

# Quality of life hits rock bottom

A survey finds Gauteng residents' satisfaction levels have dropped to the lowest ever

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**M**ore than half of the respondents – 64% – in the Gauteng City-Region Observatory's (GCRO) seventh Quality of Life (QoL) survey are worried that Gauteng will run out of water.

This has escalated from 44% in 2020-21, which "reverses the trend" seen in the GCRO's previous surveys, where there was increasing confidence in the province's water supply.

A key finding is that the Quality of Life Index has dropped over two successive surveys, in 2020-21 and again in 2023-24, to its "lowest level ever".

The current dataset is made up of 13 795 Gauteng residents, with respondents randomly sampled in their homes in every ward. The data was collected from August last year to April this year.

The survey "is designed to give a regular snapshot of what life is like for residents of Gauteng", said Graeme Götz, the director of research strategy.

"It looks at socio-economic circumstances; levels of satisfaction with services and government; the values; the socio-political opinions and other characteristics of Gauteng's inhabitants," he said.

## Gauteng's water problems

According to the survey's findings on the environment, extreme events and disasters, Gauteng confronts water security difficulties, including balancing demands for limited resources; ensuring access to water for all residents; addressing pollution and flooding; meeting infrastructure upgrade requirements and addressing inadequate sanitation.

One significant problem was the water interruptions in October 2022, when Rand Water imposed level two restrictions to manage a shortfall of supply to municipal reservoirs.

Water supply issues were also experienced during an intense period of load-shedding in 2022 and last year.

The survey also found that although the proportion of respondents who are connected to piped water remains high (92% in 2023-24), the percentage of respondents who believe their water is "always clean" declined from 75% in 2020-21 to 60% in 2023-24.

This was influenced, to some extent, by respondents' experiences of water interruptions.

"Thirty-six percent of respondents who experience daily or weekly water interruptions were dissatisfied with their water, compared to only 8% of respondents who rarely experienced water interruptions," the report said.

On satisfaction with water, Midvaal had the highest proportion of satisfied respondents (88%), while Tshwane and Emfuleni had the lowest (both 67%). All the other municipalities in Gauteng saw a decline in satisfaction with water.



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## Extreme events, disasters

According to the survey results, 55% of respondents reported that their household had been severely affected by an environmental event or disaster in the past 12 months.

These are heat waves (27%); water and sewage pipe bursts (19%); air pollution (16%); flooding (14%) and lightning storms (12%).

Respondents in the City of Johannesburg reported that they had been affected by heat waves (37%), lightning (19%), flooding (19%), hail (14%), air pollution (19%) and tremors or sinkholes (17%).

Respondents in Sedibeng municipality were more likely to report that they had been affected by water and sewage pipe bursts (34%) and water pollution (9%).

These proportions varied by dwelling type.

Respondents in informal dwellings reported experiencing harm or damage from flooding (29%), heat waves (28%) and air pollution (24%), while respondents in formal dwellings said they were affected by heat waves (27%) and water and sewage pipe bursts (30%).

Seventy percent of respondents said they did not have insurance for their household assets.

Engineers and specialists think of the problem as a water-management issue, "but at a household level, it's water, electricity issues; it's cost of living issues," noted GCRO senior researcher Gillian Maree.

"At home, you don't think of water in isolation. You think of it in relation to the other issues you juggle as a household."

"If you have to spend money to clean up because you've had damage from water or if you don't have access to water and you're trying to start your own business ... or you can't wash your baby because there's no water, there's implications."

## Record temperature, rainfall changes

Gauteng has been reporting record temperature and rainfall changes in recent years, according to the findings.

"Climate modelling for Gauteng also predicts that temperatures will rise higher than global averages and storm events may become more severe," it said.

"These changes are further compounded by rapid urbanisation, population growth and poorly planned and designed settlements that characterise the province, posing a significant disaster risk," the report noted.

While the province had a severe

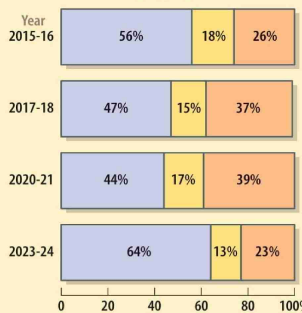
## Many affected by water cuts and hot weather

### Responses to Gauteng quality of life survey

Residents of the province are increasingly worried that Gauteng is going to run out of water

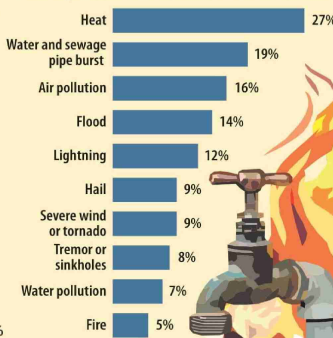
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% worried that Gauteng is going to run out of water

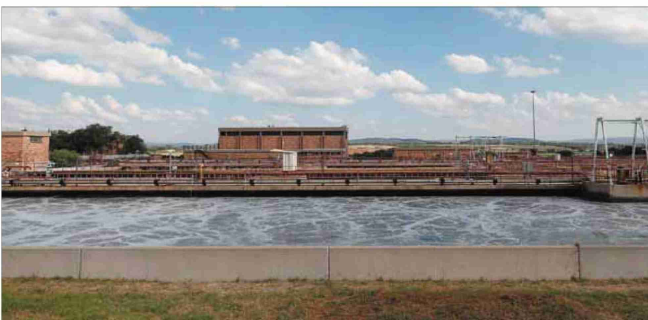


Over half of Gauteng residents reported that their household had been severely affected by an extreme environmental event or disaster in the past 12 months

% who experienced environmental events and disasters



Graphic: JOHN MCCANN Compiled by: SHEREE BEGA Data source: GCRO QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY 7 (2023-24)



**Troubled waters:** A high percentage of respondents to a survey conducted in Gauteng said that they were unhappy with the quality of their water. Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP

drought in 2016, other parts of the province regularly experienced flooding from intense thunderstorms. For example, flooding from 10 to 11 December 2022 affected areas such as Soweto, Johannesburg, Vereeniging and Brakpan.

Climate change is likely to increase the number of extreme weather events and disasters and the percentage of respondents reporting damage or harm from heat-related events is concerning, the report said.

"Climate change increases the likelihood of extreme environmental events and disasters and the data points to particular areas and challenges in future-proofing our cities and households."

## Other findings

The survey showed that poverty rates have improved from their peak during the pandemic and remain above pre-Covid levels.

A quarter of households (23%) are living below the lower bound poverty line, which is an income of R1058 per person a month in 2023 prices. During Covid it had spiked to a third (33%) of all households.

But the recovery is only partial because the proportion of people in poverty remains higher than during the pre-pandemic survey done in 2017-18 (38%).

The survey found that 85% of respondents said it was more difficult to find work than five years ago.

A quarter said that an adult in their household had skipped a meal

in the past year because there was not enough money to buy food.

Two-thirds of households make use of public health facilities and satisfaction with them is at 57%, compared to 98% for those using private healthcare services.

About 15%, up from 14% and 12% in previous surveys, are at high risk of depression, while 21% of households reported having been victims of crime.

The GCRO said that racialised inequality continues to be exemplified by African and coloured people with lower incomes "having proportionally less access to medical aid, adults and children skipping meals and having greater difficulty in saving money".

Satisfaction with basic services has declined.

"From 2013-14 to 2023-24 we see a drop in satisfaction for water (84% to 75%), sewage (78% to 61%), rubbish removal (80% to 64%), energy (78% to 42%), local roads (61% to 37%) and street lights (59% to 29%)."

## Measuring development progress

Götz said that 15 years of data "gives us a remarkable longitudinal perspective".

The data suggests "marginal improvements" from 2009 to 2017-18 across many indicators.

"But the Covid-19 global pandemic threw the Gauteng City-Region into crisis, as it did the rest of the world. It arrived in a society already struggling with low economic growth, acute unemployment levels and weakened governance capacity."

"We were hoping for signs of a post-Covid recovery. However it is clear from the QoL 7 [2023-24] survey results that Gauteng continues to face serious challenges across many dimensions," he said.

Negative sentiments had deepened as a result.

Rashid Seedat, the GCRO's executive director, said: "Gauteng households are facing a poly-crisis of poverty and unemployment; disruptions to basic services; insecurity as a result of crime and violence; poor physical and mental health outcomes; difficulties with daily mobility and extreme environmental events."

The survey found that satisfaction with all spheres of government has "been severely affected", he said.

Dissatisfaction with all spheres of government rose from 2009 to 2023-24, from 25% to 66%, 29% to 63% and 39% to 65% for national, provincial and local government, respectively. Of households, 68% now say that they do not trust government leaders compared to 54% in 2020-21.

Seedat said the fieldwork preceded the national and provincial elections at the end of May, the formation of the government of national unity and government of provincial unity in Gauteng.

"The results can't be taken as views on how well the new administrations are doing."