

Decent Work

Half of all employees in Gauteng do not enjoy decent work, says survey

According to a recent large sample survey half of all jobs in Gauteng do not meet a standard that qualifies them to be called decent work. The finding highlights the issues raised by President Jacob Zuma at a May Day gathering in Durban. Zuma was quoted as saying that government is planning to introduce new laws to promote decent work for all employees. The survey data suggest that regulation is certainly required in this area.

The survey, conducted by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory in late 2009, sampled 6 636 respondents from across Gauteng and densely populated areas just outside Gauteng's boundaries. Respondents were asked a wide range of questions about their quality of life, including ones on their employment and conditions of work.

"Eleven questions in the survey probed aspects of employment that could generally be regarded as criteria for decent work," explains Sizwe Phakathi, Senior Researcher at the GCRO. "These included whether the employee had an employment contract, company-provided training/education, paid sick leave, family leave, a housing subsidy, a transport allowance, overtime payment, medical aid, pension, performance bonus and an annual bonus. From the answers to these questions we constructed a Decent Work Index (DWI), and scored all employed respondents – those who did any type of work, business or activity for which they got paid in the past 7 days."

The survey found that 14% of those employed full time in the formal sector worked without an employment contract. This rose to 30% for those employed part time in formal sector jobs. The results also show that two thirds (67%) of all respondents did not have medical aid as part of their remuneration package, a half of all jobs (48%) did not provide for paid sick leave, and more than a half (53%) did not provide for any kind of pension. Less than one fifth of all jobs provided for additional benefits like a transport subsidy or housing allowance.

According to Phakathi, "The Decent Work Index was constructed by counting how many of the 11 items – contract, paid sick leave, housing subsidy, bonus, and so on – the employed respondents enjoyed as part of their job. Those who had enjoyed none, or only 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the aspects, were determined to have 'low' decent work. Those with between 5 and 8 were deemed to have a 'medium' level of decent work. For a 'high' score on the decent work index an employed person had to have 9, 10 or 11 of the components."

"The scores do not relate to specific benefits such as medical aid or paid leave, but merely to the number of benefits respondents enjoyed," explains Phakathi. "Further work will be done to analyse the data by particular clusters of benefits."

The GCRO's analysis shows that half of all employed respondents (49%) had 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the items in the index, meaning that they were in positions with 'low' decent work.

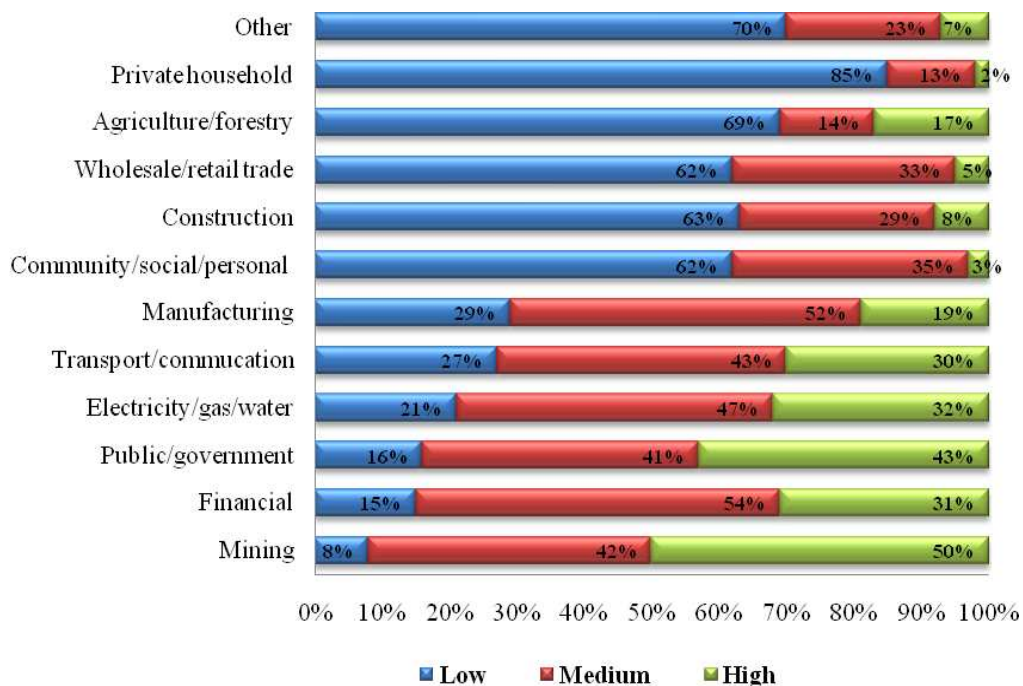
The problem, says Phakathi, is that "*indecent* work is the norm, decent work is not. Only 17% enjoyed 'high' decent work, with the remaining third (34%) having a 'medium' level of decent work. While it may be unrealistic to expect the majority to score 11 out of 11 on the index, it is not unreasonable to expect, say, three-quarters of workers to enjoy 7 or 8 of the 11 items included. The predominance of 'low' decent work paints a dismal picture, and raises questions about the role of the private sector in transforming itself and its employment practices. This is

not good news for the Gauteng city-region, which is the hub of South Africa's economy, as it is for the region as a whole."

The GCRO has cross-tabulated its Decent Work Index against a number of factors, including what work the respondent is in, race, age and education.

The analysis found that 92% of respondents employed in mining were in medium or high decent work, reflecting the historical power of union organising. The financial sector, government and electricity/gas/water also performed reasonably well, though with growing numbers in the low category. Indeed, government needs to clean up its own house: 16% of those working in the public sector were in 'indecent' work.

"At the other end of the scale, domestic work ('private household') remains a real concern", says Phakathi, "with 85% of respondents in the bottom category. A considerable number of respondents in agriculture and forestry (69%), wholesale and retail trade (62%), construction (63%) and community, social and personal services sectors (62%) fell into the lowest category of decent work."



Analysed by race, the Index shows that African workers remain worse off than other groups. Over half of African respondents (56%) had 0-4 items on the index (low), followed by Coloureds (31%), Whites (28%) and Indians (26%).

By age, 18% of respondents aged 35-65 were in the high category of decent work, followed by those aged 25-34 at 17%. The more vulnerable position of younger workers was highlighted by the fact that only one in ten (10%) of the 17-24 age group were in decent work.

Quality of work improves with level of education, according to the survey. Of those employees with no more than a primary education, a mere 2% enjoyed high decent work. By contrast 35% of respondents with tertiary education scored high on the index.

Overall, “what the survey results tell is that the creation of decent work opportunities remains a critical challenge in South Africa’s economic heartland,” says Phakathi, “Many of the jobs in the Gauteng city-region do not qualify as decent work and even the formal economy seems to be “two economies”, divided between those in jobs with aspects of decent work, and a great many battling to find work that offers any of the benefits that decent work should provide. We hope that these findings will assist government, employers, organised labour and civil society organisations towards the creation of better quality jobs – jobs that promote equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.”