

ASSESSING FOOD INADEQUACY AND
HUNGER IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 2021

USING THE GENERAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY.



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



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Assessing food inadequacy and hunger in South Africa in 2021 using the General Household Survey (GHS)

**Statistics South Africa
Risenga Maluleke**

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For technical enquiries please contact:

Nathaniel S Dlamini (PhD)

Tel.: 012 406 3057

Email: nathanield@statssa.gov.za

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Definition of terms

Dwelling unit refers 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 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 the 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 the 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.

Young children refer to children who are aged five or younger.

Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GHS	General Household Survey
HFIAS	Household Food Insecurity Access Scale
IES	Income and Expenditure Survey
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
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

According to FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2022), there were about 828 million people in the world who faced hunger in 2021, with Asia (425 million) and Africa (278 million) being the worst affected continents. There were expectations that food security would recover from the effects of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. However, data shows that world hunger rose further in 2021, adding a total of 150 million people since 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic). Given this state of world food insecurity, it will require an enormous effort for the world to reach the global target of zero hunger by 2030.

South Africa has been facing many challenges ranging from high poverty and unemployment, an energy crisis, rising energy tariffs, ever-increasing interest rates and the rise in the cost of living, which includes soaring food and fuel prices. While South Africa is food secure at national level, these events have enormously impacted South Africa's food security by making food not easily accessible to many people, therefore more likely increasing the number of individuals and households experiencing food inadequacy and hunger.

This report will provide a general overview of South Africa's state of food security in 2021 using data sourced from Stats SA's General Household Survey. While the GHS 2021 contained only a limited number of food security-related variables for analysis, a more comprehensive analysis of this subject matter is planned for the near future using data currently being collected through the Income and Expenditure Survey (IES) 2022/23 and GHS 2022.

2. Purpose of the report

This report gives us a brief synopsis of the state of South Africa's food security in 2021. It presents the levels of food inadequacy and hunger, as well as profiling households that experienced insufficient access to food. It also provides the location of these households by province, metro or non-metro and settlement type. The report establishes if these households have young children (aged five years or younger) who experience the shortage of food and hunger. In addition, it explores other factors that might influence food security which include involvement in the agricultural production of food, employment status of household members, place of residence (i.e. rural/urban, province etc.), household size, population group and sex of the household head.

3. Methodology and data sources

Statistics South Africa employ various methods in the analyses of food security data. The two main methodologies are the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) and the recently adopted Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). Data collected through the General Household Survey in 2021 are used in this report's analysis and will apply the HFIAS method.

The survey covers many themes but the report analysis will focus mainly on food security, employment status and agriculture-related data items. It has to be noted that the food security questions in the GHS were changed in 2019 to the ones discussed in Table 3.1. The methodology discussed and used in this report's analysis was adopted from a paper by Jennifer Coates, Anne Swindale and Paula Bilinsky (2007).

Table 3.1: HFIAS questions

RECALL PERIOD: 12 MONTHS	
Anxiety and uncertainty about household food supply	
1.	WORRIED: During the past 12 months, was there a time when you were worried you would run out of food because of lack of money or other resources?
Insufficient quality (includes variety and preference of the type of food)	
2.	HEALTHY:, was there a time when you were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of lack of money or other resources?
3.	FEWFOOD:, was there a time when you ate only few kinds of food because of lack of money or other resources?
Insufficient quantity of food intake and its consequences	
4.	SKIPPED:....., was there a time when you had to skip a meal because of lack of money or other resources?
5.	ATELESS:....., was there a time when you ate less than you thought you should because of lack of money or other resources?
6.	RUNOUT:....., was there a time when your household ran out of food because of lack of money or other resources?
7.	HUNGRY:....., was there a time when you were hungry but did not eat because of lack of money or other resources?
8.	WHLDAY:....., was there a time when you went without eating for a whole day because of lack of money or other resources?

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Each question in Table 3.1 is asked with a recall period of 12 months prior to the interview. After each question is asked it is followed by an occurrence question - that is, whether the condition in question has happened for five days or more in the past year. If the respondent answers ‘Yes’ to an occurrence question, a frequency of occurrence question is asked to determine how often the condition happens. However, these occurrence questions change for the last two questions where the condition is extreme.

Table 3.2: HFIAS occurrence questions

Question 1-6	
Has it happened for 5 or more days during the 12 months prior to the survey period?	1. Yes 2. No
Question 7 and 8	
How often has this happened?	1. Almost every month 2. In some months, but not every month 3. Only once or twice

3.2 Calculation of the HFIAS scores

To calculate the HFIAS scores for each household, the codes are added for each frequency of occurrence question. Before summing up the frequency of occurrence codes, they should be recoded to 0 for all cases where the answer to the corresponding occurrence question was “no”, this includes frequency of occurrences that were skipped and 1 is allocated for cases where the answer is “yes”. The score can be 0 when the household responded “no” to all occurrence and frequency of occurrence questions. As shown in Table 3.2.1 when the score is higher, it shows that the households access to food is inadequate or severely inadequate and when the score is low, the household access to food is considered adequate.

Table 3.2.1: HFIAS scores

Condition	Score
Adequate food access	<2
Inadequate food access	2-5
Severely inadequate food access	6-8

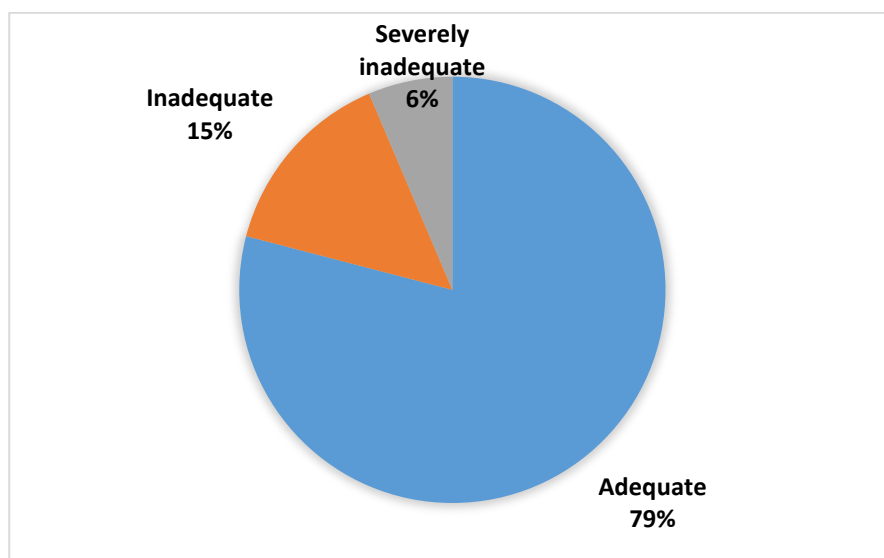
4. Findings

The findings sections discuss the analysis results which demonstrate levels of adequacy in accessing food and the experience of hunger at Household level. These results are derived from the GHS 2021 as mentioned before and are presented in four different sections: Section 4.1 presents household levels of adequacy in accessing food. Section five focuses on households’ experience of hunger. Section six concentrates on child hunger and levels of adequate access to food in households with young children. Section seven examines other factors that influence food security.

4.1 Levels of adequacy in accessing food

The number of households in South Africa were estimated to be 17,9 million in 2021. Almost eight out of 10 households (approximately 14,2 million) reported that they had adequate food access, with 15 percent (about 2,6 million) having inadequate access and 6 percent (1,12 million) having severely inadequate access to food (Figure 4.1.1).

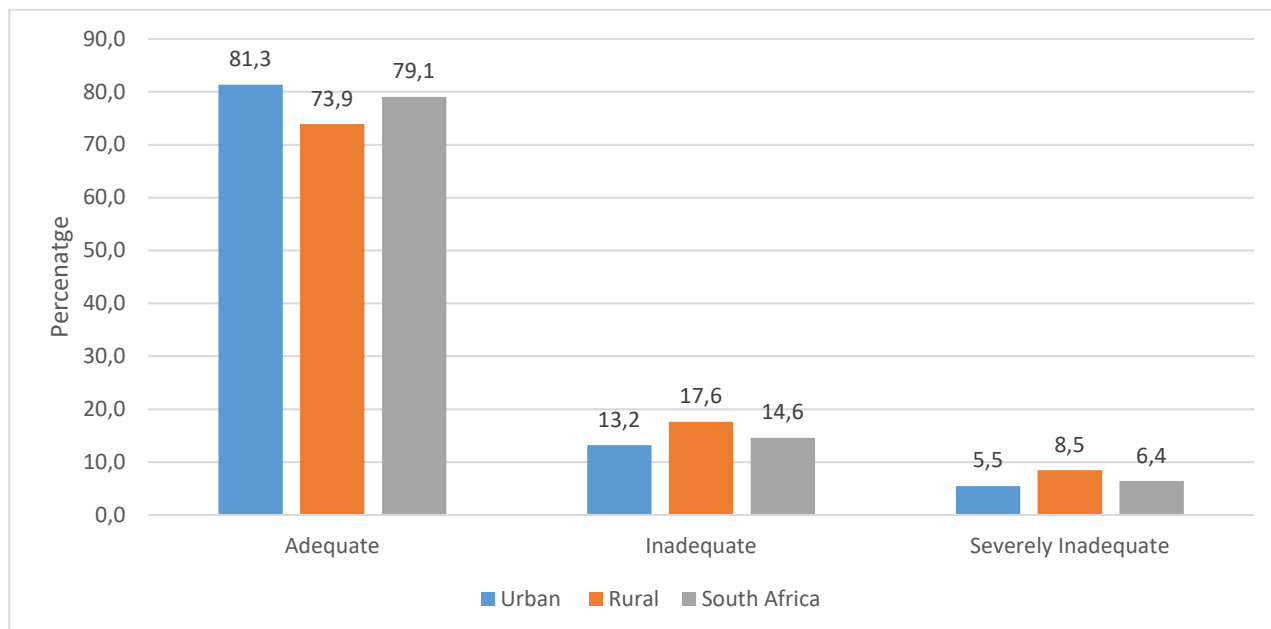
Figure 4.1.1: Households levels of accessing food



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Figure 4.1.2 shows that more than 70 percent of households in both rural and urban areas reported that they have adequate access to food. However, rural households had a higher percentage of households experiencing inadequate and severely inadequate food access compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 4.1.2: Levels of adequacy in accessing food by settlement type



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Table 4.1 shows a higher proportion of female-headed households that reported experiencing inadequate and severely inadequate accessing of food with 16,5 percent and 7,6 percent respectively, which is higher than the national average in both these categories of food access. On the other hand, 81,3 percent of male-headed households reported adequate food access which is also higher than the national average of 79,1 percent.

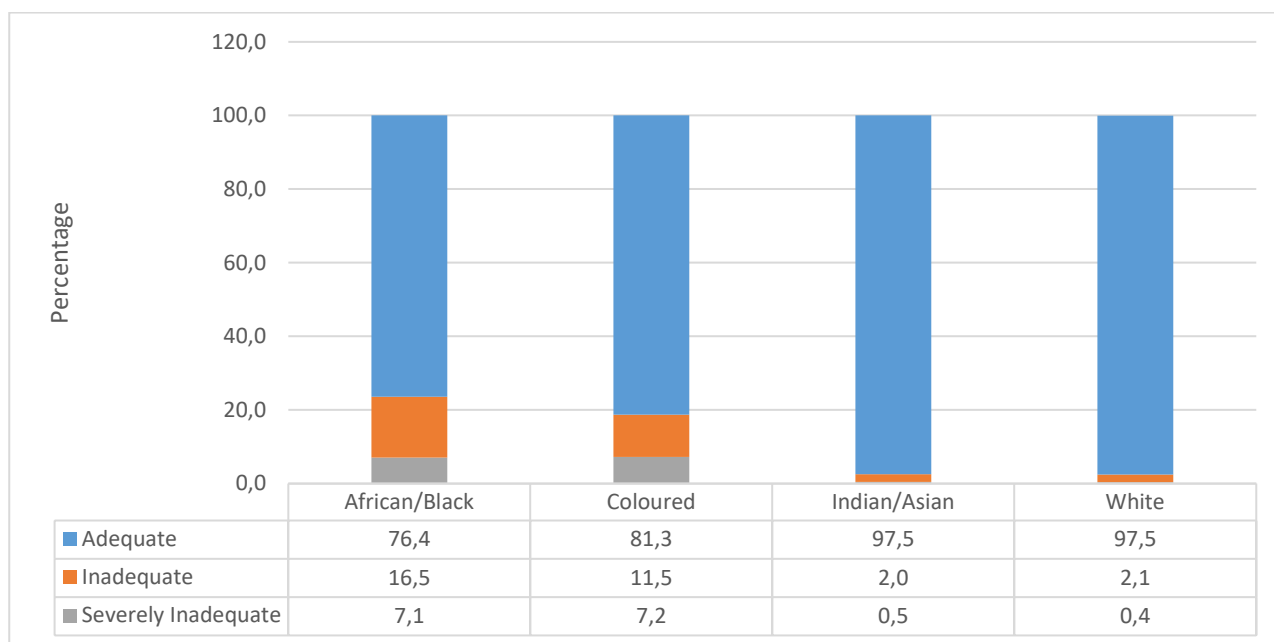
Table 4.1: Levels of adequacy in accessing food by sex of the household head

Sex	Adequate	Inadequate	Severely inadequate
Male	8 459 936 (81,3%)	1 369 343 (13,2%)	570 903 (5,5%)
Female	5 727 809 (75,9%)	1 243 012 (16,5%)	575 568 (7,6%)
South Africa	14 187 745 (79,1%)	2 612 355 (14,6%)	1 146 471 (6,4%)

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Households headed by African/blacks and coloureds are still mainly represented among those households that reported inadequate and severe inadequate access to food compared to those headed by Indians/Asians and whites (Figure 4.1.3).

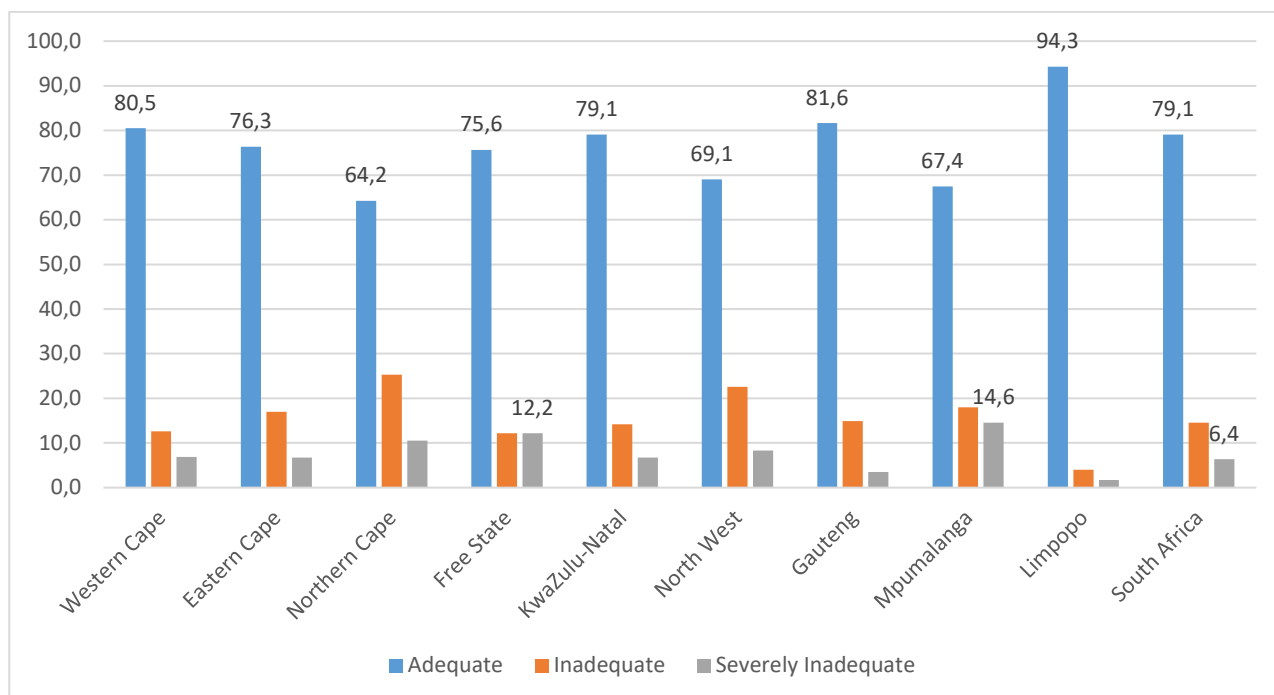
Figure 4.1.3: Levels of adequacy in accessing food by population group of the household head



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

As illustrated by Figure 4.1.4, most provinces reported that more than 70 percent of households had adequate access to food in 2021, except for the Northern Cape (64,2%), North West (69,1%) and Mpumalanga (67,4%) which reported the lowest proportions of households with adequate food access during the period under review.

Figure 4.1.4: Levels of adequacy in accessing food by province

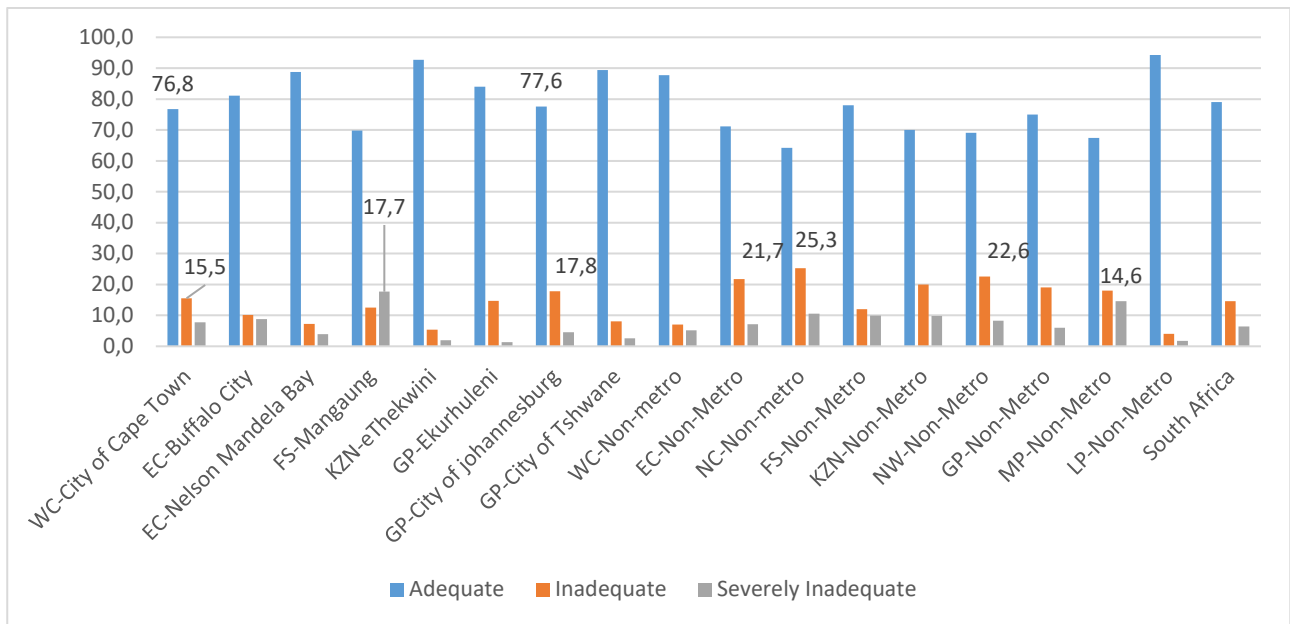


Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

In general, figure 4.1.5 indicates that the high levels of inadequate and severely inadequate access to food are more commonly observed in non-metros areas in all the provinces, with the exception of the City of Johannesburg (22,4%), City of Cape Town (23,2%) and Mangaung (30,2%). These three metros have the highest percentage of households that experienced both inadequate and severely inadequate access to food compared to other metros.

The non-metros areas of the Northern Cape (25,3%), North West (22,6%) and Eastern Cape (21,7%) had the highest percentages of households that reported insufficient access to food. While Mangaung (17,7%) and Mpumalanga non-metro (14,6%) had the highest percentage of household that reported having severely inadequate access to food.

Figure 4.1.5: Levels of adequacy in accessing food by Metro/Non-metro areas



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

5. Household hunger

Households that reported experiencing hunger in South Africa in 2021 are slightly above 2 million, which accounts for 11,6 percent of households in the country. Most of those households that reported the experience of hunger are headed by African/black. Gauteng (25,3%) followed by KwaZulu-Natal (17,5%) and Western Cape (14,0%) are the provinces with the highest proportion of households that reported experiencing hunger in 2021.

Table 5.1: Profile of South African households experiencing hunger

	Number of households with people that experienced hunger	Percentage (%)
South Africa	2 078 496	11,6
Sex of the household head		
Male	1 077 702	51,9
Female	1 000 794	48,1
Population group of the household head		
African/Black	1 925 294	92,6
Coloured	133 929	6,5
Indian/Asian	10 511	0,5
White	8 763	0,4
Province		
Gauteng	525 813	25,3
KwaZulu-Natal	362 863	17,5
Western Cape	290 356	14,0
North West	224 596	10,8
Mpumalanga	220 107	10,5
Eastern Cape	186 134	9,0
Free State	125 721	6,0
Northern Cape	77 342	3,7
Limpopo	65 564	3,2
Settlement type		
Urban	1 279 282	61,5
Rural	799 214	38,5

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show that two thirds of those households that experienced hunger are located in urban areas. The City of Cape Town (11,6%) and the City of Johannesburg (11,5%) have the highest proportions of households that experienced hunger in all the six metros. More than half of the households that reported experiencing hunger are male-headed and more than 90 percent are headed by an African/black. A quarter of households that reported experiencing hunger in the whole country are situated in Gauteng and almost half of them are concentrated in the City of Johannesburg. KwaZulu-Natal (17,5%) has the second highest percentage of those households followed by the Western Cape (14,0%) (Table 5.1).

Table 5. 2: Households experiencing hunger by Metro and Non-metro areas

	Number of households with people that experienced hunger	Percentage (%)
South Africa	2 078 496	11,6
Metros		
City of Cape Town	240 970	11,6
City of Johannesburg	238 610	11,5
Ekurhuleni	93 241	4,5
City of Tshwane	77 033	3,7
Mangaung	48 500	2,3
Buffalo City	32 771	1,6
eThekwini	29 393	1,4
Nelson Mandela Bay	19 820	1,0
KwaZulu-Natal non-metro	333 470	16,0
North West non-metro	224 596	10,8
Mpumalanga non-metro	220 107	10,6
Eastern Cape non-metro	133 542	6,4
Gauteng non-metro	116 929	5,6
Northern Cape non-metro	77 342	3,7
Free State non-metro	77 221	3,7
Western Cape non-metro	49 386	2,4
Limpopo non-metro	65 564	3,2

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

6. Child hunger

Child hunger refers to a child experiencing food insecurity rather than just missing a meal. Food insecurity means going without food consistently, which results in a child becoming undernourished or malnourished. In households with children, insufficient food access has been linked to a range of adverse developmental consequences, including social and behavioural problems (D Gallegos et al, 2021). According to the General Household Survey, there were 4,9 million households that had at least one child that was five years old or younger in 2021.

Table 6.1: Number of households with children aged five years or younger

Number of children in household	Total number of households with or without children	Percentage (%)
No child	13 083 550	72,9
One child	3 692 362	20,6
Two children	935 556	5,2
Three or more children	235 104	1,3
South Africa	17 946 571	100

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

6.1 Levels of food access in households with young children

Table 6.1.1 shows that the highest proportion (80,7%) of households that reported having sufficient food access are those with no young children and among those 6,1 percent had experienced severe inadequate access to food. On the other hand, 76,4 percent households with one child reported sufficient access to food and 6,6 percent had experienced severe inadequate access to food. Households with more young children are more predisposed to having inadequate access to food. Almost two thirds of households with more than three young children had reported sufficient food access and they had the highest proportion of households that reported severe inadequate access to food which amounted to 17,2 percent.

Table 6.1.1: Number and percentage of households with children aged five years or younger by level of adequacy in accessing food

Number of children in households	Adequate	Inadequate	Severely Inadequate
No child	10 554 746 (80,7%)	1 737 186 (13,3%)	791 618 (6,1%)
One child	2 822 129 (76,4%)	625 129 (16,9%)	245 104 (6,6%)
Two children	661 366 (70,7%)	204 827 (21,9%)	69 363 (7,4%)
Three or more children	149 505 (63,6%)	45 212 (19,2%)	40 386 (17,2%)
South Africa	14 187 746 (79,1%)	2 612 354 (14,6%)	1 146 471 (6,4%)

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

6.2 The experience of hunger in households with young children

In this section, we discuss households with young children that experienced hunger. Limited access to food may lead to hunger and undernourishment. Table 6.2.1 shows that out of the 4,9 million households with young children, more than half a million (683 221) of those households reported experiencing hunger in 2021. The highest proportion of those households are found in Kwa-Zulu-Natal (21,4%) and Gauteng (22,2%) provinces. Northern Cape (3,7%), Free State (4,8%) and Limpopo (4,1%) had the lowest proportions of households with young children that experienced hunger. More than half of the households with young children that reported experiencing hunger were headed by women and reside in urban areas.

Table 6.2.1: Profile of households with children aged five years or younger and the experience of hunger

	Number of Households with children that experienced hunger	Percentage (%)
South Africa	683 221	3,8
Sex of the household head		
Male	275 038	40,3
Female	408 182	59,7
Province		
Gauteng	151 703	22,2
KwaZulu-Natal	145 934	21,4
Western Cape	98 899	14,5
Mpumalanga	81 161	11,9
North West	63 980	9,4
Eastern Cape	55 241	8,1
Free State	32 896	4,8
Limpopo	28 219	4,1
Northern Cape	25 188	3,7
Settlement type		
Urban	390 441	57,1
Rural	292 780	42,9

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

According to Table 6.2.2, out of the 683 221 households with young children that reported hunger, 20,1 percent were found in KwaZulu-Natal (non-metro) followed by 13,6 percent in the City of Johannesburg, and 12,4 percent in the City of Cape Town. It is unsurprising that the City of Cape Town and the City of Johannesburg have the highest proportions of households that reported hunger because the experience of hunger is mostly associated with households residing in urban areas as opposed to those living in rural areas.

Table 6.2.2: Households with children aged five years or younger and the experience of hunger by Metro and Non-metro areas in 2021

	Number of Households with children that experienced hunger	Percentage (%)
South Africa	683 221	3,8
Metros and non-metro areas		
City of Johannesburg	92 730	13,6
City of Cape Town	85 047	12,4
City of Tshwane	20 152	2,9
Ekurhuleni	13 011	1,9
Mangaung	11 404	1,7
eThekweni	8 704	1,3
Buffalo City	5 832	0,9
Nelson Mandela Bay	1 862	0,3
KwaZulu-Natal non-metro	137 230	20,1
Mpumalanga non-metro	81 161	11,9
North West non-metro	63 980	9,4
Eastern Cape non-metro	47 547	7,0
Gauteng non-metro	25 810	3,8
Northern Cape non-metro	25 188	3,7
Free State non-metro	21 491	3,1
Western Cape non-metro	13 852	2,0
Limpopo non-metro	28 219	4,1

Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

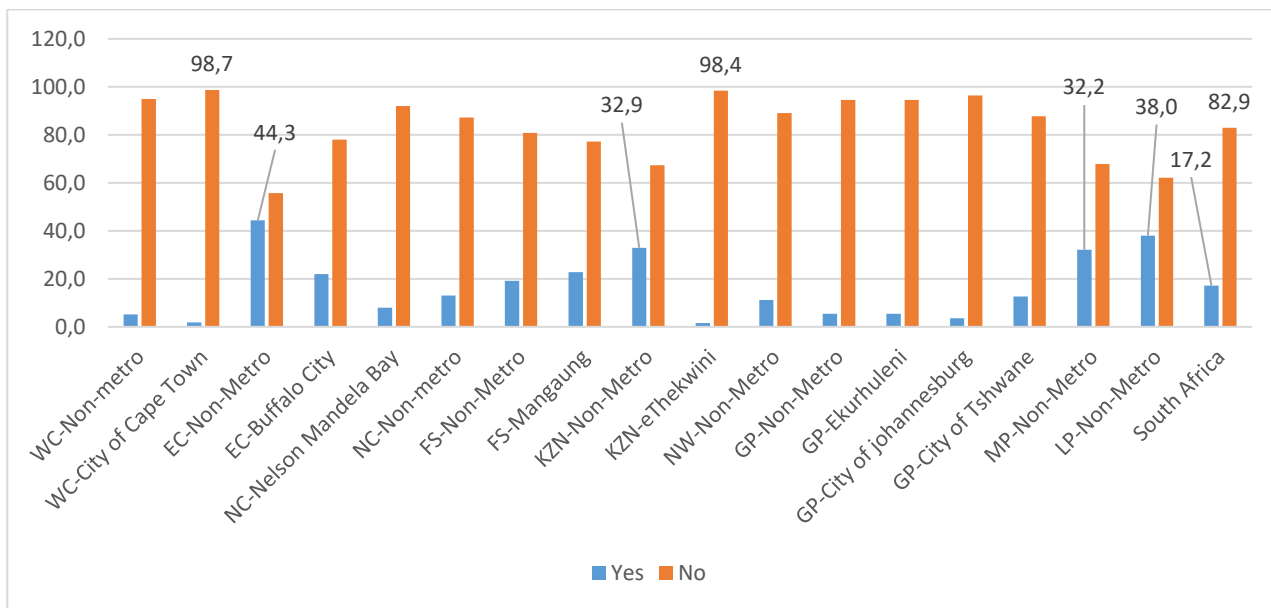
7. Factors associated with food insecurity.

Food insecurity can be influenced in the short or long term by a number of factors including employment or income, inability to produce your own food, location, size of the household, population group and sex of the household head.

7.1 Involvement in agricultural activities

There were 3,1 million (17,3%) households that were involved in agricultural activities in 2021. The proportion of households who are engaged in agricultural production is still very low, and are mainly located in non-metro and rural areas as shown in Figure 7.1.1.

Figure 7.1.1: Percentage distribution of households engaged in agricultural activities by Metro and Non-metro areas

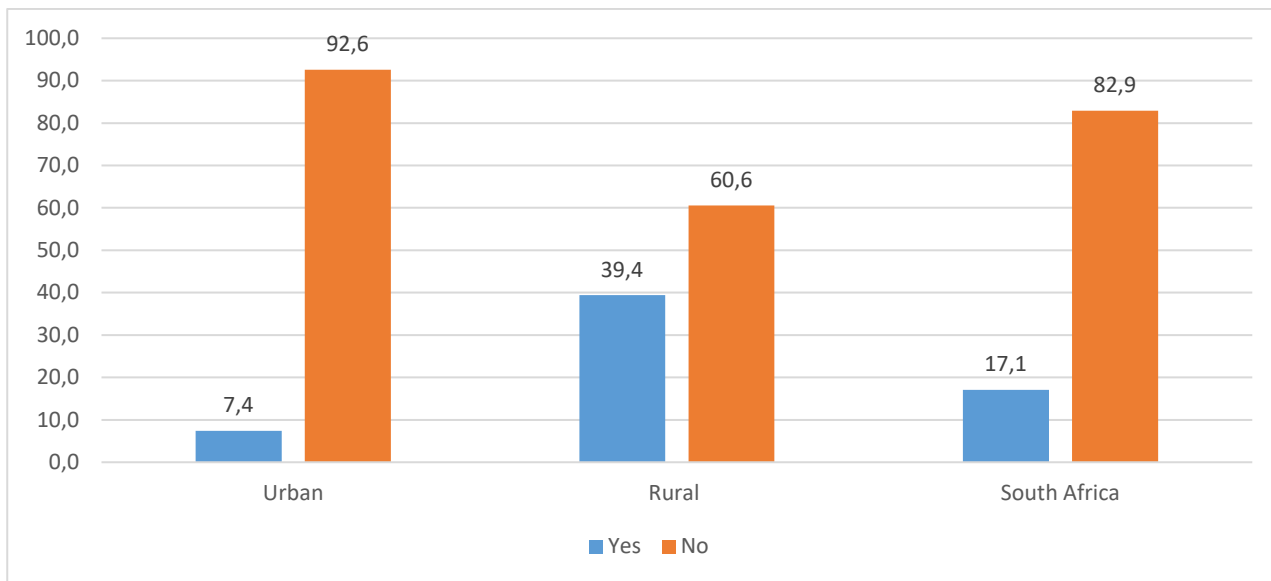


Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Provinces with large rural areas still constitute the largest proportions of households engaged in agricultural activities. Mpumalanga (32,2%), Kwa-Zulu-Natal (32,9%), and Eastern Cape (44,3%) have the highest percentages of households practising agricultural food production.

As indicated in figure 7.1.2, most households that engage in agricultural activities are found in rural areas. This is likely because households in rural areas may have access to land for such activities unlike those in urban areas.

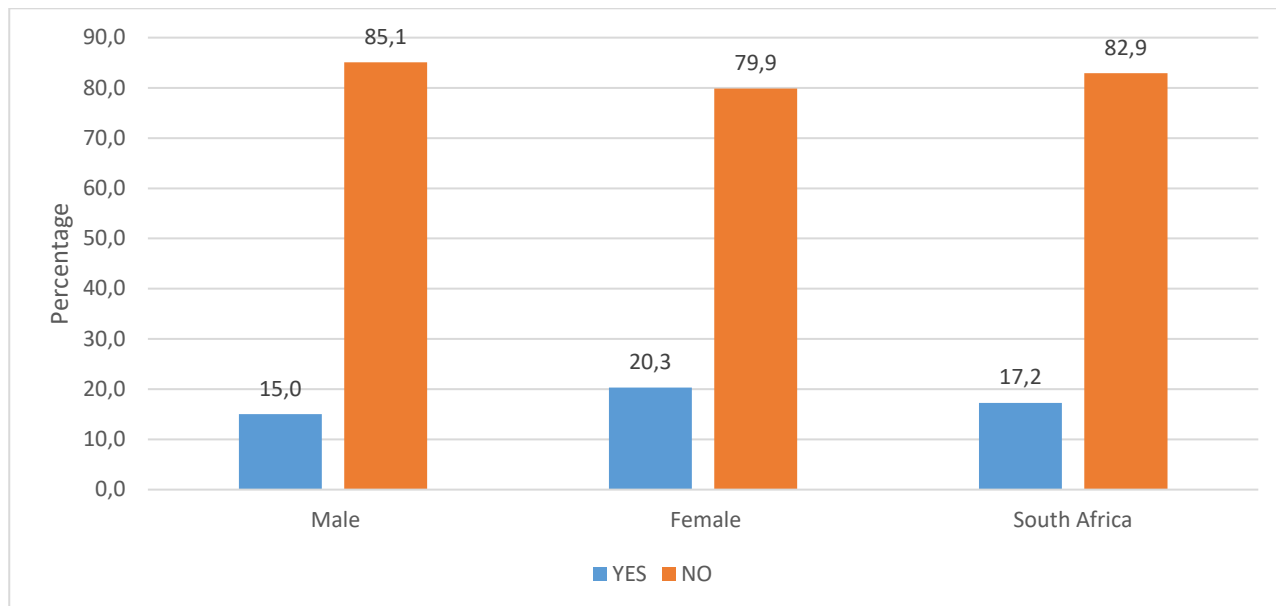
Figure 7.1.2: Percentage distribution of households engaged in agricultural activities by settlement type



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Figure 7.1.3, shows the proportion of female-headed households that are engaged in agricultural activities is slightly higher than their male counterparts. Almost one out five female-headed households were engaged in agricultural activities in 2021.

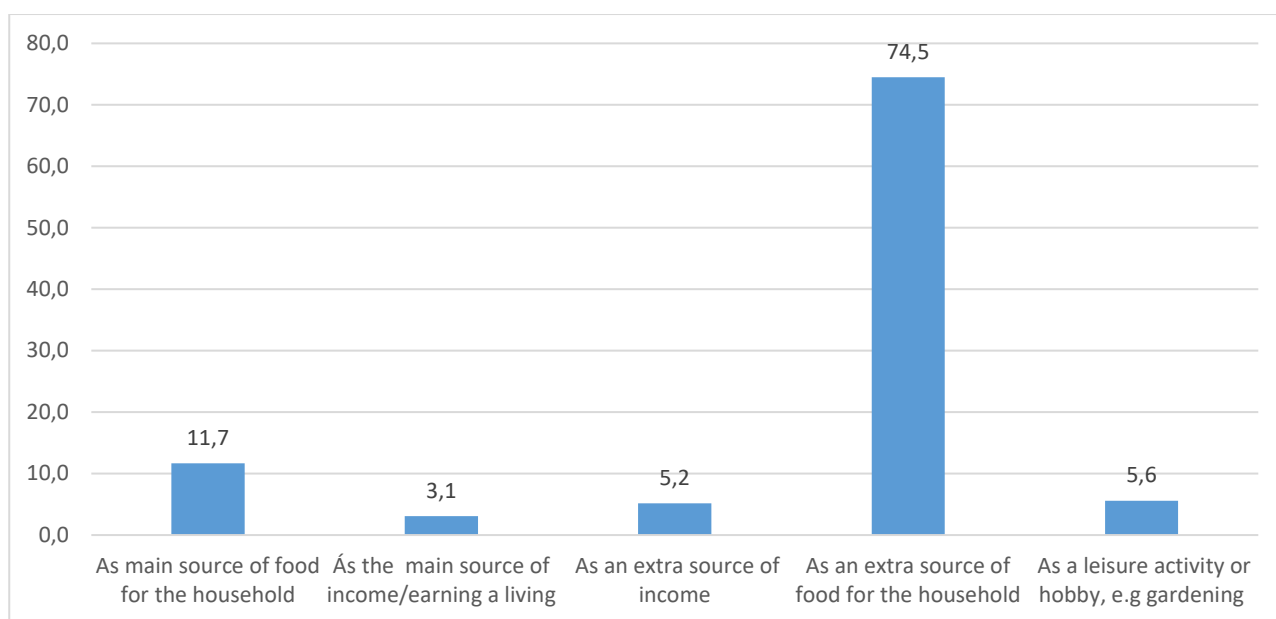
Figure 7.1.3: Percentage distribution of households engaged in agricultural activities by sex of the household head



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

Figure 7.1.4 also illustrates that out of the 3,1 million households involved in agricultural activities, almost three quarters of them do it to provide an extra source of food for the household and about 12 percent as a main source of food for the household.

Figure 7.1.4: Reasons presented by households for engaging in agricultural activities

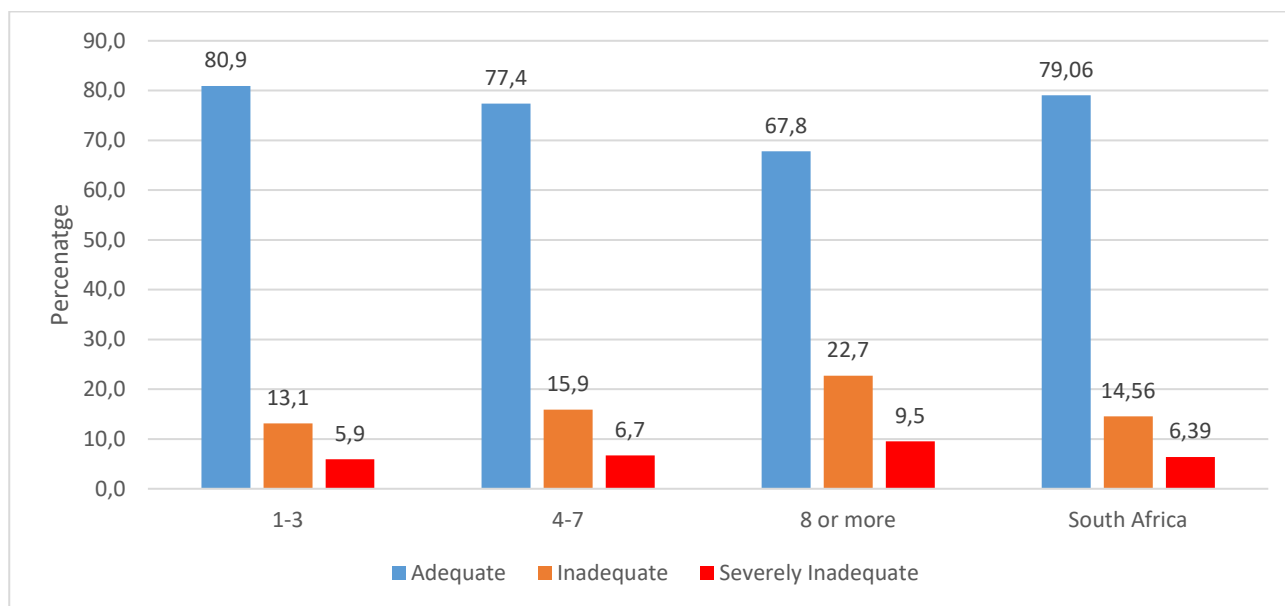


Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

7.2 Effects of household size on food access

About 81 percent of households with one to three members reported adequate access to food and almost two thirds of households with eight or more members stated that their access to food is adequate. A higher proportion of households with more than four members reported that they experience severe food inadequacy, a number that is higher than the national average. Studies have shown that households with larger numbers of members are more likely to consume more food than smaller households (figure 7.2.1).

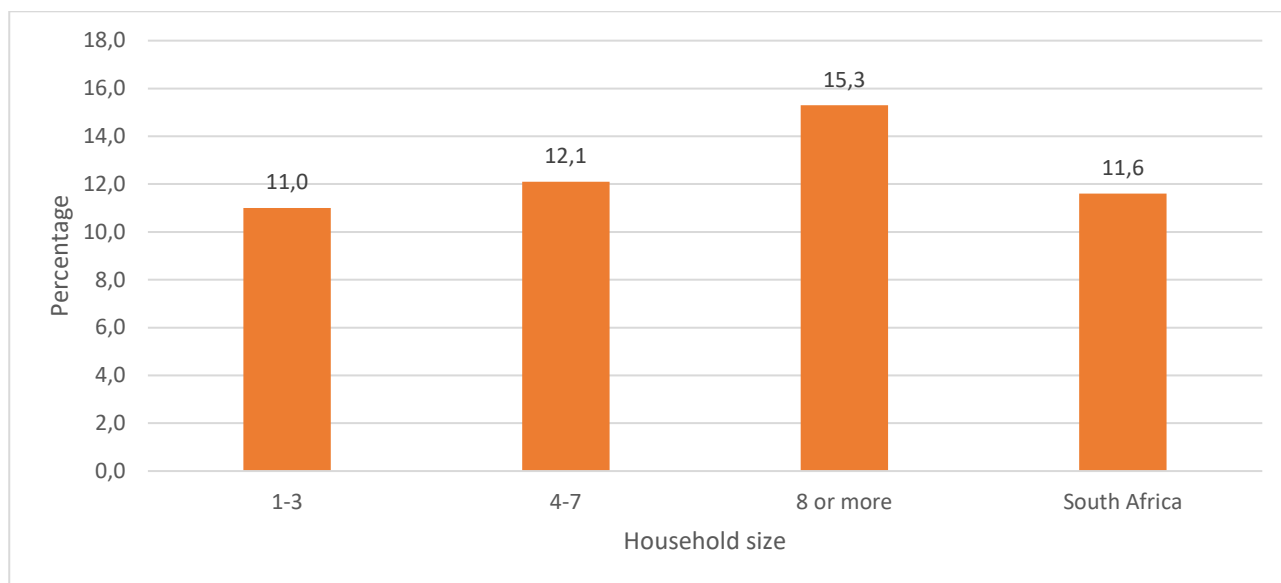
Figure 7.2.1: Levels of food access and household size



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

As mentioned earlier, households with fewer members are less likely to report hunger than those with many household members. Figure 7.2.2 indicates that 11,0 percent of households with less than four members reported that they experience hunger compared to 15,3 percent with eight or more members.

Figure 7.2.2: Percentage of households by household size and their experience of hunger

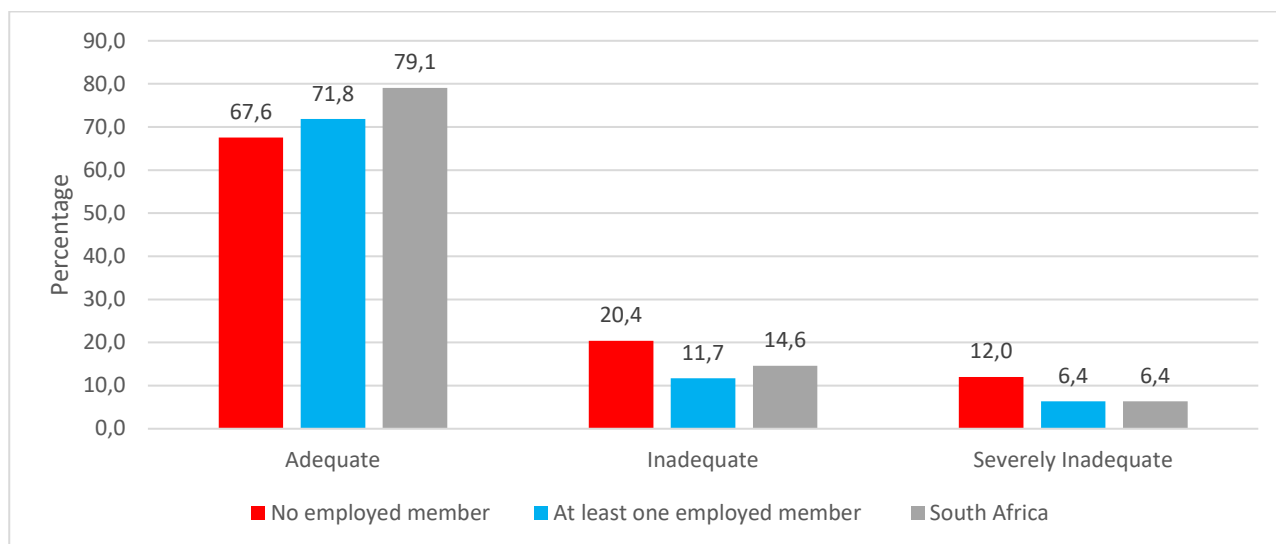


Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

7.3 Employment status and levels of adequacy in food access

Figure 7.3.1 presents employment status and levels of food access. Employment status in this section, refers to households with either no employed members or at least one member of the household that is employed (there can be more than one employed members in some households). About 72 percent of households with at least one employed member reported that their food access is sufficient and 6,4 percent experienced severe food inadequacy compared to 12 percent reported by households that did not have an employed person.

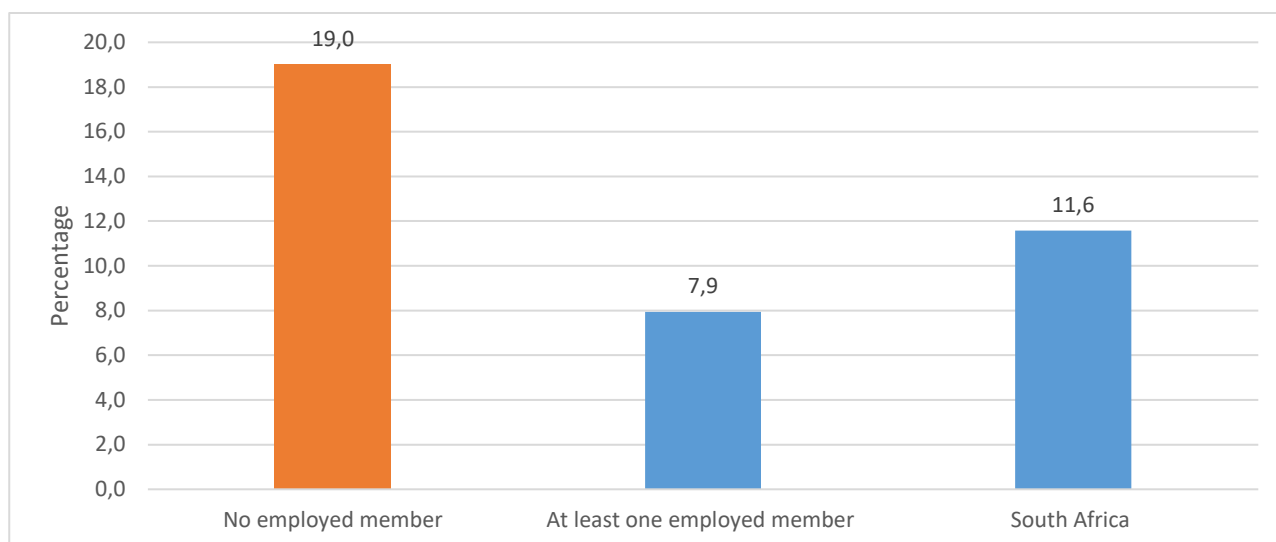
Figure 7.3.1: Proportion of households by employment status and levels of food access



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

It cannot be over-emphasised that hunger is a consequence of insufficient access to food. Having an employed person in the household can assist, as they are then able to provide the necessary financial means that can enable the household to access adequate food. A high percentage of households with no employed member reported experiencing inadequate to severe inadequate food access, and reported higher levels of hunger. Figure 7.3.2 shows that the proportion of households with no employed member that experienced hunger were more than double (19 %) compared to 7,9 percent of those that have an employed member. Employment plays a significant role in ensuring household food security.

Figure 7.3.2: Proportion of households by employment status and experience of hunger



Source: Stats SA GHS 2021

8. Summary of findings

- The number of households in South Africa were estimated to be 17,9 million in 2021. Almost eight out of ten households (14,2 million) reported that they had adequate food access, with 15 percent (2,6 million) having inadequate access and six percent (1,12 million) having severely inadequate access to food.
- Households that reported experiencing hunger in South Africa in 2021 were slightly above 2,1 million, which is about 11,6 percent of households in the country. In 2021, two thirds of these households were located in urban areas, and almost half a million of them were found in the City of Cape Town (240 970) and the City of Johannesburg (238 610).
- More than half a million (683 221) of households with young children aged five years or younger reported experiencing hunger in 2021. Of these households 20,1 percent were found in KwaZulu-Natal (non-metro) followed by 13,6 percent in the City of Johannesburg, and 12,4 percent in the City of Cape town.
- There were 3,1 million (17,3%) households who were involved in agricultural activities in 2021. The overall proportion of households who are engaged in agricultural production is still fairly low, and are mainly located in non-metro and rural areas.
- The proportion of female headed households that were engaged in agricultural activities is slightly higher than their male counterparts. One out of five female-headed households engaged in agricultural activities in 2021.
- Out of the 3,1 million households involved in agricultural activities, about 12 percent reported doing it as a main source of food for the household, and about three quarters as an extra source of food for the household.
- In terms of households that experienced hunger, the proportion of households with no employed member was 19,0 percent compared to 7,9 percent of those that had an employed member. This shows that employment plays an important part in ensuring household food security.

9. Conclusion

South Africa is facing a lot of challenges that may have an impact on the country's state of food security. Unemployment that perpetuates poverty and food insecurity is still a critical factor in improving food security in South Africa. Urban areas, particularly the biggest metros, (i.e. the City of Johannesburg and the City of Cape Town) are some of the fastest growing cities in South Africa according to United Nations (UN) projections, partly because they are the receiving areas of people seeking employment and better living conditions. A high proportion of households that reported inadequate access to food and the experience of hunger reside in these two metros compared to the other metros and non-metro areas. In addition, household participation in agricultural activities or in production of their own food need to be encouraged so that they can increase from the current low levels of less than 20 percent.

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