

Xenophobic attitudes

A shocking 69% of Gauteng city-region residents hold xenophobic attitudes, survey finds

A shocking 69% of respondents in a recent survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “foreigners are taking benefits meant for South Africans”.

The survey, undertaken by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), investigated satisfaction and quality of life among residents of Gauteng and selected areas of adjacent provinces. 6 636 residents from all walks of life responded to the survey, conducted between in August and September 2009. The high levels of xenophobia amongst respondents was one of the most surprising findings of the survey.

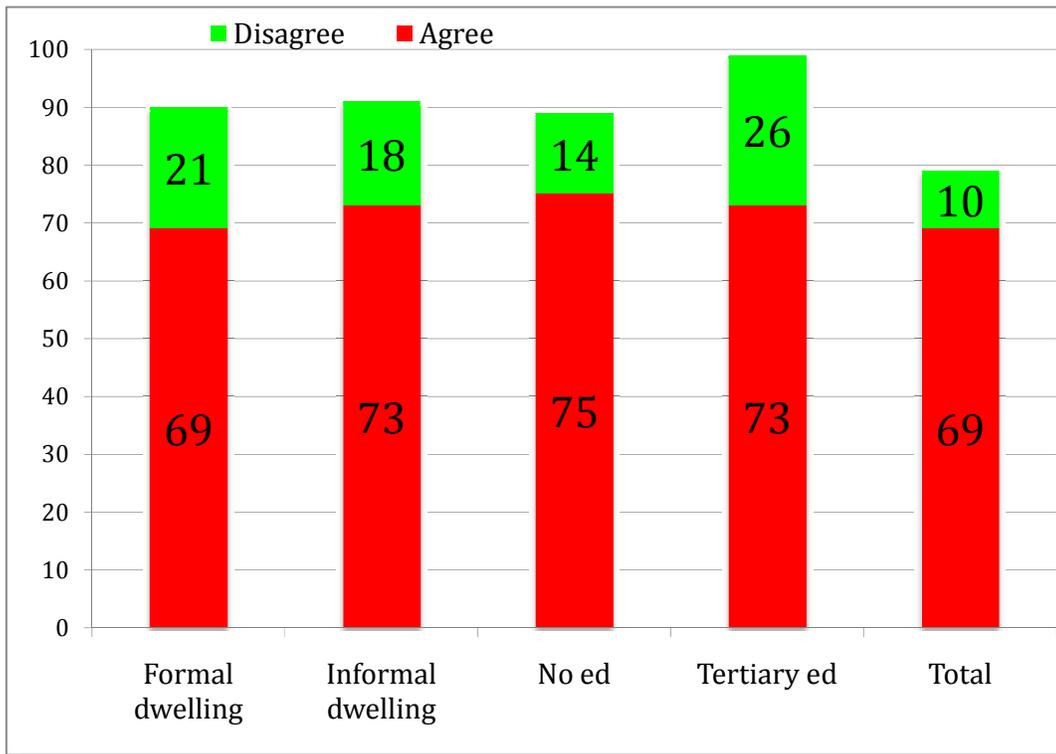
According to GCRO Senior Researcher Annsilla Nyar, xenophobic attitudes seemed to cut across race, sex and class.

69% of male respondents and 71% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that foreigners are taking benefits away from respondents. This perception was highest amongst Africans (72%) and ‘coloureds’ (77%), and only somewhat lower amongst Indian (56%) and White (56%) respondents. Respondents believed foreigners were taking benefits away from them regardless of whether they lived in an informal settlement (73%) or a formal dwelling (69%).

“Perhaps the most startling result from the GCRO’s survey was that education seemed to make little difference to pervasive xenophobic attitudes,” said Nyar. “73% of those with tertiary education thought that foreigners were taking benefits meant for them; 75% of those with no education at all thought the same. This is a frightening finding, suggesting that we have done little or nothing to combat xenophobic attitudes across society since the violence of May 2008, which killed scores of foreign migrants.”

The GCRO analysed the data across municipal areas. “Residents in some municipalities show particularly high levels of agreement with the notion of foreigners taking resources away from South Africans”, said Ms Nyar. “The highest scores were in Mogale City, where nearly 8 in 10 respondents (78%) agreed with the statement put to them. The next highest scores were found in Lesedi (73%) and Kungwini (72%). Residents in the larger and wealthier municipal areas, where jobs and resources are concentrated, display only slightly lower levels of xenophobia, with 70% of Johannesburg, 69% of Tshwane and 69% of Ekurhuleni residents agreeing that foreigners were taking things away from them.”

According to Nyar, “The results show that Gauteng residents are largely blind to the fact that ‘foreigners’ actually bring benefits to society, rather than taking them away. There is evidence to show that African migrants bring entrepreneurial skills with them, are able to start small businesses and create jobs using their own capital, and actually require no resources from the state. The survey findings are a reminder that prejudice towards foreign migrants remain alarmingly prevalent, despite the recent efforts of government and civil society to counter xenophobic violence and the conditions fostering it. Much work remains to be done.”



'Foreigners are taking benefits meant for South Africans'