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**1. A note on food price affordability**

Food price affordability is related to income and the cost of goods and services. South African families buy most of their core foods from the supermarket. How prices are formed across the food value chains, specifically at the retail level – the final point of exchange for South African families, will determine whether food is affordable or not.

Families on low-incomes do not pay for food first. This is because incomes are too low when it first comes into our pockets. Families are forced to prioritise expenditure on goods and services into non-negotiable and negotiable expenses. Non-negotiable expenses typically include: paying for transport to get to work and back, paying for electricity, servicing critical debts, paying for children’s school fees and safe scholar transport; and also include ‘crisis’ expenses such as paying for a sick child to go to the doctor and burying a family member. **Food is bought from what remains in our pockets after other critical expenses have been paid for.** *This is why the prices of food are important. The food budget is already very low and families will struggle to buy the food they need. The money that remains in pockets will then determine the answers to the questions: What food can we buy with our money? How much can we buy? Where should we buy it from?*

Buying nutritional and diverse food typically is not an option under these financial circumstances. Families prioritise the buying of foods which fill bellies and enable meals to be prepared – mostly the core starches (maize meal, rice, flour, and potatoes); oil and sugar; sugar beans; a little meat; some eggs; a few basic vegetables; salt and tea; soap and basic personal hygiene products, some Maas and maybe milk; tinned stuffs; some cheap fruits in season; a few special foods for children’s breakfasts and lunchboxes, and bread. These are the foods which the PMBEJD’s Household Food Basket tracks. It is a basket which includes the foods which are most common in low-income South African homes and which women tell us they try and buy each month, given affordability constraints. This basket is not nutritionally complete. Buying these foods will not make families healthy or well; or ensure children grow properly.

**In February 2026**, the average cost of the Household Food Basket is **R5 383,81**. **Between January 2026 and February 2026** the average cost of the Household Food Basket **decreased by R17,63 (-0,3%)**. **Year-on-year**, the average cost of the Household Food Basket **increased by R70,59 (1,3%)**.

The Household Food Basket shows that on average; food prices have come down marginally over the past month, and a little up from a year ago. The Household Food Basket is a useful tool to track what foods South Africans buy, how much of each food we buy, how we buy the food (the decisions we make at the supermarket shelves and checkout counters) and where we buy the food. It is useful to know how much a basket of food costs and by how much the basket has increased or decreased by over time, to assess how by how much South Africans are struggling financially to secure food.

However, the Household Food Basket only provides a partial picture of the food crisis South Africans face because it is not nutritionally complete – it tracks the cost of a basket of food we are likely to buy but it does not tell us the cost of a basket of food that we should be eating for good nutrition, and therefore good health and wellbeing.

## 2. An introduction to PMBEJD's Basic Nutritional Food Basket

As financial and economic circumstances worsen, so too does household health and nutrition. The gap between what women are able to buy and what they need to buy for proper nutrition widens. Because of this, PMBEJD has with the *Household Food Basket*, simultaneously been tracking *The Basic Nutritional Food Basket*.

*The Basic Nutritional Food Basket*, is a basket designed by a Registered Dietician and includes foods which do constitute proper and healthy nutrition.<sup>1</sup> The Basic Nutritional Food Basket ensures that current food expenditure (severely limited by affordability constraints) is not conflated with the food expenditure required to secure proper nutrition. Read together with the *Household Food Basket*, the *Basic Nutritional Food Basket* assists to provide a more comprehensive picture of the economic situation and food crisis South African households face. *Table 1*.

**Table 1:** February 2026: The Basic Nutritional Food Index: household sizes 4, 5 &7.

By number of family members	Index 2025/26			change in Rands		change in %	
	Feb_2025	Jan_2026	Feb_2026	Jan 2026 vs. Feb 2026	Feb 2025 vs. Feb 2026	Jan 2026 vs. Feb 2026	Feb 2025 vs. Feb 2026
Four (4)	R3 731,81	R3 720,25	R3 696,21	-R 24,04	-R 35,60	-0,6%	-1,0%
Five (5)	R4 715,68	R4 702,54	R4 672,45	-R 30,09	-R 43,23	-0,6%	-0,9%
Seven (7)	<b>R6 516,06</b>	<b>R6 502,10</b>	<b>R6 459,83</b>	<b>-R 42,27</b>	<b>-R 56,23</b>	<b>-0,7%</b>	<b>-0,9%</b>

**Month-on-month:** The cost of a **basic nutritional food basket for a family of 7 members decreased** by **R42,27 (-0,7%)** from R6 502,10 in January 2026 to R6 459,83 in February 2026.

**Year-on-year:** The cost of a **basic nutritional food basket for a family of 7 members decreased** by **R56,23 (-0,9%)** from R6 516,06 in February 2025 to R6 459,83 in February 2026.

In February 2026, *The Basic Nutritional Food Basket*, using the same household size (7) as tracked by the Household Food Basket, is **R6 459,83**. This shows that the difference in cost between the foods which families living on low incomes try and buy each month (a household food basket) and the foods which families would like to buy and should buy to meet basic nutrition (a basic nutritional food basket) was **R1 076,02** (R5 383,81 vs. R6 459,83).

It shows that as at February 2026, families living on low-incomes may underspend on basic nutritional food by a minimum of 17% (R1 076,02). It means that the nutritional health and wellbeing of households is far worse than that shown by the Household Food Basket, and that the economic situation households face, with its attendant food crisis in homes is much deeper.

## 3. Key data from the February 2026 Household Affordability Index

The February 2026 Household Affordability Index, which tracks the prices of 44 basic foods from 47 supermarkets and 32 butcheries, in Johannesburg (Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa and Hillbrow), Durban (KwaMashu, Umlazi, Isipingo, Durban CBD, Hammarsdale and Pinetown), Cape Town (Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Philippi, Langa, Delft and Dunoon), Pietermaritzburg, Mtubatuba (in Northern KwaZulu-Natal), and Springbok (in the Northern Cape), shows that:

- **In February 2026:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket is **R5 383,81**.
- **Month-on-month:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket **decreased** by **R17,63 (-0,3%)**, from R5 401,44 in January 2026 to R5 383,81 in February 2026.
- **Year-on-year:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket **increased** by **R70,59 (1,3%)**, from R5 313,22 in February 2025 to R5 383,81 in February 2026.

<sup>1</sup> The Basic Nutritional Food Basket includes a greater variety of better quality nutritionally-rich foods and in higher quantities to provide a family with a basic but nutritionally complete monthly diet. The basket can be amended to respond to families of various sizes, genders, ages and life stages through its connection to four "energy groups." Food price data for the Basic Nutritional Food Basket is collected with the Household Food Basket and conforms to the same methodology. See page 5 of *February 2026, Household Affordability Index*.

### **Food pricing trends in February 2026.**

In February, of the 44 foods tracked in the basket: 19 foods increased in price, and 24 foods decreased in price, and 1 food remained unchanged. See page 2 of February 2026, Household Affordability Index.

*Below are the month-on-month price movements of individual foods in the average household food basket:*

**Foods in the basket which increased in price in February 2026 by 5% or more**, include: onions (9%), carrots (5%), and cabbage (7%).

**Foods in the basket which increased in price in February 2026 by 2% or more**, include: maize meal (2%), rice (2%), beef liver (3%), wors (4%), tinned pilchards (3%), canned beans (4%), and white bread (2%).

**Foods in the basket which decreased in price in February 2026, by 5% or more**, include: soup (-8%), tomatoes (-6%), butternut (-12%), and green pepper (-7%).

**Foods in the basket which decreased in price in February 2026, by 2% or more**, include: sugar beans (-3%), tea (-3%), Maas (-3%), eggs (-3%), chicken gizzards (-2%), beef (-4%), beef tripe (-2%), spinach (-3%), cremora (-4%), margarine (-2%), and peanut butter (-3%).

### **Inflation on the food baskets per area tracked.**

*In February 2026, food baskets in Durban, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, Mtubatuba, and Mthatha decreased in price. Food baskets in Joburg, and Springbok increased in price.*

*(See pages 8-15 for area specific data, in the February 2026, Household Affordability Index).*

#### **4. Statistics South Africa's Consumer Price Index and Producer Price Index.**

Statistics South Africa's latest Consumer Price Index for January 2026<sup>2</sup> shows that **Headline inflation was 3,5%**, and for the **lowest expenditure quintiles 1-3 it is 2,6%, 2,7%, and 2,9%** respectively. **CPI Food & non-alcoholic beverages inflation was 4,4%**. STATSA's Producer Price Index for December 2025<sup>3</sup> shows **Agriculture was -6,6%**, of which, **Products of crops and horticulture was -23,5%**, and **Live animals and animal products was 23,7%**.

#### **5. Workers and the National Minimum Wage**

*The National Minimum Wage is R28,79 per hour, R230,32 for an 8-hour day, and R4 836,72 for an average 21-day working month.* In February 2026, with **20 working-days**, the maximum National Minimum Wage for a General Worker is **R4 606,40**. Workers work to support their families. The wage workers earn is not just to sustain themselves alone, it is used to support the entire family. For Black South African workers, **one wage typically must support 4 people**. The maximum wage of **R4 606,40** when disbursed in a **family of four persons is R1 151,60**. This is **below the National Upper-Bound Poverty Line of R2 846 per capita per month**, and **below the National Lower-Bound Poverty Line of R1 415 per capita per month** (in May 2025 prices).<sup>4</sup>

The February 2026 average cost of a basic nutritional food basket for a family of four persons is **R3 696,21** (See page 5 of February 2026, Household Affordability Index).

On our calculations, using Pietermaritzburg-based figures for electricity and transport, and the average figure for a minimum nutritional basket of food for a family of four, puts electricity, and transport, taking up **60,4%** of a worker's wage (R2 781,85/R4 606,40). See Table 2 below.

<sup>2</sup> STATSSA (2026). **Consumer Price Index January 2026**. Statistical release P0141. 18 February 2026. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P3, 6. See Link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0141/P0141January2026.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> STATSSA (2026). **Producer Price Index December 2025**. Statistical release P0142.1. 29 January 2026. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P12. See Link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P01421/P01421December2025.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> STATSSA (2026). **National Poverty Lines 2025**. Statistical Release P0310.1. 29 January 2026. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P3. See link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03101/P031012025.pdf>

**Table 2:** The current shortfall in the National Minimum Wage vs. household expenses for a family of four persons (February 2026).

Income	NMW in family of four	
Number of days worked		20
Number of hours worked		8
Remuneration rate		R28,79
Wage income	<b>R4 606,40</b>	
<b>Wage income</b>	<b>R4 606,40</b>	
Household expenses		% of wage
Transport to work (2 taxi, return)	R1 600,00	34,7%
Prepaid electricity (350kWh)	R1 181,85	25,7%
Total for transport + electricity	<b>R2 781,85</b>	<b>60,4%</b>
Money remaining to spend on all other expenses	<b>R1 824,55</b>	
Subtract: food (4 persons)	R3 696,21	
<b>Minimum surplus/shortfall on food costs</b>	<b>-R1 871,66</b>	<b>-50,6%</b>

After paying for transport and electricity workers are left with R1 824,55. **The minimum shortfall on food for a workers' family in February 2026 is 50,6%** (a shortfall of R1 871,66 on a basket of nutritional food costing R3 696,21). If all the remaining money (R1 824,55) went to buy food, then for a family of 4, **it would provide R456,14 per person per month**. There is no possibility of a worker being able to afford enough nutritious food for her family. **This is 47% below the National Food Poverty Line of R855 per person per month.** (See page 7 of February 2026, Household Affordability Index). Note that: the Food Poverty Line is a monetary-based threshold below which a person cannot consume enough food to meet their minimum daily energy requirements.<sup>5</sup>

#### 6. The New National Minimum Wage rate for 2026

The Department of Employment and Labour have gazetted that the new NMW rate for 2026, implemented on 1 March 2026 will be R30,23 an hour.<sup>6</sup> An increase of 5% (from R28,79 to R30,23). In Rand-value, the new NMW rate will increase by R1,44 per hour. On an average 21-working day month, and if workers work every day of an average 21-day month, for 8 hours, then the 5% increase will add up to a monthly wage of R5 078,64. **This is a monthly increase of R241,92 per month.**

The new electricity tariffs for 2026/27 will increase by 8,76% and come into effect on 1 April for direct Eskom customers and on 1 July for Municipal customers. On PMBEJD's current tracked prepaid electricity tariffs of 350kWh per month, electricity costs a family R1 181,85. **An 8,76% electricity increase will add an additional R103,53 onto the family's electricity expenses.** If we consider the imminent price increases on electricity against the new NMW for 2026, the new electricity tariffs will draw down R103,53 off the NMW increase of R241,92. The 5% annual increase on the NMW will therefore be reduced by 43% (R0,62), moving the annual NMW increment to a 2,9% increase (R0,82 per hour); vs. the 'intended' increase of R1,44 (or 5%). And a monthly increase of R138,39. **This means that workers are likely to get a below average CPI Headline Inflation increase for the 2026/27 term.**

Our data for February 2026 already shows that at the current NMW rate of R28,79 per hour, workers' families face a shortfall of 50,6% (R1871,66) on a nutritional basket of food (R3 696,21), and food expenditure falls 47% below the Food Poverty Line. An annual increase of R0,82 per hour or potential R138,39 per month (if workers work a full 21 working-day month, and don't get sick or need to take a leave of absence) is not enough for workers to absorb higher expenditures and improve their families' lives this year.

The NMW set at such a low level does not allow workers and their families the possibility to secure even their most basic expenses of transport, electricity and food. Workers have to cut back on food and go into deeper levels of debt to cover wage shortfalls. Small annual increments off such a low wage base (in Rand-value), including not ensuring

<sup>5</sup> STATSSA (2025). **Poverty Trends in South Africa: An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2023.** Report No. 03-10-06. Statistics South Africa, Pretoria. P102. See link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-06/Report-03-10-062023.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Employment and Labour (2026). **Government Gazette, 3 February 2026. No. 54075. Amendment of National Minimum Wage for 1 March 2026.** Pretoria. P4. See link: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202602/54075rg11941gon7083.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202602/54075rg11941gon7083.pdf)

the new rates set absorb future increases on essential expenses administered by the state at known intervals throughout the year, including not projecting inflation on goods and services for the entire NMW term means that workers paid at the NMW rate are locked into ever deeper levels of poverty each year.

A National Minimum Wage set at a level that when disbursed in a worker’s family is below all South Africa’s major poverty measurements can only result in harm to our nation’s health, reduced productivity in all areas of the economy; poor societal and educational outcomes; constrained economic growth, a deepened sense of hopelessness and increased instability. The NMW is just one instrument to part-deal with our major economic structural problems, including our historical low-wage regime, but it can be wielded better and in conjunction with other instruments and initiatives.

### 7. Children and the Child Support Grant

In February 2026, the average monthly cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet was **R942,21**. Over the past month, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet **decreased** by **R5,97 (-0,6%)**. Year-on-year, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet **decreased** by **R9,42 (-1,0%)**. See page 5 of February 2026, Household Affordability Index.

In February 2026, the **Child Support Grant of R560 per month** is **35% below the National Food Poverty Line of R855 per month** (in May 2025 prices), and **41% below** the average monthly **cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet (R942,21)**.

As children grow older, their nutritional requirements increase. It means that the cost of feeding a child increases in price as a child grows older and is also different for teenage girls and boys. The Child Support Grant of R560 per child is a fixed amount: it does not account for age, or gender differences. For growing children this means that the R560 CSG becomes increasingly inadequate to cover their nutritional needs. *This is seen in Table 3 below.*

**Table 3:** The shortfall of the Child Support Grant when compared with PMBEJD’s Basic Nutritional Food Basket for children of different ages and genders.

By age of child and gender	Feb_2026 PMBEJD Basic Nutritional Food Basket per child	Child Support Grant 2025/26	Shortfall in ZAR of PMBEJD Nutritional Food Basket vs Child Support Grant	Shortfall in % of PMBEJD Nutritional Food Basket vs Child Support Grant
Small child aged 3-9 years	R 830,98	R560,00	-R270,98	-33%
Small child aged 10-13 years	R 903,61	R560,00	-R343,61	-38%
Girl child aged 14-18 years	R 956,40	R560,00	-R396,40	-41%
Boy child aged 14-18 years	R 1 077,86	R560,00	-R517,86	-48%
<b>Average for all children</b>	<b>R942,21</b>	<b>R 560,00</b>	<b>-R382,21</b>	<b>-41%</b>

As of December 2025, **twelve million eight hundred seventy-one thousand six hundred seventy-four children** (12 871 674) were receiving a Child Support Grant of R560 a month.<sup>7</sup> **This Child Support Grant of R560 is 35% below the Food Poverty Line of R855:** a monetary-based threshold below which a person, in this case our children, cannot secure enough food to meet their minimum daily energy requirements, let alone all the other essential proteins, fibre, calcium, minerals and vitamins children need to grow physically and mentally strong and healthy, and be better able to resist illnesses, and recover faster.

The inadequacy of a R560 CSG resulting in a shortfall of 35% against the Food Poverty Line and 33% to 48% against PMBEJD’s Basic Nutritional Food Basket is horrifying, however the reality of the shortfall in food spend is worse than shown by these statistics. This is because the dire financial situation of parents, means that the R560 CSG is required to pay for other expenses needed to support the raising of children, and not just food for an individual child.

<sup>7</sup> SASSA (2025). **Factsheet: Issue #12 of 2025. 31 December 2025. A Statistical Summary of Social Grants in South Africa.** South African Social Security Agency. Pretoria. P1.  
See link: <https://www.sassa.gov.za/statistical-reports/Documents/FACT%20SHEET%20%20December%202025.pdf>

The Child Support Grant *is also used* to pay for safe transport for children who live and go to school in places that are unsafe; for clothes and shoes; and the myriads of educational resources and fees still demanded of parents whose children attend “zero-fee” schools, and Early Child Development Centres or creches (not funded sufficiently or not funded at all). Electricity, water, clothes, shoes, domestic hygiene products and food need to be paid for.

It means that a food underspend of 35% to 48% for our **twelve million eight hundred seventy-one thousand six hundred seventy-four children is likely to be far higher and much more terrible, as parents try and meet competing demands for that little R560 to raise their children as best they can.** There are consequences for denying millions of children proper nutritious food. We risk condemning yet another generation of our children to historical inequity, injustice, lost potentials and hopelessness; and with this a continuation of poor economic, educational, health and societal outcomes.

### **7.1 Some ideas on improving support to children and their families**

*Pushing up the Child Support Grant to the level of the Food Poverty Line, will improve the situation of our children. This will have to include the implementation of an economic support measure such as a Basic Income Grant for parents (one which is enough to cover basic expenses plus include an amount for parents to start or support a livelihood). Linking all parents receiving a Child Support Grant for their children to a mechanism whereby no payment is required for electricity and water, as these services draw down on income support. Ensuring all schools and creches have a fully funded nutrition programme, which offers proper nutritious food for children. Free and safe transportation to schools and creches. A support mechanism for parents to cover children’s education expenses, including school clothes and shoes, stationery, and books (especially important in the New School Year). And fully funded zero-fee schools and Early Child Development Centres. Children under the age of 5, and who are not able to access the School Nutrition Food Programme, as they do not yet attend school, and who have specific needs due to their age, should receive a higher Child Support Grant as an immediate priority. Our children’s health and wellbeing, support and potentials, are an indicator of where we, as a country are headed – we can change our country’s future trajectory by prioritising our children.*