural areas had the highest percentage of households involved in agricultural-related activities. Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga have had at least 25% of households involved in producing food since 2017. National figures indicate that there has been a general increase in the percentage of households that were producing their own food in 2020. Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Free State, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal had significant increases from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 5.3.3).

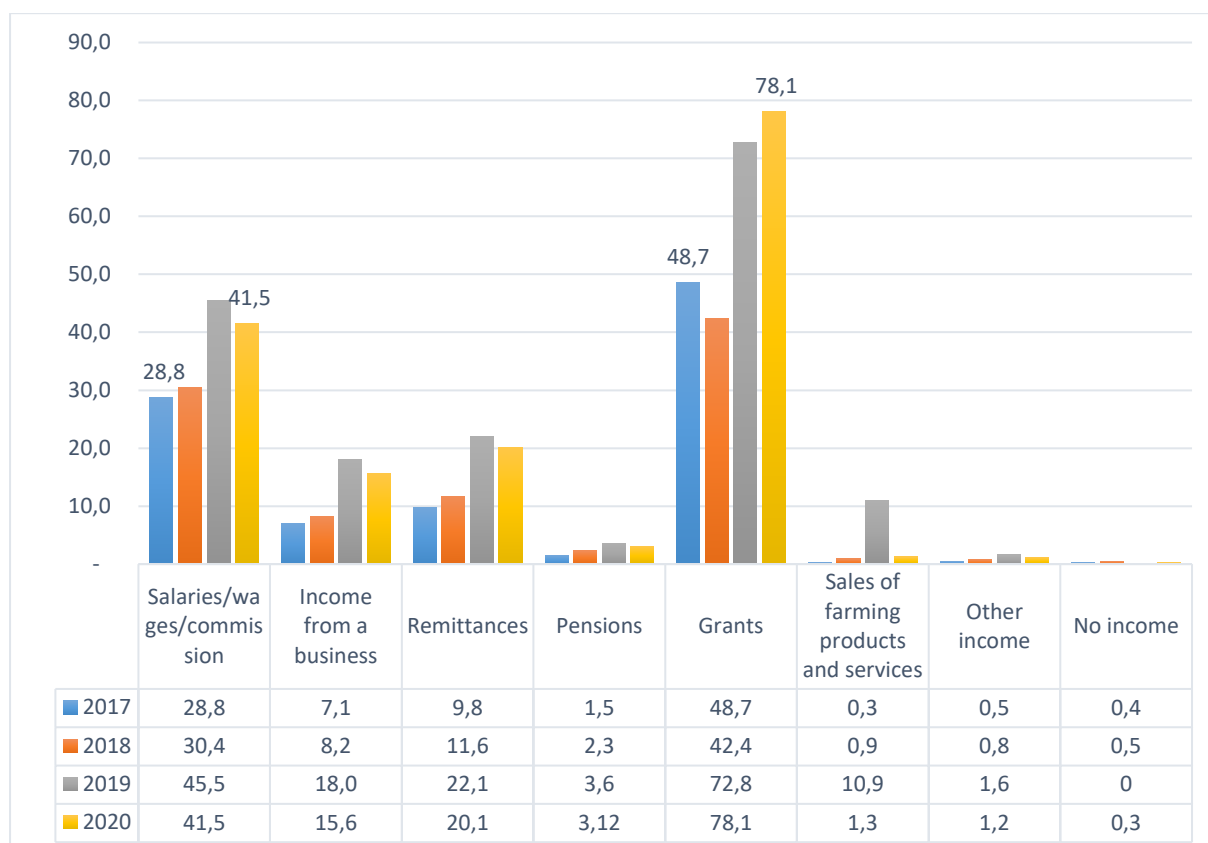
Figure 5.3.3: The percentage distribution of households involved in agricultural production activities by province in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

Figure 5.3.4 shows households that reported salaries and grants as their main sources of income were also the households more likely to be involved in agricultural production of food. However, households that reported grants as their main source saw a significant spike in agricultural activities in 2019 and 2020.

Figure 5.3.4: The proportion of households involved in agricultural production activities by main source of income in 2017–2020

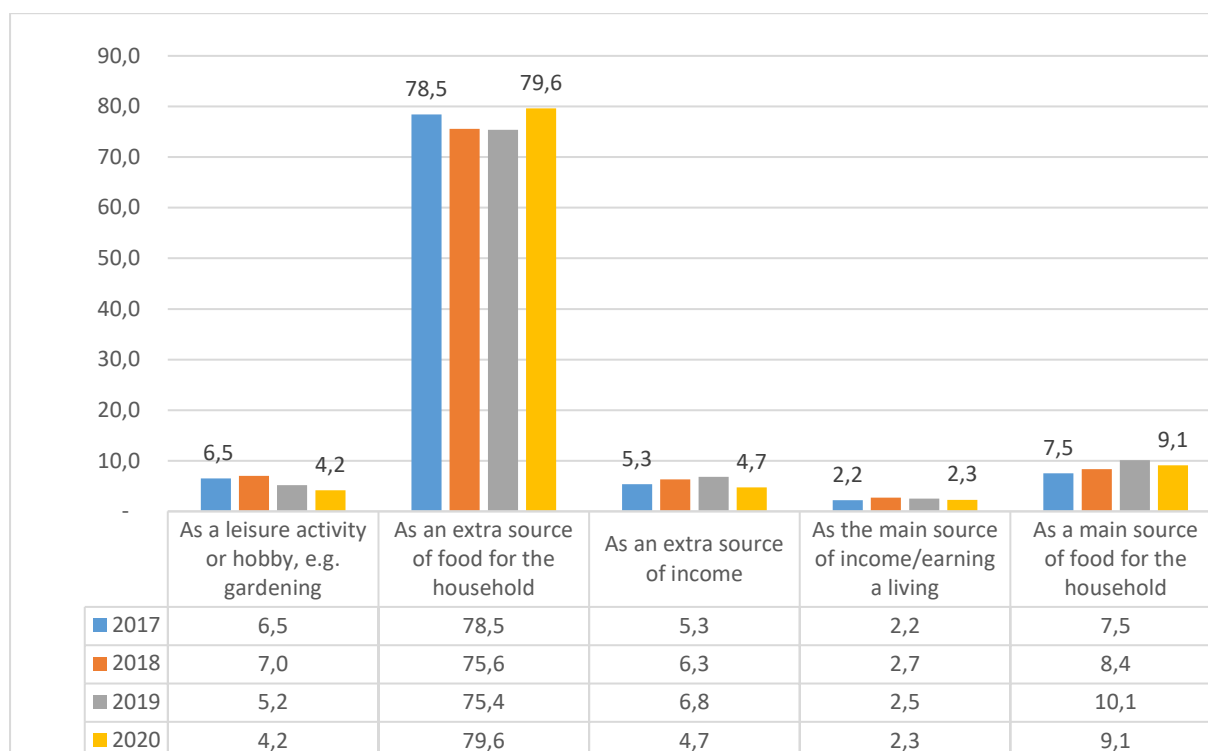


Source: GHS 2017–2020

It is worth noting that for households to engage in food production, they require some form of capital to buy inputs (like seeds and fertilizer) or animals to breed. When their income is reduced or lost, it may hinder their ability to participate in agricultural production of food. At the same time, when their regular income is dwindling or insufficient to meet their growing needs, it may force them to seek other means to feed themselves; for some, they may opt to produce their own food.

Figure 5.3.5 indicates that between 2017 and 2020, of the more than 75% of households that reported being involved in food production, reported that they were doing it to supplement food for the household. There is an increase in 2019 and 2020 in the proportion of households that reported the reason for engaging in the agricultural production of food as a main source of food for the household.

Figure 5.3.5: Percentage distribution of households involved in agricultural activities by reason for involvement in 2017–2020



Source: GHS 2017–2020

6. Key findings and conclusion

6.1 Key findings

- In 2019, 17,3% of South Africans were estimated to be suffering from moderate to severe food insecurity, while 7,0% were estimated to be affected by severe food insecurity. The provinces worst affected by moderate to severe food insecurity and severe food insecurity were the Northern Cape (28,8% and 15,4%) and North West (28,0% and 11,4%).
- One out of five South Africans (23,6%) in September 2020 were affected by moderate to severe food insecurity, while almost 14,9% experienced severe food insecurity.
- The female population is more likely to be both affected by moderate to severe and severe food insecurity compared to their male counterparts.
- Black Africans followed by coloureds are still more prone to be affected by moderate to severe and severe food insecurity than Indians/Asians and whites.
- Almost half of female-headed households did not have an employed person living in the household in 2020.
- Income from salaries as a source of income has declined, while more households reported receiving an income from grants between 2017 and 2020.
- Households involved in food production have been below 20% in the four years under review.
- Female-headed households are mostly producing their own food compared to male-headed households.

6.2 Conclusion

Many countries have effectively reduced the prevalence of food insecurity by increasing income, economic growth and also offering additional resources to improve food security (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2014). South Africa's recent trajectory of low economic growth and increasing unemployment as seen through a number of statistical publications, may be a significant hurdle in reducing food insecurity.

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