

2. Livelihoods & poverty

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The challenge of poverty (and people's associated livelihoods) remains high on South Africa's development agenda. The National Development Plan, for example, aims to eliminate poverty by 2030. Here we unpack initial insights into dynamics of livelihoods and poverty in Gauteng, as reflected in the GCRO's 2015 Quality of Life (QoL) survey.

Do Gauteng residents frequently go hungry?

Food security (referring to economic and physical access to the food required to maintain a healthy lifestyle for all people) is an important indicator of relative poverty. It remains a challenge in Gauteng.

In the 2013 QoL survey, 14% of respondents said they or another adult in the household had skipped a meal sometime in the last year because of a lack of money. 11% of households that had children in them said a child had skipped a meal sometime in the last year. In 2015 the food security question was asked slightly differently. This time, 13% of respondents said that adults in their households 'always', 'often' or 'sometimes' skipped a meal. A further 6% said 'seldom', making up a total of 19% of households that were food insecure on this measure. In 2015 11% of households with children in them said that children 'always', 'often' or 'sometimes' skipped a meal. This is equivalent to 2013, but a further 5% said that children in the household 'seldom' went hungry, making up 16% who were food insecure on this measure.

Growing own food

Food security can be increased by growing one's own food, although it does need to be recognised that growing food itself takes financial and other resources, and is often a risky proposition. Cultural and circumstantial factors – such as whether the household can access land – also intervene, which means the choice whether or not to grow food is not simply a matter of economically rational decision-making, and in turn the growing of food is not a neat indicator of poverty.

In the 2015 QoL survey 11% of respondents said they grow their own food, compared to 7% in 2013. People are more likely to grow their own food for eating rather than selling it to raise incomes (Figure 1). Only in a few municipalities in Gauteng, such as in Lesedi, do a larger proportion of respondents also grow food to sell, but even here they are in a minority.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of wards where high concentrations of respondents grow their own food. People are more likely to grow their own food in areas like Sebokeng, Bronkhorstspuit and Soshanguve, compared to people in areas like central Johannesburg, Tembisa and Hammanskraal. We find that in some areas, like Sebokeng, high proportions of respondents growing their own food coincide with high proportions of people who skip meals. However, this relationship is not consistent throughout the province and highlights again the complex interaction between food insecurity and households' own-production of food. Various factors need to be considered in understanding people's choice and ability to grow their own food.

One such factor worth noting is the significant impact of school feeding schemes, which according to the 2015 QoL results benefit over 2 million children in Gauteng (Figure 3). Coverage varies across municipalities, indicating the relative depth of poverty in different parts of the province. 26% of Johannesburg respondents say they have children benefitting from school feeding schemes. The percentage rises to 39% in Merafong and 40% in Randfontein.

The impact of social grants

One of the most prominent government interventions aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality is social grants. 41% of respondents indicated that someone in their household receives a social grant. This is marginally up from 38% in the 2013 QoL survey.

Despite their importance, it is clear that social grants do not yet provide comprehensive assurance that primary needs are met in all vulnerable households. Figure 4 shows that in households where someone received a social grant 74% of respondents said it was never the case that they or another adult skipped a meal. In households that did not get a social grant, 86% of respondents said no adult had skipped a meal. Two issues are highlighted here. First, even where social grants are received about a quarter (26%) of households are still affected by food insecurity. Second, while it is logical that the large majority of households not receiving social grants are also not affected by food insecurity, there remain a significant 14% of food insecure households that are not covered by social grants.

Investing in unlikely bonanzas

Nearly a quarter of Gauteng's population (23% of respondents) buy lotto tickets on a regular basis (either 'every week' or a 'couple of times a month'). This suggests that many people continue to invest in the remote chance of a financial windfall to alter their circumstances, and that this faith is remarkably consistent across income brackets (Figure 5). Although lower income levels do inhibit lotto purchases, 21% to 24% of households in the lowest income brackets still buy lotto tickets regularly, with mid-level earners being the most likely chance-takers. In the more affluent households, just less than 20% of respondents buy lotto tickets regularly.

Debt, saving and asset ownership

About 40% of respondents have some form of debt against their names or households. This has significantly increased, by 10%, since 2013. Households who earn more money are more likely to also be in debt, presumably due to asset investments, but more concerning is that the uptick in incidence of debt in 2015 over 2013 is most marked in lower income groups (Figure 6).

For the first time respondents in the 2015 QoL survey were asked whether they found it easy or difficult to save money (Figure 7). Only 22% said it was easy or very easy. 78% said it was difficult to impossible. It is important to note that responses differ markedly by race. Only 18% of African respondents said it was easy or very easy to save money, compared to 37% of white respondents.

Asset ownership is an important indicator of relative levels of material sufficiency and deprivation. Figure 8 shows once again the primacy placed on cell-phones as a means of personal and societal connectivity. Furthermore the 2015 QoL survey shows positive improvements in access to telecommunication devices and infrastructure. Some of the biggest increases were in ownership of a personal computer, laptop or tablet, from 28% in 2013 to 34% in 2015, and in an internet connection from 19% to 30%. Along with almost universal access to cell-phones, these gains suggest potentially enhanced access to opportunities available in the broader environment.

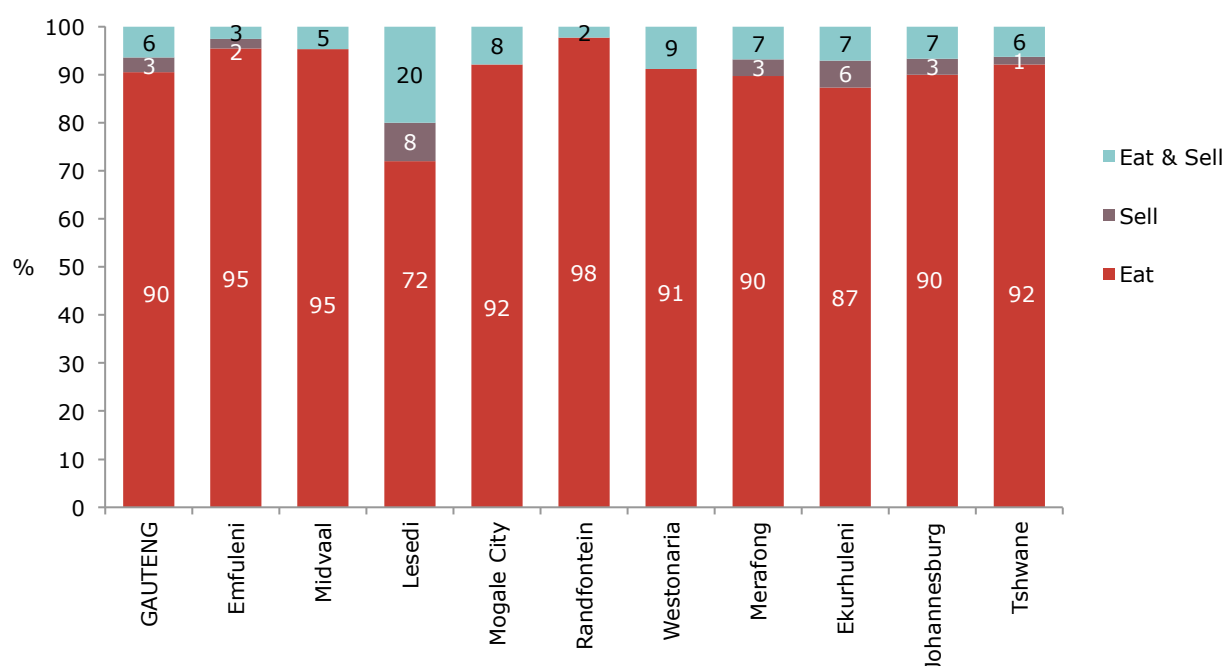


Figure 1: Households who grow their own fruit or vegetables. In Gauteng, 90% of all the people who grow food do so for their own consumption. This holds across municipalities in the province, with the exception of Lesedi, where more than 20% of people who grow their own food also sell the food.

Do you grow your own food?

% per ward (to eat, to sell, to eat and sell)

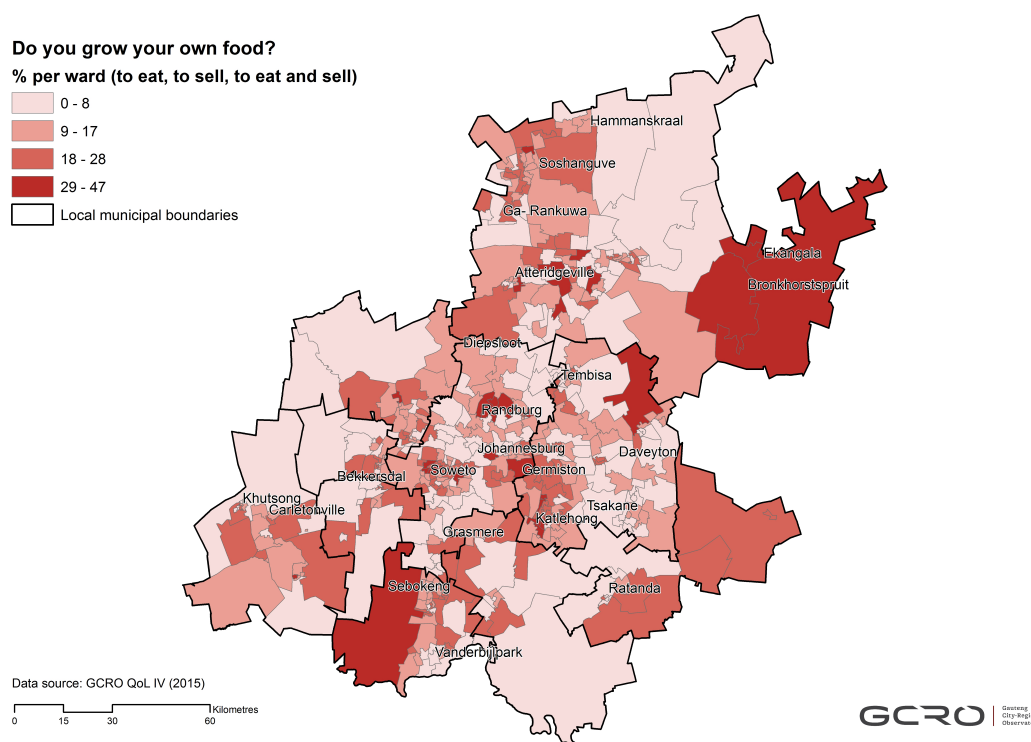
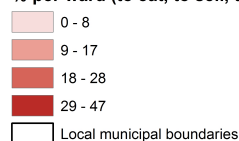


Figure 2: Spatial distribution of households growing their own food. There are patches of high and low concentrations of people growing their own food at the core and periphery of the province. In central Johannesburg, Hammanskraal, Tembisa and Daveyton less than 8% of respondents say they grow their own food. By contrast, 29-47% of respondents grow their own food in areas around Sebokeng, Bronkhorstspuit and parts of Randburg.

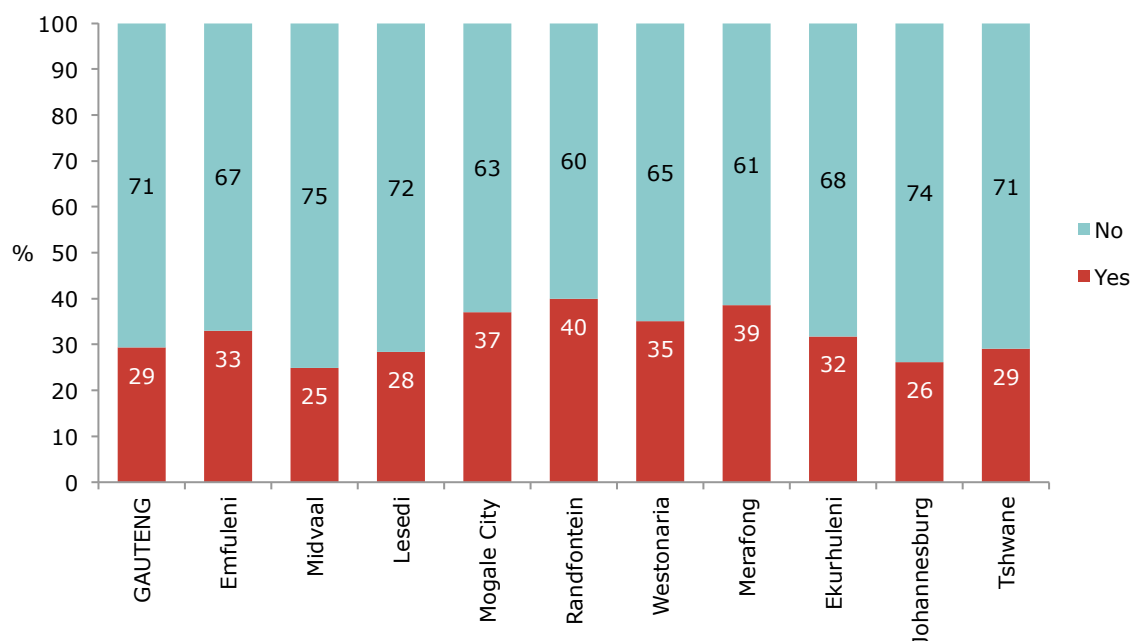


Figure 3: Children in this household benefit from a school feeding scheme. 29% of children benefit from school feeding schemes in Gauteng. Randfontein (40%), Merafong (39%), Mogale City (37%) and Westonaria (35%) have the largest proportions of children who benefit from school feeding schemes. Only Midvaal, Lesedi and Johannesburg have smaller proportions of children who benefit from school feeding schemes, compared to the provincial average.

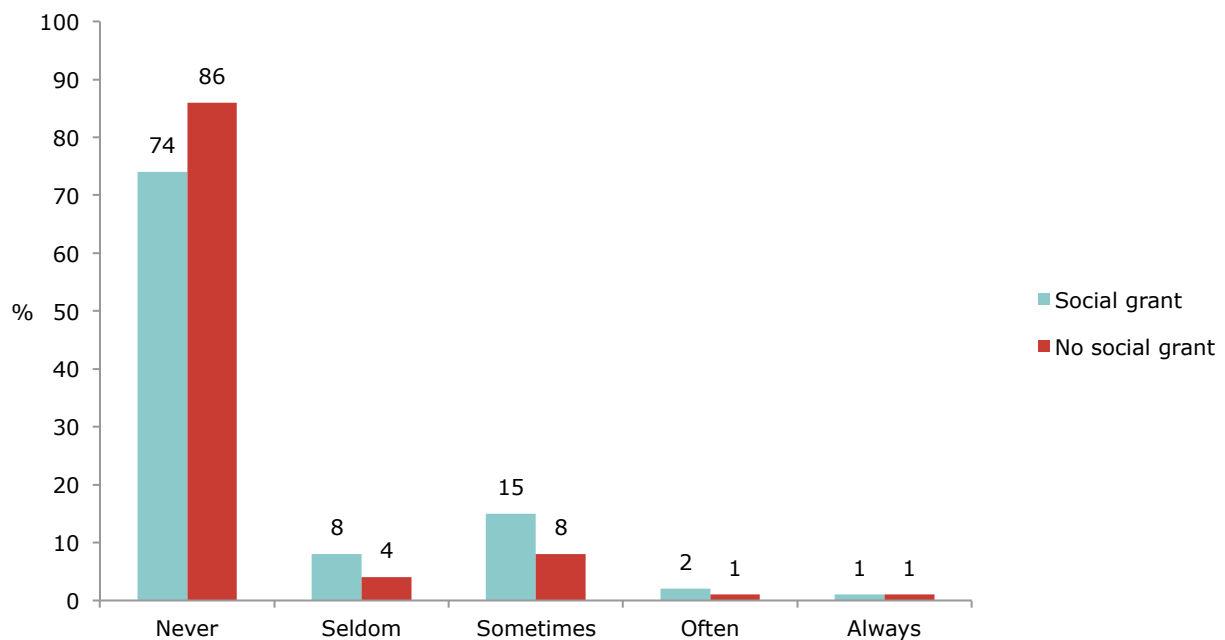


Figure 4: Social grants and frequency of respondent or other adult skipping a meal. In slightly more than a quarter (26%) of households where someone receives a social grant there is also an adult who had to skip a meal at some point during the past year. 15% say this happens 'sometimes' and 2% say this happens 'often'. On the other hand 14% of households that are affected by food insecurity are not covered by a social grant.

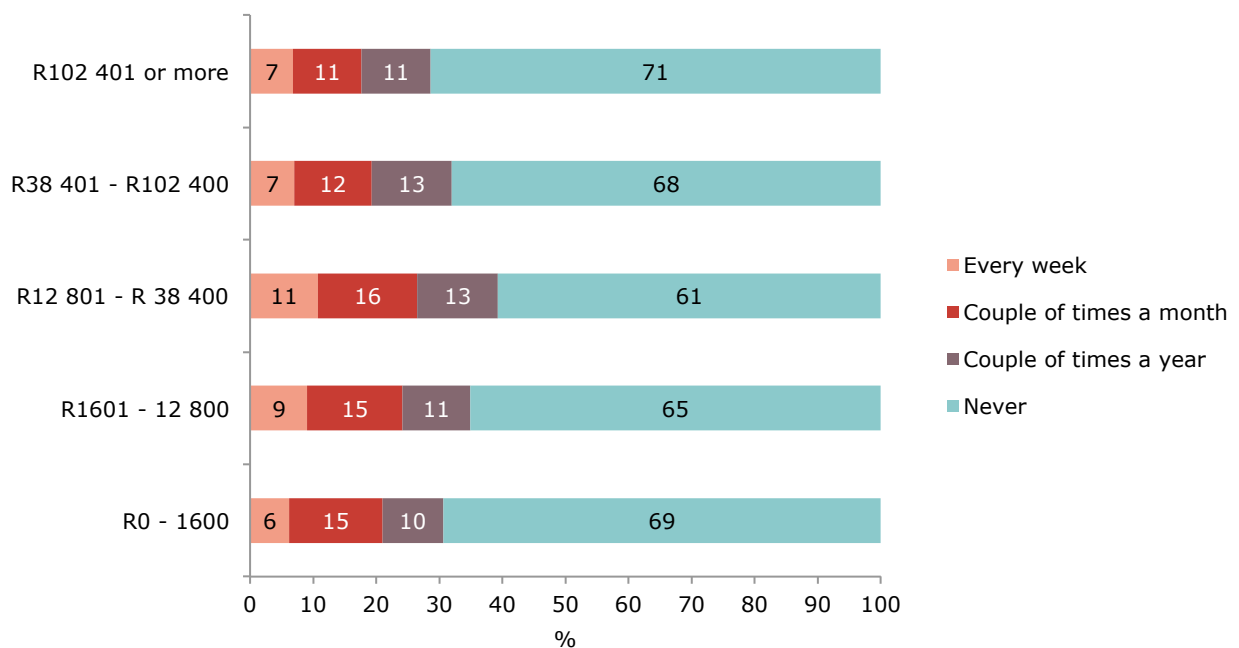


Figure 5: Investment in lotto tickets by income groups. Of those respondents in households that earn less than R1 600 a month (including those people who said they earned no income), 21% buy lotto tickets regularly (every week or a couple of times a month). Almost a quarter (24%) of those in households earning between R1 600 and R12 800 also buy lotto tickets regularly, but the people who are most likely to buy lotto tickets regularly are those with household income between R12 801 and R38 400 (26%).

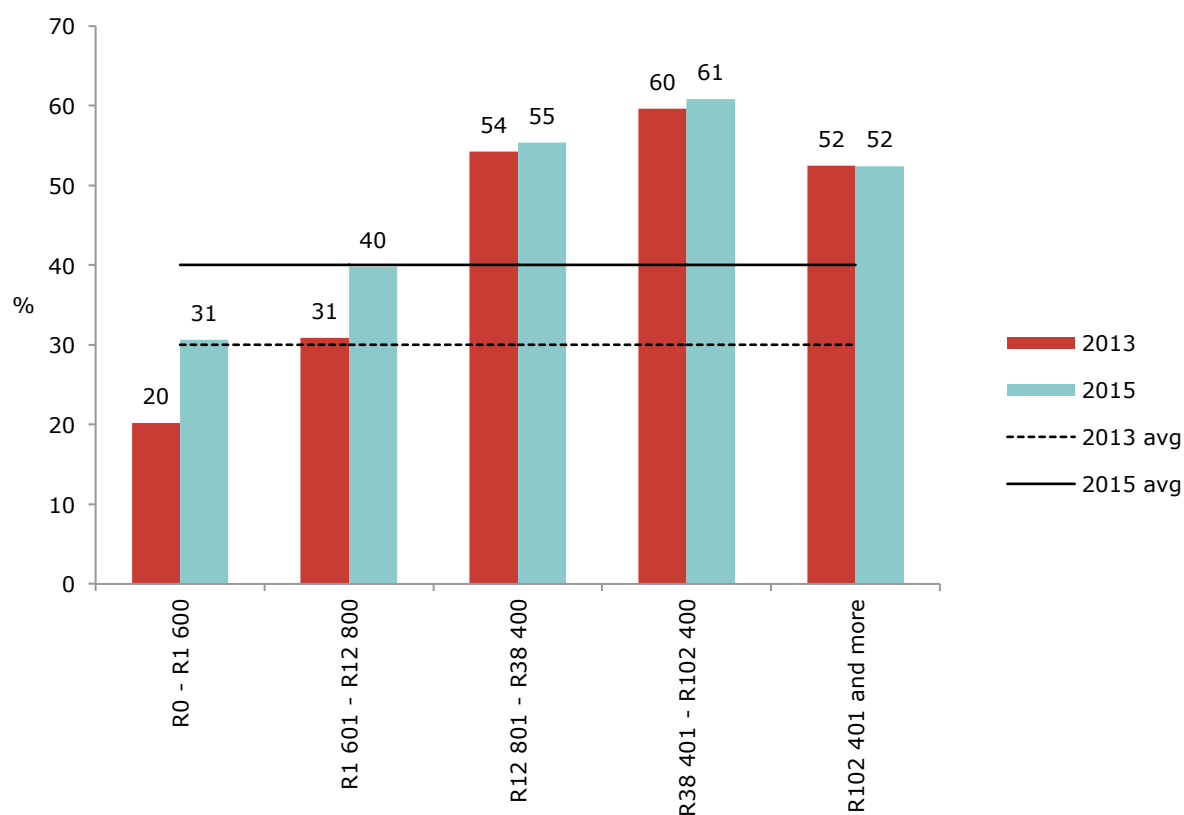


Figure 6: Proportions of indebtedness per income group (2013 & 2015). Those in middle-income brackets tend to carry the highest likelihood of indebtedness. However, the sharp increase in proportions of indebtedness (between 9 – 11%) in Gauteng is carried by respondents in lower income groups.

	How easy or difficult do respondents find it to save money? (%)	
	Very easy - easy	Difficult - impossible
African	18	82
Coloured	22	78
Indian/Asian	37	63
White	37	63

Figure 7: The ease of saving money (by race).

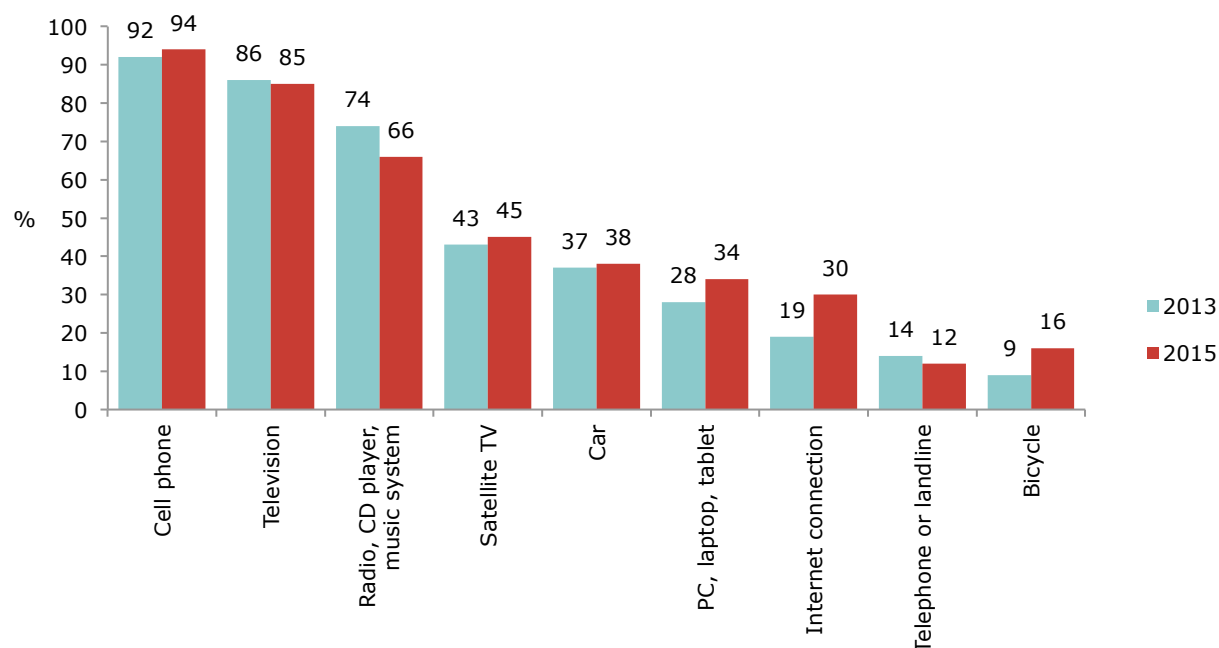


Figure 8: Household assets – Owned and in working order. There have been numerous changes in access to assets since 2013. Most notable changes occurred in access to PCs, laptops or tablets (up by 6%), internet connections (up by 11%) and bicycles (up by 7%). Note that 82% of respondents in the 2015 QoL survey own a fridge in good working order but this was not recorded in 2013.

OTHER RECENT RESEARCH IN THIS THEME:

- Poverty and inequality in the Gauteng City-Region (2016 forthcoming) by Darlington Mushongera, GCRO Research Report
- Hungry City-Region (2016 forthcoming) by Caryn Abrahams, GCRO Occasional Paper
- A multidimensional poverty index for Gauteng (February 2015) by Darlington Mushongera et al., GCRO Map of the Month
- The GCRO Barometer (2014) by Darlington Mushongera, GCRO Interactive website

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