

Food prices remain high as we enter the third wave of Covid-19: a call to reinstate the grant top-ups and Covid Special Relief Grant.

Over the past 10 months the cost of the average Household Food Basket has increased by **7,1%** or **R271,90** to **R4 128,23** in June 2021. Mothers tell us that high food prices have hollowed out proper nutrition on the family plate. This has removed an important line of defence against Covid-19 and other common illnesses and children and women are more vulnerable to disease. It is likely that the long queues of hungry people that we saw in the first and second waves requiring food support will again come to pass because the state has taken away all income support, wages have not gone up, unemployment levels remain untenably high, jobs continue to be lost and food prices have gone up. At the very least government should reinstate the support that was given in the first and second waves: bring back the top ups to the grants and the Covid Special Relief Grant.

Key data from the June 2021 Household Affordability Index

The June 2021 Household Affordability Index, which tracks food price data from 44 supermarkets and 30 butcheries, in Johannesburg (Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa and Hillbrow), Durban (KwaMashu, Umlazi, Isipingo, Durban CBD and Mtubatuba), Cape Town (Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Philippi, Langa, Delft and Dunoon), Pietermaritzburg and Springbok (in the Northern Cape), shows that:

- **In June 2021:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket is **R4 128,23**.
- **Month-on-month** (between May 2021 and June 2021): The average cost of the Household Food Basket **decreased** by **R8,88 (-0,2%)**.
- **Over the past ten (10) months** (between September 2020 – when we released our first publication, and June 2021): The average cost of the Household Food Basket **increased** by **R271,90 (7,1%)**, from R3 856,34 in September 2020 to R4 128,23 in June 2021.

Over the last month we have seen that maize meal, rice and flour have come down. Cooking oil prices continue to be high, as are sugar prices and sugar beans. All fruits and vegetables except potatoes and onions have come down (potatoes and onions are typically sourced in the Free State during the Winter months). All meat prices have gone up (this is a typical trend during the Winter months where feed costs and energy costs increase). Margarine has gone up, and polony has shown significant spikes.

All Household Food Baskets except the Joburg Household Food Basketⁱ came down very marginally in June and bring no relief to struggling households. High food prices continue to hurt low-income families and remove nutritious food off the plate whilst making families, particularly women (because women eat last and sacrifice their nutrition for their families) and children (because children need highly nutritious foods to develop properly), more vulnerable to disease.

Household Food Basket	Sep_2020	May_2021	Jun_2021	May 2021 vs. Jun 2021 [Rands]	May 2021 vs. Jun 2021 [%]	Sep 2020 vs. Jun 2021 [Rands]	Sep 2020 vs. Jun 2021 [%]
Joburg	R3 886,87	R4 185,63	R4 216,31	R30,68	0,7%	R329,44	8,5%
Durban	R3 800,59	R4 146,06	R4 095,04	-R51,02	-1,2%	R294,45	7,7%
Cape Town	R3 902,48	R4 043,89	R4 020,04	-R23,85	-0,6%	R117,56	3,0%
Springbok	R4 061,82	R4 554,97	R4 528,87	-R26,10	-0,6%	R467,05	11,5%
Pietermaritzburg	R3 678,32	R3 954,86	R3 952,63	-R2,23	-0,1%	R274,31	7,5%
Average	R3 856,34	R4 137,11	R4 128,23	-R8,88	-0,2%	R271,89	7,1%

Statistics South Africa's Consumer Price Index for Food and Non-alcoholic Beverages rose to **6,7%** in May 2021.ⁱⁱ Headline inflation for this same period is 5,2%. The value of the money we have in our pockets is being eroded by higher levels of inflation on basic goods and services. High inflation levels on food are especially harmful for households living on low incomes as families spend a much higher proportion of their income on food.

Workers

Statistics South Africa's latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey, for Quarter 1: 2021ⁱⁱⁱ shows that unemployment levels have increased. The expanded unemployment rate for Black South Africans is **47,9%**. **Ten million two hundred and ninety-nine thousand Black South Africans are unemployed.** A worker's wage must now spread further to support **4,3 persons**. With baseline wages so low, and the cost of food, electricity, and transport, so high; workers struggle to support their families even at the very basic level required to function, be productive and be healthy.

The National Minimum Wage for a General Worker in June 2021 is **R3 643,92**. Transport to work and back will cost a worker an average of R1 260 (34,6% of NMW), and electricity an average of R647,50 (17,8% of NMW). **Together transport and electricity, both non-negotiable expenses, take up 52,3% (R1 907,50) of the NMW, leaving R1 736,42 to secure all other household expenses.** The average cost of the *PMBEJD Basic Nutritional Food Basket* for a family of four persons in **June 2021 is R2 859,60**. On this data, if all the remaining money after transport and electricity went to food, families will still have a food shortfall of **39,3% (-R1 123,18)**.

Women and children

In June 2021, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet cost **R729,05**. The Child Support Grant of **R460** a month is **21% below the food poverty line of R585** per capita and a further **37% below the June 2021 cost of R729,05 to feed a child a basic nutritious diet.**

The crisis around child nutrition continues to deepen. We have written our fingers off over the years as to why it is absolutely critical for South Africa's future health, education, and economic outcomes that child nutrition is prioritised, and more recently that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already very serious crisis. South Africa will face a future health implosion if women's and children's nutrition is not dealt with. Public clinics and hospitals will be overrun by very run-of-the-mill illnesses, which would normally be resisted through a nutritional plate of food. Women's health is deteriorating and it is likely that non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and other heart diseases; including complications with HIV and TB will lead to higher mortality.

High food prices and no jobs could lead to social disorder and social instability. Throughout history, this has been the case. At some point the restrained protesting will become more violent, and movement of goods and services on our public highways and roads will be curbed; and private property and state security will be threatened. The right of a hungry child and her hungrier mother to exist; to survive, to eat; will become far more important than any right to private property.

It is likely that the long queues of hungry people that we saw in the first and second waves requiring food support will again come to pass because the state has taken away all income support, wages have not gone up, unemployment levels remain untenably high, jobs continue to be lost and food prices have gone up. At the very least government should reinstate the support that was given in the first and second waves: bring back the top ups to the grants and the Covid Special Relief Grant.

ⁱ The Joburg basket saw higher increases on potatoes, onions, chicken, meats, polony, margarine, cooking oil and sugar, and unlike other areas which saw big drops in the tomato price; the tomato price in Joburg increased. Polony also really spiked in Joburg (the average increase on 2,5kg was R13,99 or 31% month-on-month).

ⁱⁱ STATSSA (2021). **Consumer Price Index May 2021**. Statistical release P0141. June 23, 2021. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P7. See Link: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0141/P0141May2021.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ STATSSA (2021). **Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 1, 2021**. Statistical release P0211. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P28-29, 46-47. See Link: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2021.pdf>