

World Food Day – South Africa’s food security at lowest point in over a decade

According to the **South African Food Security Index 2024**, developed by two economists from the University of Stellenbosch, food security is at its lowest point in over a decade.

The Index evaluates four dimensions of food security, namely availability, access, utilisation and overall stability, from 2012 to 2023, and creates a baseline to measure food security in South Africa yearly using publicly available and annually updated data.

While South Africa peaked at 64.9 on the Index in 2019, this number dropped to 45.3 in 2023 (zero indicates severe food insecurity). It means that, on average, more South Africans experienced greater (deeper) food insecurity in 2023, compared to any other year between 2012 and 2023.

“One of most concerning observations drawn from the Index is that child hunger remains a major issue. As many as one in four children are growth stunted – a number which is especially alarming given the country’s overall level of economic development,” commented Sanjeev Raghubir, Chief Sustainability Officer for the Shoprite Group.

Africa’s largest food retailer commissioned the South African Food Security Index 2024 to enable a deeper understanding of the state of food security, to highlight where some of the biggest gaps may exist and to help inform better decision making.

Additional takeouts from the Index include:

- One in four of the poorest households reported that children in their homes went hungry in 2023;
- Male-headed households have lower risks of hunger (12.5% in rural areas and 8.7% in urban areas) than female-headed households (16.7% in rural areas and 11.9% in urban areas).
- By 2023, 11.8% of households said they were consuming a lower variety of food than usual given economic constraints.
- Food security varies significantly across the country. While Limpopo performs surprisingly well, the Eastern Cape had moved into “poor” territory by 2023;
- At a national level, food availability declined from a peak of 2.8 tons of raw food per person per year in 2017 to 2.6 tons in 2022.

While the Index highlights that food security in the country could worsen over the next decade if immediate interventions are not implemented, it also shows that South Africa has drastically reduced hunger levels in the past. Doing so again is possible and will require a concerted and collaborative effort by policymakers and relevant stakeholders.

“The findings of South African Food Security Index 2024 add further fuel to our daily obsession with affordability and accessibility to ensure that our most price-sensitive customers can put food on the table,” continues Raghubir.

“We will continue to fight hunger by offering the lowest possible prices in our Shoprite and USave stores, our extensive surplus food donation programme, fleet of mobile soup kitchens and the development of community food gardens.”

To access the full report XXX.

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Notes to Editor:

The Index was compiled by Prof Dieter von Fintel, the Vice Dean for Research, Internationalisation and Postgraduate Affairs in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University and Dr Anja Smith, a development economist and part-time researcher at the Research on Socio-Economic Policy (ReSEP) at Stellenbosch University's Economics Department and co-founder of Beam, a research communication collective. The report uses a wide variety of data sources, ranging from original quantitative data, as well as secondary data, academic literature and policy reports produced on food security and nutrition in South Africa.