

# Translocal Households, Rural-Urban Links and Migrant Food Security in South Africa

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## Abstract

This paper revisits the issue of rural-urban links in post-apartheid South Africa, challenging the assumption that the end of apartheid would lead to rapid urbanization and the dissolution of circular migration. Despite the abolition of influx controls and the significant increase in the urban population from 33% in 1980 to 55% in 2011 among black South Africans, rural-urban ties and flows have proven resilient. The persistence of circular migration is evident in the continuous flow of people, goods, and remittances between urban and rural areas. This paper draws on a survey of over 800 Eastern Cape migrants in Cape Town, conducted in 2022, to explore the dynamics of these connections. The findings highlight the complexity and nuances of post-apartheid migration, revealing that translocal livelihoods and mobilities are still prevalent. The study also examines the significant gender shift in migration patterns, with a notable increase in female migrants. Remittances play a crucial role in supporting rural households, indicating the enduring importance of rural-urban links. The research underscores the need to rethink traditional concepts of urbanisation and consider the broader implications of sustained migrancy for rural and urban development in South Africa.

## Keywords

internal migration, rural-urban linkages, translocal households, food security, South Africa

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## Cover Image

Sweet Home Farm informal settlement, Philippi, Cape Town. Credit: Allen Brown/Alamy



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## Introduction

A fundamental pillar of South Africa's dehumanising apartheid system was a draconian policy to ensure that black South Africans could not permanently settle in the cities and towns of the country (Hindson, 1987). Under influx controls and pass laws enacted in the early 1950s, able-bodied male black migrants could come to work in urban areas but could not bring their families with them, and as soon as their employment came to an end, they were required by law to return to their rural homes. Most black African households were forced to eke out a living as farm labourers on white-owned commercial farms or in impoverished rural reserves known as bantustans or homelands. This oscillating labour migration system was originally developed as a way of mobilising cheap labour for the country's gold mines and was later generalised by the apartheid government to the entire economy. By the time influx controls were abolished in the late 1980s, over 17 million black South Africans had been arrested for violating the pass laws. Between 1960 and 1980, the percentage of black South Africans recorded in urban areas remained steady at 32%, while all other racial groups became more than 75% urbanised. Because black African urbanisation was 'coercively curtailed' (Posel, 2020, p.30) during the apartheid decades, patterns of circular or oscillating rural-urban labour migration were established. Rural-urban links remained robust and strong, underwritten by the constant movement of migrants, goods, and remittances between the two.

The collapse of the apartheid system in the 1980s and early 1990s led many scholars to assume that rapid urbanisation, the termination of circular migration, and the dissolution of state-enforced rural-urban links would quickly follow (Bekker, 2001; Kok & Collinson, 2006; Posel and Casale, 2003; Reed, 2013; Todes, 2001). This assumption was reinforced by census data showing that the proportion of South Africans residing in cities increased from 47% of the population in 1980 to 63% in 2011 (and to 68% in 2022). In absolute terms, the number of urban residents increased from 14 million to 42 million during this period. Among black South Africans, the percentage of people in urban areas increased rapidly from 33% in 1980 to 43% in 1996 and to 55% in 2011. Dramatic changes in the urban landscape reinforced the impression of rapid urbanisation as large informal settlements grew virtually overnight on the periphery of most cities, as many rural dwellers joined the post-apartheid scramble to leave an impoverished countryside (Ginsberg et al., 2016; Visagie & Turok, 2020).

Migration scholars have focused their attention on the implications of post-apartheid transformation for rural-urban links and demonstrated that the narrative of post-apartheid temporary to permanent migration and urbanisation is too simplistic and unilinear (Bank et al., 2020; Posel, 2004, 2010). Rather, as several empirical studies have pointed out, the current reality is far more dynamic, nuanced, and complex (Hall & Posel, 2019; Posel, 2020). As Ndinda & Ndhlovu (2020, p. 79) note, "the connection and reconnection to rural areas is neither linear nor a straightforward process of urbanisation." Some have argued that the discourse of

rural-urban links needs to be jettisoned entirely because they have been subsumed by translocal or multi-spatial livelihoods and mobilities that span the urban and the rural as well as spaces in between (Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005). Indeed, argues Bank (2020, p. 211), "the urban and the rural no longer exist as neatly separated categories or social, economic, and political spaces." It is increasingly common in the literature to see households as 'translocal', 'stretched', or 'double rooted', all terms designed to capture the fact that most rural households have members living and working in different localities (Hall & Posel, 2019). Rather than the dated nomenclature of rural-urban linkage, it is more appropriate to reformulate the question and focus on the movement of people, money, goods, and food items between spatially stretched nodes of divided households.

The 'urbanisation of the rural' is far advanced in much of South Africa with the growth of scores of small towns and villages in the countryside. Furthermore, smallholder agricultural production is declining as rural households rely on cash income to purchase basic necessities such as food, healthcare, education and housing construction. Any agricultural production that persists is more of a dietary supplement than a fundamental part of household diets. Given this state of rural affairs, permanent departure and resettlement in the cities are seen as inevitable by some. Some who leave never return, but migrancy remains strikingly resilient for most. Labour migrants remain socially, culturally and economically tied to 'home'. Most intend to return for good on retirement or as soon as they can opt out of urban life. Most migrants with children generally prefer to have them raised by grandparents away from the city, at least in their early years.

This paper focuses on the resilience of labour migration in the three decades since the end of apartheid. We first review the shift in thinking about South Africa's urbanisation trajectory from the view that it was an inevitable consequence of the collapse of apartheid mobility restrictions towards a more nuanced perspective, based on emerging evidence, that labour migration and its attendant flows of people, cash, and goods have been unexpectedly resilient. Adopting the translocal framework as a guide, the paper then focuses on the nature of the ties that persist within households stretched across space between town and countryside. The final section examines the contemporary characteristics of one of South Africa's main internal migration corridors between the Eastern and Western Cape provinces, drawing on evidence from the secondary literature and primary data from a sample survey of more than 800 Eastern Cape migrants who resided in Cape Town in mid-2022.

### Post-Apartheid Internal Migration

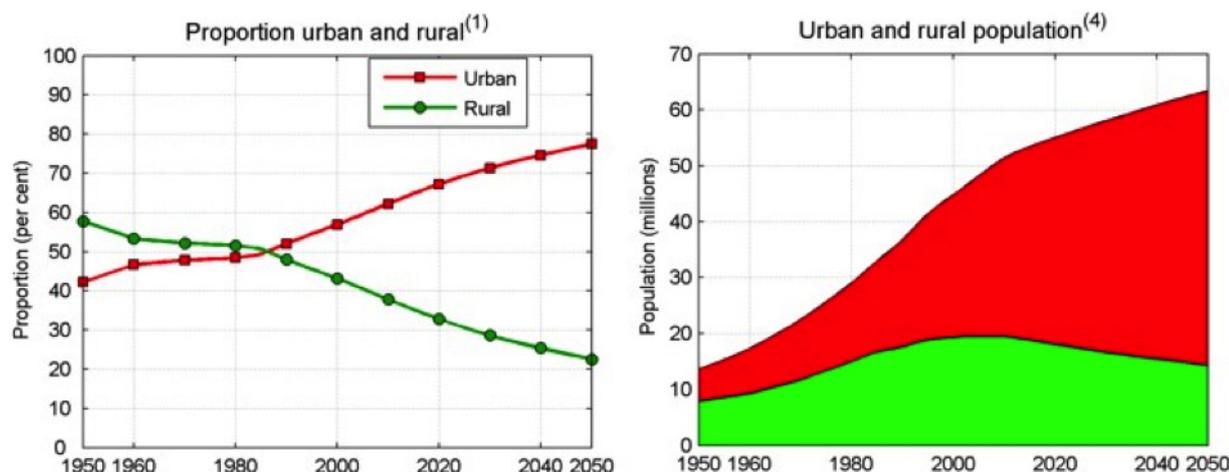
South Africa is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa, with almost 70% of the population of 62 million living in cities and towns (Figure 1) (Bakker et al., 2020). This percentage is projected to reach 80% by 2050. At the same time, many urban dwellers maintain close connections with rural homes where members of immediate and extended families (particularly the young and elderly) reside. Contrary

to initial expectations that state-enforced circular migration would cease with the end of apartheid, migrancy has shown considerable resilience, despite the rapid increase in overall rural-to-urban migration and a rise in the overall proportion of the population living in cities (Figure 1) (Posel & Casale, 2003, 2006; Posel, 2010, 2020). As Posel (2020 p. 30) notes, during the first post-apartheid decade, “studies measuring changes in labour migration specifically have identified the persistence of labour migration... and even an increase among African households in rural areas” (Posel, 2020, p. 30). In 1993, for example, 34% of rural African households had at least one non-resident labour migrant. Just over a decade later, in 2005, the figure was 36%. In absolute terms, the total number of households with labour migrants increased by 400,000 between 1993 and 2005. Microdata from three rural health and demographic surveillance system (HDDS) sites provided broad confirmation of these macro-surveillance findings on the continuity in temporary circular migration after the end of apartheid (Collinson et al., 2007, Ginsburg et al., 2016, 2017). For example, Ginsburg et al. (2016) report that temporary migrants comprised 25% of

the population in 2010-11, including 60% of males aged 30 to 49, and 33% of females aged 20 to 39.

Posel (2020, p. 34-35) has recently argued that the second post-apartheid decade saw a significant decline in the extent of labour migration. However, she attributes this to the global financial crisis of 2007-8 and the subsequent economic recession in South Africa. The proportion of rural African households with an absent labour migrant apparently decreased from a high of 37% in 2004 to a low of 5.5% in 2010-11 (Table 1). By 2014-15, this figure had risen again to 16%, suggesting that the decline may well have been a temporary response to a particular set of economic conditions. Visagie & Turok (2020) report a significant drop in unemployment among rural-urban migrants from 50% in 2008 to 13% in 2014-15, which may account for the recovery in the incidence of rural-urban migration over this period. Although comparable data are not available to assess whether this recovery was sustained beyond 2015, a comparison of Census 2011 and 2022 results shows that at the macro-level there continued to be significant levels of bidirectional population movement.

**Figure 1: Urban and Rural Population of South Africa, 1950-2050**



Source: BusinessTech (2014)

Table 1: Percentage of Households with Labour Migrants, 1993-2015		
	% of rural households	% of all households
1993	33.8	18.8
1999	35.8	16.5
2002	36.9	17.3
2004	36.9	16.2
2005	36.0	15.7
2008	21.8	10.6
2010-11	5.5	3.6
2012	14.8	7.4
2014-15	15.6	8.1

Source: Posel (2020)

Between 2011 and 2022, a total of 3.6 million individuals changed their province of residence (Table 2). Of these, 2.1 million (59%) were new arrivals and 1.5 million (41%) were departures. Although the ten South African provinces experienced both arrivals and departures, the main destinations were Gauteng and the Western Cape, which accounted for 57% of total arrivals. These two provinces experienced a significant net gain of almost 700,000 through in-migration. However, both also saw a significant number of departures of return migrants, primarily to the Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal, and Limpopo. These three provinces are the major source of rural-urban migrants and had similar numbers of out-migrants and returnees. If all rural-urban migration was permanent, departures from provinces such as Gauteng and Western Province would have been minimal, as would the number of arrivals in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal, and Limpopo. Instead, circular migration and its attendant rural-urban links appear to have persisted well into the third post-apartheid decade. As Visagie & Turok (2020, p. 58) recently noted, 'circular migration remains a distinctive feature of South African urbanisation, where migrants maintain social and cultural attachments with their respective rural-sending communities.'

The apartheid system was based on absolute state control over the mobilities of African women. While black African men were admitted to the cities as migrant labourers housed in single-sex hostels, women were to remain in the rural areas, support themselves and subsidise men's wages through subsistence production (Lee, 2009). This system, based on the mining industry model with its exclusive male workforce, began to erode and then collapse in the dying days of apartheid as rural women defied the state and migrated in greater numbers from impoverished reserves to urban centres to seek work. Therefore, one of the most significant post-apartheid changes in rural-urban migration patterns has been a gender transition through rapid acceleration of this late apartheid trend (Camlin et al., 2014; Hall & Posel, 2020; Williams et al., 2008).

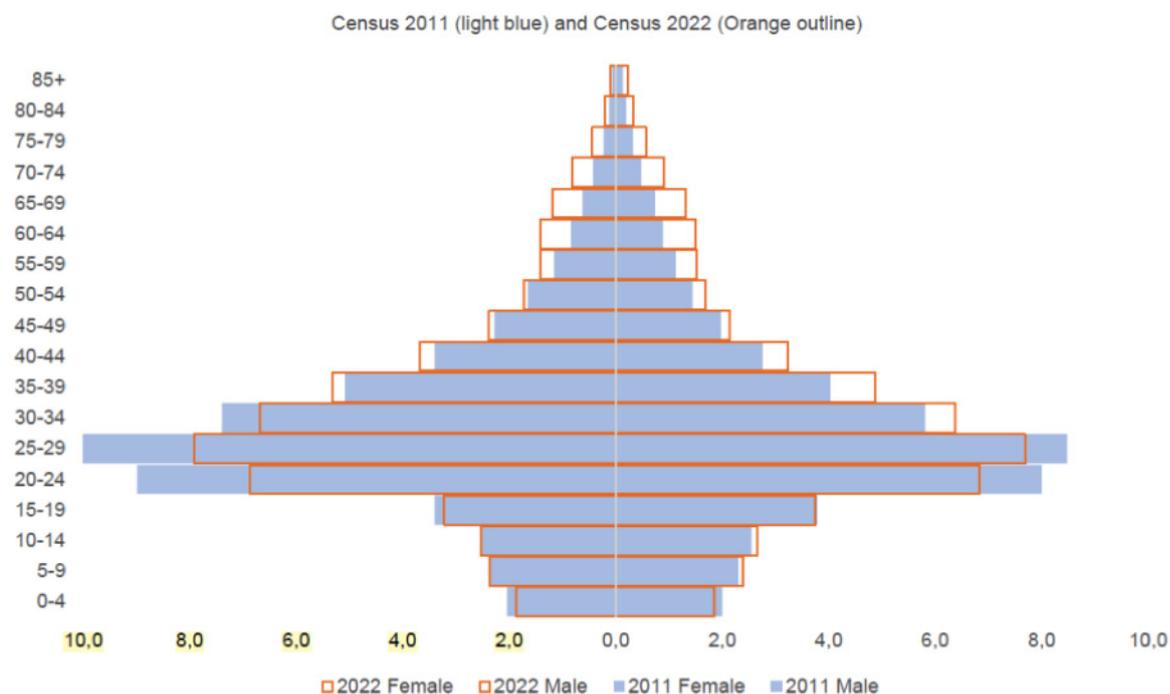
The last three decades have seen a massive increase in the number of rural-urban female migrants working in South African cities and towns. While the South African labour market (with the notable exception of domestic work) remains heavily weighted in favour of male migrants, post-apartheid developments have opened new income-earning niches for women. For example, the apartheid state banned all forms of informal economic activity. The informal economy has grown significantly in all urban centres since the mid-1990s, providing women migrants with new survivalist employment opportunities and independent livelihoods (Singh, 2007). The feminisation of migration saw the share of female migrants rise from 29% in 1993 to 37% in 2002 (Posel & Casale, 2003). According to von Fintel & Moses (2017), migration patterns and migration numbers are no longer distinguishable across gender.

The age profile of male and female migrants is also strikingly similar. Myroniuk et al. (2018) Figure 2 shows that the majority of both male and migrants are between 20 and 34 years old in 2011 and again in 2022. Young people's interest in farming is limited, especially since small-holder agriculture is not a significant source of income in rural areas (Henning et al., 2022). The distinctive population pyramid of the migrant population is also notable for the relatively small number of child migrants, some of whom may remain in rural areas where they are raised by their grandparents or other extended kin (Bennett et al., 2015; Hall, 2016; Hall & Posel, 2019). However, Ndinda & Ndhlovu (2020) report that although many of the residents of informal settlements maintain relationships with rural family, most urban residents under the age of 35 have less affinity with rural areas, either because they were born and raised in urban areas or because their precarious economic circumstances make it difficult to maintain links with the countryside. As they note, "financial crises and harsh conditions in urban areas progressively undermined these tenuous links" (Ndinda & Ndhlovu, 2020, p. 78).

	Arrivals	Departures	Net Gain/Loss
Gauteng	795,330	395,977	+399,353
Western Cape	406,549	112,520	+294,029
Eastern Cape	184,213	246,842	-62,629
Kwazulu-Natal	169,183	179,250	-10,067
Limpopo	151,357	215,274	-63,917
North West	146,262	98,987	+47,275
Mpumalanga	132,459	119,809	+12,650
Free State	73,643	83,521	-9,878
Northern Cape	44,376	32,282	+12,094
	2,103,272	1,484,462	+618,810

Source: Statistics South Africa (2022)

**Figure 2: Age Distribution of Male and Female Migrants in 2011 and 2022**



Source: Statistics South Africa (2024, p. 76)

One of the strongest indicators of the strength of translocal ties in stretched households is the extent of remittances in cash and kind from migrants in the city to support family in the countryside (Bowles & Posel, 2005; Posel, 2001). At the outset of the post-apartheid era in the early 1990s, average income from agricultural production by rural households made up only five percent of the total. By contrast, remittances represented 57% of total income in recipient households (Posel, 2020). Only 21% of rural households with migrant workers did not receive any remittances and two-thirds of remitters sent remittances eight or more times a year. Remittances continue to be of critical importance for many rural households. Collinson & Biyase (2021), for example, report that remittances from male and female migrants averaged ZAR1,500 and ZAR1,100 per month, respectively, in 2017. Additionally, migrants commonly send clothing and food to rural households.

Remittances play a ‘crucial role’ in the food security of the poorest rural households and in improving human capital (through education and healthcare expenditure) in better-off households (Collinson & Biyase, 2021; Lu & Treiman, 2011; Phangaphanga, 2013). Biyase & Tregenna (2016) model the probability of a household receiving remittances and the level of remittances between 2004 and 2015. The determi-

nants include the age and employment status of the household head, the income of the household, and the type of area in which the household resides. Education is only significant as a determinant of the amount remitted. Gender affects both the probability of remitting, and amount remitted, with female migrants more likely to remit but to remit less, an outcome of their more limited labour market opportunities (Camlin et al., 2014). Finally, cash remittances have been shown to improve food security and nutritional outcomes among poor rural households (Waidler & Devereux, 2019).

Remitting from migrants in urban areas to family in rural areas remains relatively common and plays an important role in alleviating poverty and minimising rural food insecurity. However, the exchange of informal food from rural to urban areas is much less common than in other African countries. A comparative study of low-income households in three South African cities found that less than a quarter receive food remittances (Table 3). More than two-thirds of these remittances came from family in other urban areas, with less than a quarter coming from rural areas. The relative insignificance of food remittances from rural households is primarily a function of the fact that very few households produce food that is surplus to their own needs.

	Cape Town	Johannesburg	Msunduzi
% of urban households receiving food remittances	18	14	24
% of recipients receiving food from other urban areas	83	67	82
% of recipients receiving food from rural areas	14	24	15
% of recipients receiving food from both rural and urban areas	3	9	3

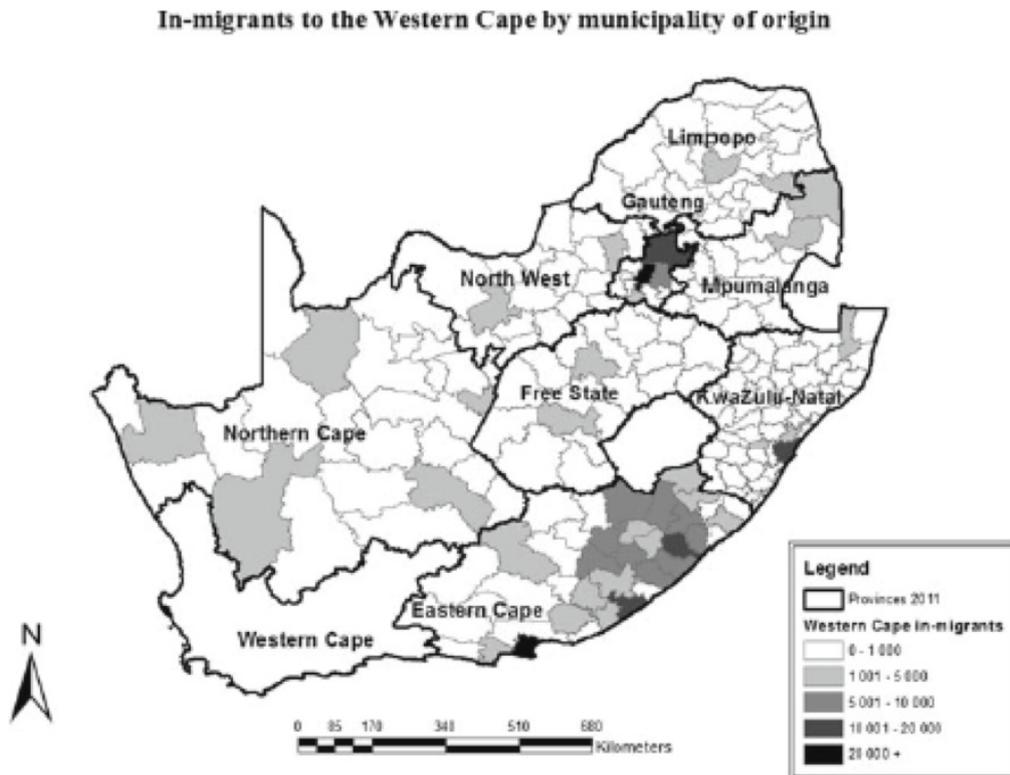
Source: AFSUN

### The Eastern-Western Cape Corridor

One of the busiest post-apartheid internal circular migration corridors in South Africa links the rural areas of the Eastern Cape with the City of Cape Town in the Western Cape. In the apartheid period, migration in the corridor was strictly controlled with forced removals of migrants from Cape Town back to the Eastern Cape (Beinart, 2014). However, the abolition of influx controls in the 1980s greatly increased two-way traffic in the corridor (Bekker, 2001; 2002). Western Province is a major destination for migrants from the East-

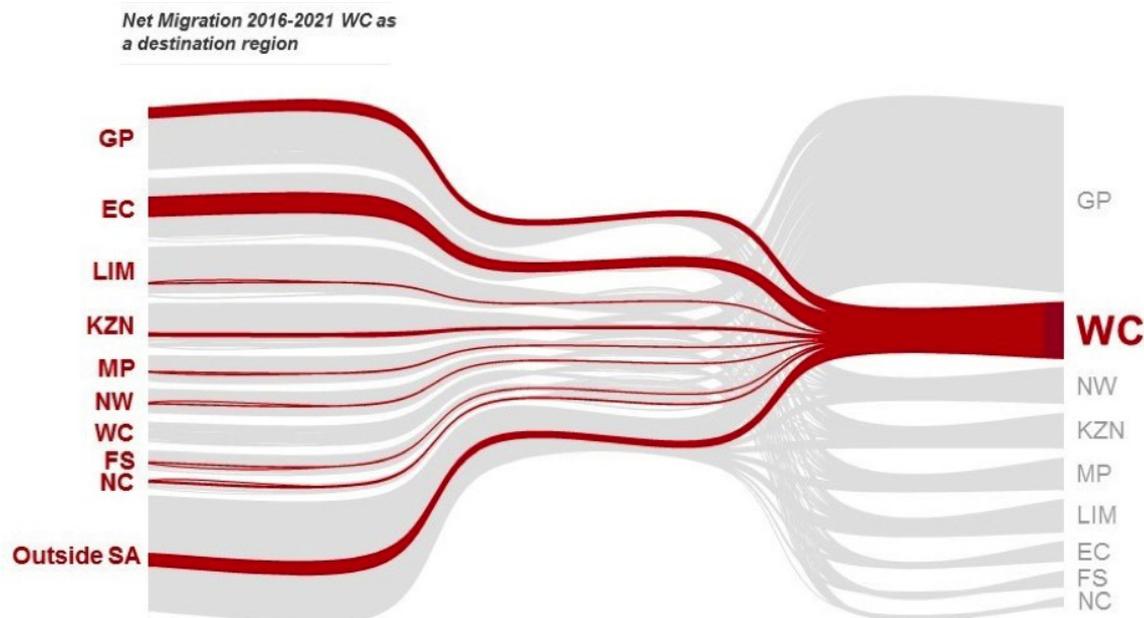
ern Cape (Figure 3 and 4). Table 4 shows Statistics South Africa data for patterns of in-migration and out-migration to and from the Western Cape at five-year intervals for the period 2006 to 2021. Western Cape had approximately 1.4 million in-migrants and 480,000 out-migrants over the period for a net migration of around 890,000 (Table 5). Just over one million of the 1.3 million interprovincial in-migrants in the Western Cape (or 76%) were from the Eastern Cape. Migrants from the Eastern Cape made up 30% of the total population of Cape Town of 3.4 million.

Figure 3: Eastern Cape Origins of Migrants in the Western Cape



Source: Jacobs & Du Plessis (2015)

Figure 4: Inter-Provincial Migration to the Western Cape, 2016-2021



Source: Statistics South Africa (2018)

EC = Eastern Cape; WC = Western Cape

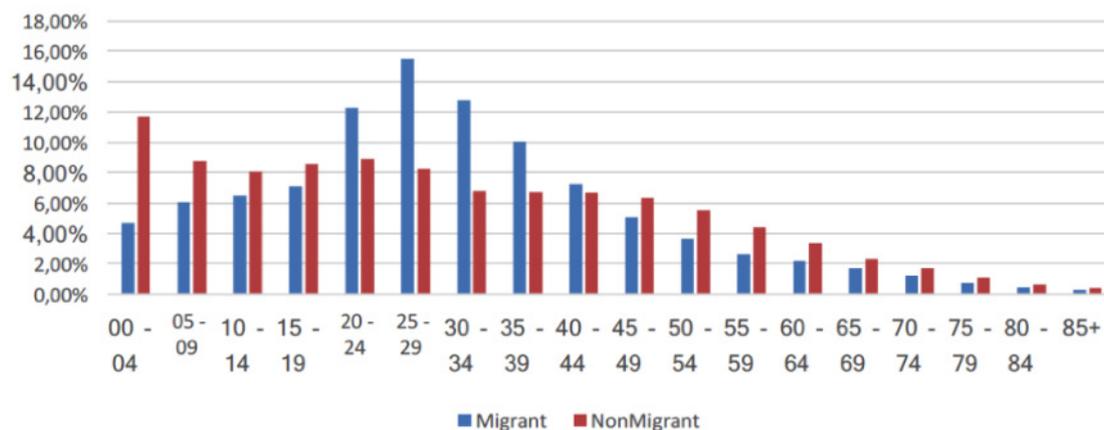
Table 4: Internal Migration Estimates for Western Cape Province, 2006-2021	
<b>2006-2011</b>	
In-Migrants	420,480
Out-Migrants	144,253
Net Migration	276,227
<b>2011-2016</b>	
In-Migrants	458,270
Out-Migrants	160,673
Net Migration	298,047
<b>2016-2021</b>	
In-Migrants	493,621
Out-Migrants	177,313
Net Migration	316,308
<b>Total 2006-2021</b>	
In-Migrants	1,372,371
Out-Migrants	482,239
Net Migration	890,132
<i>Source: Statistics South Africa (2023)</i>	

Table 5: Inter-Provincial Migrants in Western Cape, 2022		
Origins	No.	%
Eastern Cape	1,134,674	67.8
Gauteng	241,313	14.4
Kwazulu-Natal	89,660	5.4
Northern Cape	76,481	4.6
Free State	60,247	3.6
North West	26,411	1.6
Mpumalanga	24,395	1.5
Limpopo	21,591	1.3
Total Migrants	1,674,772	
<i>Source: Statistics South Africa (2023)</i>		

Figure 5 from the 2011 Census compares the age profile of migrants and non-migrants in the Western Cape and shows that the migrant population is heavily concentrated in the 20 to 40 age range with comparatively lower numbers of children and the elderly. Table 6 compares the demographic profile of long-term and short-term inter-provincial migrants in the Western Cape in 2011. Short-term migrants are defined as those who moved to the province the previous five years and long-term migrants as those who migrated before 2007. Short-term migrants tend to be younger with 71% under the age of 35, compared with 63% of longer-term migrants. Both groups have a similar breakdown by sex (52% male and 48% female). Consistent with their younger age

profile, short-term migrants were more likely to be single and in single-person households. The educational profile of the three groups was similar with 40-50% in each category failing to finish high school. In all six cases, migrant status was related to income. As income increased, the proportion of both types of migrants decreased. For example, the proportion of short-term migrants in the lowest income quintile was 32-33% compared to 17-18% in the highest income profile. Short-term migrants also tend to have lower skill levels than long-term migrants. For example, 25% of short-term migrants were skilled and 28% were unskilled, the equivalent figures for long-term migrants were 33% (skilled) and 20% (unskilled).

Figure 5: Migrant Status by Age in Western Province, 2011



Source: Dinbabo et al. (2016)

Table 6: Demographic Profile of Types of Internal Migrants in Western Cape, 2011		
	Long-term (%)	Short-term (%)
<b>Age</b>		
15-24 years	21.0	34.5
25-34 years	42.3	36.0
35-44 years	20.5	16.4
45-54 years	9.8	7.6
55-64 years	6.4	5.5
Mean (years)	33.1	30.9
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	52.2	52.3
Female	47.8	47.7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married/living together	51.3	45.4
Never married	44.8	50.1
Other	4.0	4.5
<b>Education</b>		
None	1.6	1.6
Primary	6.1	5.4
Incomplete secondary	46.7	40.8
Matric	29.0	31.2
Certificate/Diploma	4.5	5.9
Degree	11.7	14.7
Other	0.4	0.5
<b>Household size</b>		
One person	16.3	16.7
Two to three persons	41.4	46.5
Four to five persons	30.4	25.6
More than 5 persons	12.0	11.2
Mean household size	3.4	3.2
<b>Income quintile</b>		
Quintile 1	18.9	16.8
Quintile 2	15.4	11.0
Quintile 3	22.7	21.5

Quintile 4	16.5	17.8
Quintile 5	26.5	32.9
<b>Skill levels</b>		
Skilled	33.3	24.9
Semi-skilled	47.0	47.4
Unskilled	19.7	27.7
<i>Source: Kleinhans &amp; Yu (2020)</i>		

## Survey Methodology

Our survey was conducted in Cape Town in early 2023. As the focus was the migration corridor from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape, only migrant households from the former region Cape were surveyed. Because these migrants reside in various townships and informal settlements, we sampled a variety of residential sites. In all, we sampled migrants in nine different areas of Cape Town (Table 7). In each area, we used a random sampling strategy to identify respondents. We first selected a random starting point, usually a street on the edge of the settlement. Numbers were assigned to the first six households on the street and a dice rolled to select the first household for interview. Thereafter, the dice was thrown to select the second household, repeating the process until a sufficient sample size was reached. If a selected household was not from the Eastern Cape, the next household from that area on that street was selected for interview. In each area we sought to maintain a two-third to one-third balance between migrants that had come to the city after 2010 and those that had come before 2010. In the final sample, the ratio was 65% (post-2010) and 35% (pre-2010). The survey was loaded onto tablets and administered by trained fieldworkers to a migrant head of household or their representative. After data cleaning, the final sample numbered 818 households.

## Migrant Profile

The sample respondents were 51% male and 49% female. This is a significant shift from the apartheid and immediate post-apartheid years when rural-urban migration was male-dominated and supports the argument that female and male internal migration are increasingly indistinguishable (von Fintel & Moses, 2017) (Table 8). The age profile of female and male migrants is relatively similar with the bulk of both (around 90%) between 20 and 50. However, males are somewhat more likely than females to be in their 20s and vice versa for migrants in their 30s. The main differences are in marital status, educational attainment, and employment status. Male migrants are more likely to be married, or cohabiting (35% versus 21%) and female migrants are more likely to be single (79% versus 65% of males). Eastern Cape migrants have relatively good levels of basic education with most having reached secondary school. However, women have lower high school dropout rates and higher completion rates. More often, they also have a post-secondary qualification (such as a diploma or degree from a technikon) or university experience. Despite higher levels of educational attainment, female migrants are more disadvantaged than males in the labour market. Unemployment rates are higher among female migrants (27% versus 21%) and more male migrants are in full-time employment (71% versus 62%).

Table 7: Distribution of Survey Sample in Cape Town

	No.	%
Langa	143	8.3
Dunoon	122	7.0
Nyanga	96	5.5
Joe Slovo	96	5.5
Gugulethu	88	5.1
Imizamo Yethu	81	4.7
Khayelitsha	75	4.3
Delft	60	3.5
Phillipi	55	3.2
Other	2	0.1
	818	100.0

Table 8: Comparison of Male and Female Migrants from the Eastern Cape				
	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Age</b>				
<20	3	0.7	5	1.3
20-29	120	29.1	98	24.6
30-39	148	35.9	161	40.4
40-49	90	21.8	92	23.0
50-59	43	10.4	34	8.6
60+	9	2.1	9	2.4
<b>Marital status</b>				
Unmarried	244	59.1	272	68.2
Married	95	23.0	68	17.0
Cohabiting	49	11.9	17	4.3
Divorced/separated	17	4.1	29	7.3
Widowed/abandoned	8	1.9	13	3.3
<b>Education</b>				
No formal schooling	6	1.5	5	1.3
Primary school	27	6.5	26	6.6
Some high school	132	32.0	97	24.4
Finished high school	181	43.9	190	47.6
Post secondary	35	8.5	60	15.1
University	31	7.6	21	5.3
<b>Work status</b>				
Unemployed	108	27.1	87	21.1
Working full time	246	61.6	294	71.3
Working part-time	45	11.3	31	7.5

The economic drivers of migration from the Eastern Cape are strikingly similar for men and women, with both equally likely to be migrating to earn income to support the rural household. Several characteristics stand out about the reasons for migrating from the Eastern Cape and for choosing Cape Town as a destination (Table 9). First, responsibility for family members is critically important (94% said that the family needed more money to survive and 91% that they wanted to earn money in Cape Town to remit home). Second, the decision to migrate was not taken in isolation (70% said that the family directed them to leave for Cape Town). Third, the lack of employment opportunities in the Eastern Cape (88%) and the prospect of a good job in Cape Town (94%) were important motives for migration. At the time of the survey, the unemployment rate in the Eastern Cape was 42% and almost 60% for those aged 25 to 34 years (ECSECC, 2022). Fourth, food insecurity was cited by almost 60% as a reason for migration. However, agricultural challenges and climate change were considered relatively insignificant, which is consistent with the dependence of most rural households on cash income (Rogan, 2017). Finally, family and friends' social networks were significant draws to Cape Town as 90% had relatives in the city and

66% had friends living there, a concrete example of the effect of migrant networks (Stapleton, 2015).

Bank (2005) says we should not underestimate the extent to which rural households in the Eastern Cape have moved away from household-based agricultural production and embarked on new livelihood strategies (see also Ebenezer & Abyssinia, 2018). In their article, de la Hey & Beinart (2017) argue that smallholders in the Eastern Cape have largely abandoned arable production in the fields. Rural smallholder agriculture is in a particularly parlous state, with few households producing crops for market and most dependent on food purchase for their daily dietary needs (Daniels et al., 2013; Mthethwa & Wale, 2017; Neves & du Toit, 2013; Ragie et al., 2020; Rogan, 2017; Westaway, 2012). Many households have become dependent on social grants for their basic needs (Hajdu et al., 2020). Rural development initiatives to support small farmers have been largely ineffectual and failed to reverse a process of deagrarianisation (Bank & Minkley, 2005; Fischer et al., 2024). In this context, migration to Cape Town has assumed ever greater importance as a viable livelihood strategy.

Table 9: Reasons for Migration from Eastern Cape to Cape Town			
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neither (%)
<b>Reasons for Leaving the Eastern Cape</b>			
My family needed more money just to survive	94.0	3.9	2.1
I was unemployed and unable to find a job at home	87.9	9.8	2.2
My family said I should leave and come here to work	69.7	24.8	5.4
We did not have enough food to eat at home	58.7	35.7	4.8
I was unhappy with the schools	39.7	56.7	3.5
I was unhappy with the hospitals and clinics	32.6	64.1	3.3
My job did not suit my qualifications and experience	29.2	65.0	5.9
We had a farm, but our crops failed	17.0	79.5	3.6
We had no land/not enough land	16.0	80.9	3.0
There was too much crime/insecurity	5.5	91.9	2.5
I left my home area because of climate change	9.0	85.5	5.6
<b>Reasons for Migrating to Cape Town</b>			
I heard there were good jobs available here	93.7	4.6	1.7
I needed to earn money just to survive	90.5	8.1	1.4
I wanted to earn money to send back home	91.0	6.4	2.5
I had relatives living in this city	90.2	9.3	0.5
I wanted my children to have a better life	67.3	27.9	4.8
I had friends living in this city	66.2	33.0	0.9
I came here because the schools are good	43.4	53.3	3.3
I came here because of the social life/ entertainment	38.5	58.5	2.9
I came here because the hospitals/clinics are good	35.7	61.0	3.3
I came here because the housing is good	23.2	67.0	9.7
I wanted to establish an informal business here	16.5	76.6	4.2

Eastern Cape migrants in Cape Town maintain close connections with their household members in the Eastern Cape (Makiwane & Gumede, 2020). Only 5% of the migrants interviewed said that they never return to the Eastern Cape. The rest retain strong personal bonds, returning home at least once a year. Furthermore, the ubiquity of mobile phones in stretched households means that contact is immediate and continuous. As Porter et al. (2018) note more broadly “the immediacy of phone communication brings emotional benefits through regular interaction, but also hazards of instant sociality; phone-enabled mobile money transfers allow rapid support in times of crisis, but money demands bring an additional stress to many migrants’ lives; calls bring the faraway near, so travel costs can be reduced or avoided, but they may initiate new concerns about reduced co-presence.” Dalvit (2023), for example, shows that mobile network coverage sustains a bidirectional flow of people, resources and information between a rural district in the Eastern Cape. Mobile phones “play an important and nuanced role in arranging physical or virtual rendezvous, facilitating transfers of monetary and other resources, and enabling timeless communication and exchange of information across distance” (Dalvit, 2023: 913).

## Migrant Remittances

Before the pandemic, an estimated 24 million people in South Africa, or two-thirds of the adult population, sent, received, or both sent and received remittances (Techno-serve, 2016). The total volume of domestic remittances was estimated at USD11-13 billion p.a. Remittances are sent by migrants using various formal and informal channels. Informal remittance channels including personal conveyance by the migrant or by friends and relatives, spaza shop owners, taxi drivers, and associations such as egg circles and burial societies. There are four main formal remittance channels (Figure 6):

- Migrants traditionally relied on the state-owned post office which is empowered to remit funds within South Africa, in accordance with Section 46 of the Post Office Act 44 of 1958 (Lawack, 2021). Post offices have a large outreach network including in remote rural locations. Their remittance products include ordinary and telegraphic money orders.
- The major South African banks – ABSA, FNB, Standard Bank, and Nedbank – offer inter-account transfers (in person and digital) but also allow account holders to

send money to a mobile wallet that the recipient can access from an ATM. These include FNB's eWallet, Absa's CashSend, Standard Bank's Instant Money, and Nedbank's Send-iMali.

- South Africa's supermarket chains have entered the remittance market in recent years. Shoprite was the first to introduce money transfer at its Money Market counters as early as 2006. With more than 950 supermarkets, Money Market has broad coverage in urban and rural areas. As Technoserve (2016) observe, the launch of a simple, counter-based, cash-in, cash-out service at a low flat rate attracted migrants who were not regular users of the formal banking system. In the decade that followed, other chains (including Spar, Pep and Pick n Pay) followed Shoprite's lead.
- There are now several digital remittance providers include MTN Mobile Money, WChat Wallet, and MobiCash. Vodacom's M-Pesa, which is a major digital remittance player in other African countries, started in South Africa in 2010 and exited in 2016 primarily due to a lack of widespread adoption and the challenges of penetrating an established financial services market.

Eighty percent of the migrants surveyed reported that they regularly send remittances back to households in the Eastern Cape. As Table 10 shows, most migrants in Cape Town prefer to use formal rather than informal channels. Only 10% of remitters surveyed take the funds themselves, rely on friends or relatives, or use the services of bus and taxi drivers. Thus, 90% of remitters send money through formal channels. The post office is used by less than 2% of migrants surveyed, suggesting that this traditional method of sending remittances has been largely abandoned. At the other end of the remittance spectrum, only 3% have embraced the use of mobile money digital platforms and apps on cellphones. Far more popular for transferring funds are the banks (used by 57%) and supermarkets (29%).

The average amounts remitted vary widely, with 22% remitting small amounts of less than ZAR500 per month and 44% remitting between ZAR501 and ZAR1,000 per month (Table 10). However, women remit more on average than men (ZAR1,007 versus ZAR862 per month). Men are more likely to submit smaller amounts despite their more privileged position in the labour market. For example, 29% of men remit between ZAR100 and ZAR500 per month compared to only 21% of women. In addition, 20% of women send more than ZAR1,500 per month, compared to only 13% of men.

**Figure 6: Remittance Service Providers in South Africa**



Source: Technoserve (2016)

Table 10: Main Remittance Channels Used by Migrants		
	No.	%
<b>Formal channels</b>		
Bank	367	56.6
Supermarket	188	29.0
Internet/mobile phone	19	2.9
Post office	10	1.5
<b>Informal channels</b>		
I take it myself	32	5.3
A friend or relative takes it for me	20	3.1
A bus or taxi driver takes it for me	13	1.6
<b>Average monthly amount remitted</b>		
ZAR101-500	81	22.1
ZAR501-1,000	162	44.3
ZAR1,001-1,500	70	19.1
ZAR1,501-2,000	38	10.4
ZAR2,001-2,500	11	3.0
ZAR2,501 +	4	1.1

## Migrant Food Security

Previous studies have identified food poverty and insecurity as a major challenge confronting residents of low-income neighbourhoods in South African cities such as Cape Town (Battersby, 2011a; 2011b; Crush et al., 2018; Hunter-Adams et al., 2019; Swanepoel et al., 2018; Vanleeuw et al., 2022). The food insecurity travails of international migrants in the city have attracted some attention (Crush & Tawodzera, 2017; Hunter-Adams & Rother, 2016; Nyamnjoh, 2018; Sithole & Dinbabo, 2016). By contrast, the food access struggles of internal migrants have received little or no research attention. At the rural end of the migration corridor, there is a clutch of case studies pointing to the dire food security situation of households in the Eastern Cape (Cheteni et al., 2020; Hendriks et al., 2016; Musemwa et al., 2015; Nqumbela et al., 2020; Rogan, 2017). Few of these studies factor in the role of migration in exacerbating or mitigating household and individual food security. This survey therefore provides an opportunity to take a recent snapshot of the food security status of migrants from the Eastern Province in Cape Town.

Asked to compare Cape Town with the Eastern Province, as many as 78% said that hunger was better in Cape Town, and 81% that food prices were better in Cape Town. Just over 80% reported that food had become much more expensive during the COVID-19 pandemic with 75% agreeing that it had become more difficult to access food during the pandemic. Average household income was R5,955 per month. Migrant households spent an average of R1,614 per month on food and groceries, representing 27% of household income and 45% of total household expenditure. Various household food insecurity metrics were used in the survey to capture the state of migrant household food insecurity in post-pandemic Cape Town in 2023. Here we report on findings for

three of these measures: the Lived Poverty Index (LPI), the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence indicator (HFIAP), and the Household Dietary Diversity Scale (HDDS).

The LPI measures the frequency of a household going without various basic necessities in the previous year, one of which is food. As Table 11 shows, just over one-third of households had gone without enough food at some point, although only 6% of households had done so many times or all the time. As many as 62% said they had never gone without enough food. These numbers suggest that most migrant households in Cape Town can access sufficient food to meet their needs most of the time.

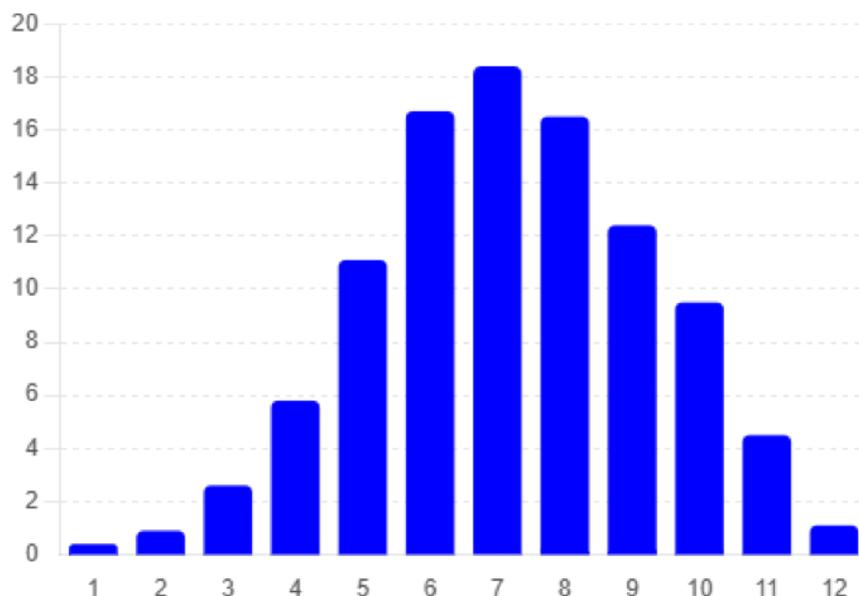
The HFIAP groups households into four categories based on responses to nine frequency-of-occurrence questions relating to food access and consumption in the previous four weeks: food secure, mildly food insecure, moderately food insecure, and severely food insecure. Table 12 shows the frequency distribution of households and broadly confirms the finding of the LPI analysis in so far as almost two-thirds of migrant households (64%) were completely food secure. The primary difference is in the severity of food deprivation. Almost a quarter of migrant households surveyed were classified as severely food insecure. Further analysis is necessary to determine the characteristics of this group of households, but it seems likely that the household head and other members are unemployed depriving the household of a regular stream of income with which to purchase food.

The HDDS is a measure of the nutritional quality of the household diet based on the degree of consumption of food from 12 food groups in the 24 hours prior to the survey. Figure 7 shows that only 21% of households had a low diversity diet (HDDS = 1-5), many of which were also food insecure. The rest had relatively balanced diets with 43% consuming food from 8 or more food groups.

	No.	%
Always	25	3.1
Many times	22	2.7
Several times	76	9.4
Just once or twice	187	23.0
Never	501	61.8
Total	811	100.0

	No.	%
Severely food insecure	203	24.1
Moderately food insecure	42	5.0
Mildly food insecure	59	7.0
Food secure	537	63.9
Total	841	100.0

**Figure 7: Distribution of Dietary Diversity Scores**



At least two of the Eastern Cape case studies use some of the same food security metrics. Their findings suggest that food insecurity is an extremely significant challenge in this region. For example, Musemwa et al. (2015) report that 68% of rural households are severely food insecure (compared to only 24% of migrant households in Cape Town). In relation to dietary diversity, Cheteni et al. (2020) report that as many as 63% of households had an HDDS score of between 1 and 3 (compared to less than 4% of migrant households in Cape Town). Although the case study data is not strictly comparable with the Cape Town data, they do suggest that migrant households in the city may enjoy a much higher level of food security. Although this provisional conclusion requires more representative data from the Eastern Cape, it does indicate that migration to Cape Town has positive food security outcomes. The potential role of remittances in bolstering food security in the Eastern Cape (and possibly compromising it in the city) also requires further study.

## Conclusion

The conventional wisdom on post-apartheid mobilities, heavily indebted to the work of economist Dorrit Posel, is that oscillating labour migration was unexpectedly resilient for the first post-apartheid decade but has been increasingly displaced by permanent urbanisation in the years since. This paper reviews the evidence for this hypothesis and finds that the evidentiary basis for the purported decline in labour migration is surprisingly weak. Data from the 2022 South African Census on interprovincial changes of residence appear to indicate that large-scale circular migration has continued to the present. To further refine this finding, the paper focuses on a case study of one of the busiest migration corridors in the country linking the rural areas of the Eastern Cape with the city of Cape Town in the Western Cape. If circular migration is in a state of terminal decline, we would expect to see significant changes in this migration corridor.

Drawing on evidence from a recent survey of more than 800 migrants in Cape Town, the paper establishes that labour migration and translocalism continue to be an important feature of rural-urban ties and flows. The paper also confirms that post-apartheid labour migration in this corridor has become increasingly feminised with women migrants now playing a key role in supporting the rural residents of spatially stretched households. Finally, there is considerable variation in the levels of food security among migrant households in Cape Town. Around one-third of households exhibited moderate or severe food insecurity. However, preliminary evidence suggests that levels of food security are much higher in Cape Town than in the Eastern Cape from which migrants come. Hence, despite the challenges and hardships of life in the city, improved food security appears to be a positive outcome of migration.

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