

Living in the Gauteng City-Region: overview

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The Gauteng City-Region

The idea of a global city-region emerged in the early 2000s with the realisation that there was a single urban extent that covered the three main cities in Gauteng – Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni – as well as secondary cities such as Mogale – but that the functional economy included sites such as Rustenburg, Middelburg, Sasolburg and other places beyond Gauteng's borders. With better internal collaboration across metropolitan and municipal (and provincial) boundaries, the city-region could compete externally – and would be comparable to the major global city-regions.

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory was created by the Gauteng Provincial Government, in partnership with the University of Johannesburg and University of the Witwatersrand, to benchmark the city-region globally. A first step was to generate accurate baseline data about the people living in the Gauteng city-region (GCRR), against which future comparisons can be made. GCRO commissioned a sample of 6643 respondents – generating data with an error bar of 1,3% - in late 2009. This covered the whole of Gauteng in detail, and also sampled GCR 'footprints' in four neighbouring provinces.

Topline results

The GCR continues to act as a major magnet drawing people into the area, according to Prof Everatt. A fifth of respondents (20%) were not living in Gauteng five years ago, and of those, three-quarters (73%) had moved to Gauteng in the 2007-2009 period. In other words, as economic conditions worsened with the oil price surge of 2007/08 followed by the global economic recession, so movement to the economic hub increased considerably. The provincial population growth – the fastest in the country since 1990 – seems set to keep growing at a remarkable pace. Keeping up with this growth is already a major challenge for government,

People come to GCR not always to live, but to make money and return home. A third (30%) of respondents do not consider the province to be home, in turn begging the question about their expectations – do people migrate to Gauteng to live, or to work, maximise income and leave, not wishing to pay rent and service charges while in the province? How should government tailor services to meet these different types of migrant?

Delivery successes & challenges

Although the province faces considerable delivery challenges, these are relatively small when seen in the national context. Access to RDP-level water is the norm in the GCR, although sanitation and refuse removal remain challenging. It is worth noting moreover that of those who get water, 7% complain that it is 'hardly ever' or 'never' clean, indicating that maintenance of infrastructure is a challenge for Gauteng as elsewhere.

Among respondents, 1.5% lacked sanitation below the level of a chemical toilet, worst in Midvaal (5.1%) and Nokeng (3%). In all 9% of respondents lacked refuse removal. Nine in ten respondents had access to electricity for lighting. On the negative side, arrears for water and electricity were hovering around one in ten, with 4% having had their water cut off due to non-payment, 5% having had the same happen to their electricity.

Crime topped the list of problems facing respondents, cited by 46%, followed by unemployment (14%), HIV/AIDS (7%), housing (7%) and poverty (5%). A fifth (21%) of respondents had been victims of crime in the 12 months prior to being surveyed, and a quarter felt unsafe or very unsafe in their own homes. This remains a core challenge for local and provincial governments in the GCR.

Debt was widespread: just 7% of respondents told us they were not paying back money in any form (from a mortgage to a loan-shark). Connectivity was high, with 89% of respondents' households including a cell-phone, 87% with a TV, 87% with a radio and 18% with an internet connection.

But poverty remained part of the city-region narrative. One in twenty (5%) respondents told us they eat one meal per day, 17% had to skip meals due to lack of money, and 14% of respondents (with children in the household) had been unable to feed their children due to lack of money in the 12 months prior to being interviewed. Asked to describe themselves and offered the choice of upper, middle or lower class (the same options used in a survey of Soweto residents a few years back), 40% of respondents insisted that they were none of these – they were simply “poor”. (Just 2% described themselves as upper class.)

Government

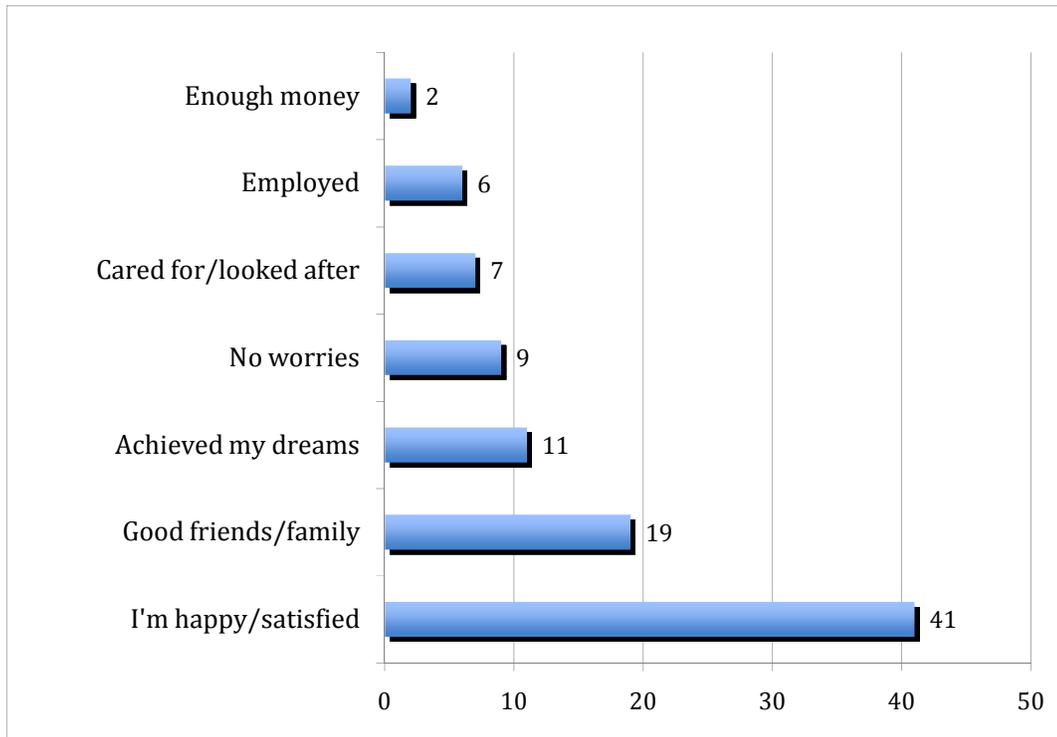
Asked about government, 57% were satisfied with the national sphere's performance, 50% were happy with the provincial sphere – high for this kind of study, given that so many people do not know what functions the provincial sphere is responsible for – but just 40% were satisfied with their local government.

The local elections promise to be robust, with 13% telling us they were very dissatisfied with the local sphere, and 27% merely 'dissatisfied'. But the picture is not sanguine: asked which sphere of government had done most to help the respondent improve their quality of life, 27% replied 'none of them', suggesting that dissatisfaction with government generally is fairly widespread. This may underlie some of the protests that have marked the GCR landscape for the last year or two.

Living for the city

City-regions provide high-end quality of life – but the question is, to what proportion of Gautengers? In the survey, respondents tended towards the positive when respondents were asked to reflect on their lives overall: 46% were satisfied or very satisfied (16% in the latter category), a fifth (21%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and the remaining third (34%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (10% in this last category). And this is important – city-regions are robust, energetic, creative, wealthy, stylish places, and it should not be surprising to find that almost half of those respondents living in the GCR feel positively satisfied with their lives. It is easy to lose sight of this fact when bombarded on a daily basis

with the tales of violence and human turpitude that make for mainstream media reportage in Gauteng, according to Prof Everatt.



Most of those who were positive, when asked why they said so, had no answer beyond the fact that they were happy or satisfied. Others ascribed it their friends or family, one in ten had achieved their dreams, a similar proportion had 'no worries', others felt cared for and finally – the smallest proportion of those who were satisfied – had either work or sufficient money to feel good.

Equality and inclusiveness – the key policy goals

The Gauteng City-Region remains a place of contrasts, of wealth and poverty, of reconciliation and xenophobia, and so on. And while the city-region remains a magnet for migrants from South Africa and beyond, the majority of citizens are enjoying the quality of life provided by the biggest economy on the continent located in an emerging space – the city-region – that includes World Heritage sites alongside informal settlements, globally competitive industries alongside massive unemployment, suggesting that the key challenge facing all of us is the search for equality, for lessening the gap between the extremes, and making the city-region inclusive and sustainable.