

Extensive survey shows Quality of Life improving in Gauteng

The results of the Gauteng City-Region Observatory's 5th Quality of Life Survey (2017/2018) show that, despite very challenging economic conditions, overall quality of life in the province continues to improve. The survey also finds increases in residents' satisfaction with all spheres of government in the recent period.

GCRO has run its Quality of Life survey every two years since 2009. This iteration interviewed 24 889 respondents across Gauteng.

The results were launched at a high-profile event held today at the University of Johannesburg. The event was attended by Gauteng Premier David Makhura who also responded to the results.

GCRO Executive Director, Dr Rob Moore, said on the release of the survey's findings, "Economic conditions are clearly very challenging at the moment, with GDP per capita lower than it was ten years ago, and unemployment nearing 30%. In spite of this, our survey shows steady improvement in overall quality of life over time.

"It is also clear that satisfaction with government has improved since the last time the survey was run in 2015/16, in particular with provincial government. Some 44% of residents are satisfied with provincial government compared to 39% in the 2015/16 survey. While this might seem low at first glance, the recent increase in satisfaction with provincial government is significant, and this sphere now commands more satisfaction than national government (which stands at 43% satisfied) and local government (at 38%)."

Despite continued high levels of population and household growth in Gauteng, the QoL survey shows that levels of access to services have remained stable. "Access to piped water to homes and yards has remained above 90% over the decade that the survey has been conducted," Dr Moore said. "This tells us that government is broadly keeping pace with increases in demand for service connections. However, there are signs that provision of services has deteriorated significantly in some municipalities, while delivery has improved in others. This reflects in different levels of satisfaction with local government.

"Our results show that, of the major cities, Ekurhuleni is doing well and Johannesburg has marginally improved in many service areas. Smaller municipalities like Lesedi and Midvaal are also up since the last survey in 2015/16, but Emfuleni has seen significant declines in the area of refuse collection, and satisfaction with that municipality is down. Tshwane also seems to be struggling in a number of areas."

With just under 25 000 people interviewed across Gauteng's 529 wards, the 2017/18 Quality of Life Survey is one of the biggest social attitudes surveys in sub-Saharan Africa. The survey takes a multi-

dimensional approach to defining what constitutes quality of life and provides data on a wide range of topics including: access to, and satisfaction with, basic services; satisfaction with government; transport and mobility; livelihoods; migration; neighbourhood, community and family dynamics; race and gender relations; health and well-being; and political and social values and attitudes.

Levels of satisfaction with government services have varied, with some service areas showing improvements and some declines since the last Quality of Life survey in 2015/16.

Some 86% of respondents across Gauteng are satisfied with their water services, up from 83% in the last survey. Some 74% of respondents are satisfied with energy services, up marginally from 72% in 2015/16.

Satisfaction with roads has held steady at around 55% across the province but there are differences between municipalities. Dr Moore explains, “At 61% slightly more Johannesburg residents are satisfied with roads than in the 2015/16 survey. By comparison Ekurhuleni has fallen from 60% satisfied to 56% satisfied. Emfuleni has by far the lowest level of satisfaction with roads, at just 19%.”

However, Dr Moore pointed out that Ekurhuleni is outperforming the other metros on most service measures. “In important areas like cost of municipal services, billing, and waste, the province as a whole has seen big declines in resident satisfaction. This includes declines in satisfaction with costs of services and billing in Johannesburg and Tshwane. By contrast, residents of Ekurhuleni are much more satisfied with costs, billing and waste than in the last survey.”

Reflecting weak economic conditions, only 19% of respondents are satisfied with government initiatives to grow the economy. Satisfaction with public health services is also down overall, from 65% satisfied in 2015/16 to 57% in 2017/18. “This may reflect how the Life Esidimeni tragedy has seeped into public perceptions of health services, rather than a province-wide deterioration in health provision,” Dr Moore said.

Previous iterations of the survey have shown that overall satisfaction with government is typically lower than satisfaction with the essential services that government provides, and the 2017/18 results are no different. While many service measures like water or energy show satisfaction levels in the region of 70% or 80%, only 37% of respondents are satisfied with local government. According to Dr. Moore, “It is a feature of public sentiment that attitudes to local government are coloured by a range of factors beyond basic service delivery. This is a general condition where government is often held accountable for issues or conditions that are beyond its immediate mandate or control.”

Overall satisfaction with local government is up marginally in Ekurhuleni (43% satisfied), Johannesburg (38%) and Tshwane (34%). But satisfaction with Emfuleni is down, with only 19% satisfied. Emfuleni’s residents also indicate the highest dissatisfaction with local government in the province, with 64% reporting being dissatisfied.

Across Gauteng, respondents report that the three biggest problems in their communities are crime (32% of respondents), unemployment (18%), and drug and alcohol abuse (16%).

Measured as a whole through a 'Quality of Life index' made up of 58 different variables, overall quality of life has increased from a value of 6.02 (out of a possible 10.0) in 2011 to the current value of 6.30, which represents a significant shift in the right direction. Dr. Moore notes that this improvement is in the face of difficult economic conditions and continued high in-migration.

“Some dimensions of the index, such as a group of variables dealing with 'Work', keep pulling the index down. For example there have been 7% declines in the percentage of respondents saying, respectively, that are satisfied with their standard of living and satisfied with working conditions in their jobs. However, other variables have jumped higher, pulling the index up. So for example there was a 14% increase in the percentage of respondents saying others in their community can be trusted, an 11% increase in those saying it is important to look after the environment, and a 27% jump in the percent participating in community organisations and clubs. All these variables have pushed up the 'Community' dimension of the index dramatically.”

While the overall trend is positive, quality of life differs significantly across racial groups. White respondents indicate a fairly substantial improvement in overall quality of life, while African respondents experienced a substantially smaller improvement in quality of life. Dr Moore noted, “While the overall improvement in measured quality of life is encouraging, this disparity demonstrates the high levels of inequality that continue to plague the Gauteng City-Region.”

Commenting on the value of the QoL data in assisting policymakers to tackle socio-economic challenges, Dr Moore observed, “As an independent, trusted and respected survey, the QoL data is highly valued by government, civil society and academic researchers. The data is both demographically and spatially representative. This allows local, provincial and national Government to use the data for policy and decision making, target setting, and to gauge success in their implementation of initiatives. Both provincial and local government are increasingly making use of this data to respond proactively to different issues that arise in particular places.”

Focusing on urban issues in the Gauteng City-Region, the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) is a partnership between the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG), and organised local government in Gauteng (SALGA-Gauteng). Key findings and more detailed results from the Quality of Life Survey are available on the GCRO website www.gcro.ac.za.

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About the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO)

The GCRO is a research institute that helps to build the knowledge base that government, business, labour, civil society and residents all need to make the Gauteng City-Region competitive, spatially integrated, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. The GCRO collects data and benchmarks the city-region; provides policy analysis and support; undertakes applied research; publishes critically reflective academic work; and participates in international conferences and exhibitions. GCRO is a partnership between the Gauteng Provincial Government, the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), and organized local government in Gauteng (SALGA-Gauteng).

Note to Editors

More information, headline findings and the press pack are available on our website (<http://gcro.ac.za/research/project/detail/quality-of-life-survey-v-201718/>):

1. Continuing improvement in the Quality of Life index over time
 2. Quality of life remains lowest for African respondents and is not catching up
 3. Access to many basic services remains high, but there are challenges with refuse removal
 4. Reliable provision of water poses a challenge
 5. Decreasing satisfaction with services
 6. Increasing satisfaction with provincial government
 7. Satisfaction with government is strongly related to Quality of Life
 8. African respondents increasingly likely to see politics as a waste of time
 9. A quarter of respondents have seen a protest in their community in the last year
 10. Respondents who list drugs as the biggest community problem are spatially concentrated
 11. Having no access to parks impacts respondents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood
 12. Respondents more willing to pay e-tolls than in previous years
 13. More adults report skipping meals, particularly in poorer households
 14. Only about half of respondents have all of their child dependants living with them
 15. Families living in more affluent areas more likely to send children to private schools
 16. More than half of business owners in Gauteng operate in the informal sector
 17. International migrants more likely than other respondents to own a business
 18. Most respondents agree that inter-racial dating and marriage is acceptable
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Media contact

Karen Eicker on behalf of the GCRO
+27 82 215 1361 / + 27 11 646 9200
karen@apexcommunications.co.za