

# TOWARDS A DECENT LIFE FOR ALL



## DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING

*Ubomi obungahlelekanga*  
*"a life without a struggle"*

There is a crucial link that exists between the right to a decent standard of life and the right to dignity. The right to dignity is an inalienable right guaranteed in **Section 10 of the South African Constitution**.

South Africa is also a signatory of the **UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. Article 11(1) of the ICESCR recognises the right to an adequate standard of living for all.

There are still no empirically grounded measures of a decent living level in South Africa. In October 2018 the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its Final Observations recommended that South Africa design and regularly update a composite index on the cost of living in South Africa so that social benefits could be benchmarked to ensure an adequate standard of living for all.

This research presents a **Decent Standard of Living (DSL)** and a **DSL Index (DSLII)** for South Africa. It is based on a concept of relative poverty that focuses on **the ability of people to achieve a socially determined acceptable standard of living to enable them to participate fully in society**.

### Where does it come from?

The **DSL** was developed using simple steps that included what ordinary people thought.

**48 Focus Groups** were held across the country

A **selection of goods** that people thought were necessary, not luxury goods, was developed.

These were developed in **two national surveys**.

**21 Socially Perceived Necessities (SPNs)** were identified - goods that two thirds or more of participants thought were necessary for a decent standard of life.

We then identified the **income range** of people who had all 21 SPNs from *Statistics South Africa Living Conditions Surveys*.

The **median income** of people who have all 21 SPNs, is **R7 326** per person, per month, in 2019 prices.

We were then able to see also what items the people who had all **21 SPNs spent their money on**.

This enabled us to **update the DSL** every year taking these goods and services bought, into account.

**BUT**, this is not a standard that many people currently have in South Africa – in fact, only around **3% of the population have all 21 SPNs** - approximately 1.7 million people.

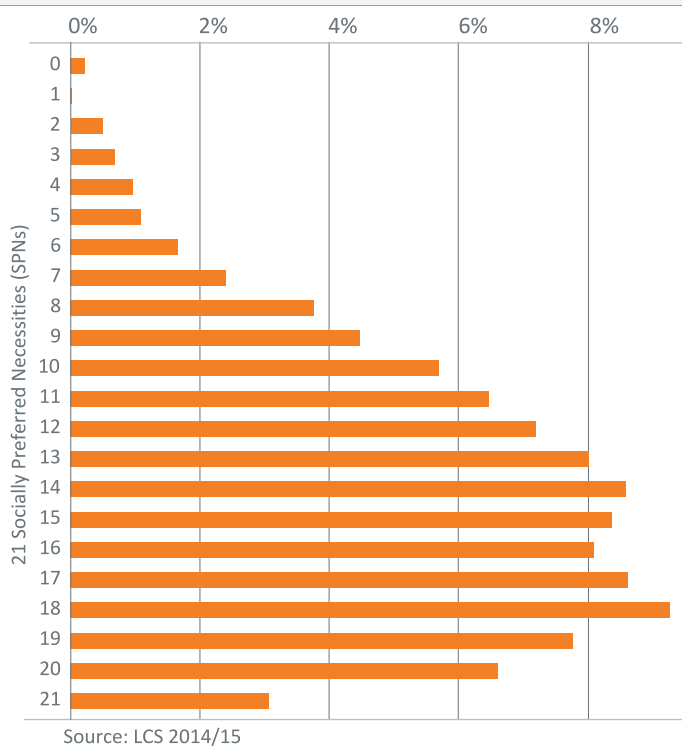
Just over a quarter (26%) of the population have 18 or more SPNs - approximately 14 million people.

42% of people have 16 or more SPNs - approximately 23 million people.

#decentstandardofliving

The graph below reveals the extent of poverty and inequality that exists across South Africa.

## Population Access to 21 SPNs



It clearly demonstrates how much work we all need to do to make a decent standard of living available to all.

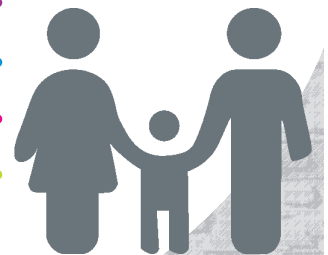
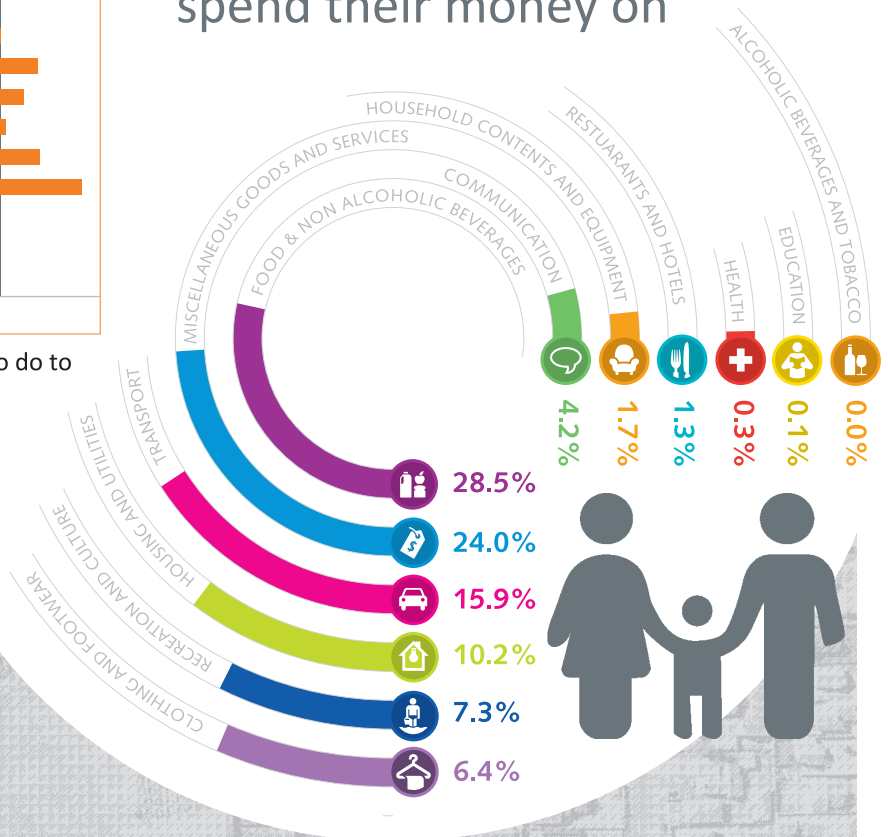
## 3 ways in which people are able to access the 21 SPNs

**Social networks.** e.g. an SPN like 'someone to talk to when you are upset' can be acquired through the household's own social networks rather than bought;

**The social wage.** i.e. those things that are best provided by the state, like the SPNs of 'tarred roads close to the house' and 'street lighting', and thirdly

**Commodities.** i.e. things that can be bought with money such as a fridge or funeral insurance.

## What people with 21 SPNs spend their money on



ONLY  
**1.7**  
MILLION  
SOUTH AFRICANS HAVE  
ACCESS TO ALL 21 SPNs

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We compared income levels with other benchmarks, including wages, bargaining settlements and social grants. We can see from the graph below how little income so many millions of people have to survive on. **Certainly not a decent life!**

## Income comparison

**Selected Benchmarks per capita income/earnings and living wage measures in South Africa** (monthly amounts in Rands)

Note: Amounts shown are for 2019 unless otherwise specified.

Child Grant	R420
Food Poverty Line	R561
<b>Lower Bound Poverty Line (StatsSA)</b>	<b>R810</b>
Foster Child Grant	R1,000
Upper Bound Poverty Line (StatsSA)	R1,227
<b>DSL 16 SPNs</b>	<b>R1,520</b>
Disability Grant	R1,780
Old Age Grant	R1,780
Care Dependency Grant	R1,780
<b>DSL 18 SPNs</b>	<b>R2,651</b>
Median Monthly Earnings of Employees (women), 2017	R3,000
Sectoral Determinations Median Minimum Wage, 2018	R3,194
Median Monthly Earnings of Employees (all), 2017	R3,500
<b>National Minimum Wage</b>	<b>R3,500 (R20 per hour)</b>
Median Monthly Earnings of Employees (men), 2017	R4,000
Living Wage Lower Bound (Wage Indicator Foundation)	R4,715 = US\$312
Median Minimum Wage South Africa, 2018	R4,812
Bargaining Councils Median Minimum Wage South Africa, 2018	R4,994
Average Minimum Wage South Africa, 2018	R5,399
Living Wage Upper Bound (Wage Indicator Foundation)	R7,313 = US\$484
<b>DSL 21 SPNs</b>	<b>R7,326</b>
Mean Household Income (Living Conditions Survey), 2014/2015	R11,514
DSL Median Salary 21 SPNs	R14,868
Av. Monthly Earnings for Employees in the Formal Non-Agricultural Sector	R21,432

Sources: Available on request by contacting [info@saspri.org](mailto:info@saspri.org)

### What does this mean for national choices and priorities?

*This data provides a rich source for future analysis and for informing policies regarding both public and private acquisitions in order to accelerate the realisation of a decent standard of living for all in South Africa.*

We can use this level to see **how adequate** social benefits are like, Child Support Grant.

This is also a **lens for monitoring** progressive realisation of achieving a decent standard of living.

A lens for **exploring levels of taxation** and prices, and for looking at **salaries and wages** – both the ones at the top and the ones at the bottom.

### Increasing Access

So our communities, the state and the private sector (Business) **all have a role to play** in increasing access to a decent standard of life.

**Paying more tax** means that the state can provide more through the *social wage* and this will also lower inequality.

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