



# Backyarding:

Understanding backyard  
rental markets better:  
A synthesis of research  
findings in eight  
neighbourhoods in  
Cape Town

2021

## Acknowledgements

Backyard Matters is a partnership initiative between Development Action Group (DAG) and Isandla Institute, which until December 2020 also included Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU). The project is aimed at strengthening the backyard rental market and contributing towards well-managed, quality rental stock that provides affordable, dignified and safe housing solutions. Backyard Matters is funded by Comic Relief.

Cover image: Isandla Institute/Shاون Swingler. Langa.

## Executive Summary

'Backyarding' has historically remained virtually invisible in public policy and urban programmes. Nowadays, there is increased recognition of the informal backyard rental sector as a growing, community-led solution to the need for affordable accommodation and to current housing deficits. But understanding of its workings, functionality and deficiencies is still fairly limited, which in turn hinders the development of appropriate policy and/or supportive interventions.

This paper draws on insights gained through enumeration studies of and focus groups with backyard landlords and tenants in eight neighbourhoods in the City of Cape Town. The neighbourhoods are: Eerste River, Freedom Park, Ilitha Park, Kensington, Lost City, Lotus Park, Maitland Garden Village and Manenberg. The research aimed at understanding the backyard rental market better was conducted in 2020 as part of the Backyard Matters Project, a partnership initiative between the Development Action Group (DAG), Isandla Institute and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU), funded by Comic Relief.

This paper synthesises the findings of the fieldwork across the eight neighbourhoods. As such, it contributes to filling the knowledge gap of the informal backyard rental sector, with specific reference to Cape Town. A key finding of the fieldwork is that the informal backyard rental market is highly contextual and that social factors can be very important aspects of its functioning – in fact, in some instances, social factors are primary drivers of this market. This certainly differs across neighbourhoods, but it offers an important critique of a more conventional perspective on the backyard rental market as operating purely on a financial logic.

Given the contextual nature of how the informal backyard rental sector operates, what it provides, who provides it and who it provides for, it is more appropriate to talk about backyard rental markets, rather than a singular market.

Nonetheless, while context matters a great deal in understanding the informal backyard rental sector, this is not to suggest that there are no common themes and opportunities for intervention – be it from the state, the finance sector or other stakeholders. The paper distils 10 key take-away points from the primary data that suggest some common themes can be identified. These include: investing in adequate, affordable services; quality structures; tenure (especially in a post-Covid 19 reality); and, significantly, improving the public realm and quality of the neighbourhood.

In all, the fieldwork findings present a rather complex and contextual picture of backyarding in Cape Town, which suggests that interventions need to be nuanced in responding to relevant contextual factors and opportunities.

**This paper synthesises the findings of the fieldwork across the eight neighbourhoods.**

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*Isandla Institute acknowledges the contributions made by representatives from Development Action Group (DAG), Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU), People's Environmental Planning (PEP), Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) and Ubuhle Bakha Ubuhle (UBU) during the Local Community of Practice Learning Event held on 19 February 2020.*

## Introduction

**Backyard accommodation is increasingly receiving attention from government institutions, civic organisations and academia as a community-led solution to the crisis of affordable accommodation and housing deficits in South Africa. This has not always been the case. Historically, although backyard residences in both formal and informal urban areas was acknowledged, they remained virtually invisible and were thus not prioritised for policy or state intervention. As a result, not enough is known about the nature and functioning of the backyard sector and its place in the low-cost rental market.**

*Backyard Matters: Enabling People, Place and Policy* is a 42-month project funded by Comic Relief, which brings together the Development Action Group (DAG), Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) and Isandla Institute in an aim to contribute towards an improved understanding of backyard accommodation. The project seeks to add to the identification of interventions which enhance and foster this particular under-estimated and neglected housing sector. The first year of this project has been geared towards data collection in eight identified neighbourhoods in the City of Cape Town, to build an evidence-base for advocacy and technical support. Each enumeration activity has been summarised in a neighbourhood profile.<sup>1</sup>

**The paper seeks to provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of the social and economic dynamics of backyarding in the Cape Town context.**

This paper synthesises the findings of enumeration and survey data from the eight neighbourhoods. Whereas the neighbourhood profiles provide an individual analysis of neighbourhoods, this synthesis paper cuts across the eight neighbourhoods in order to highlight some key findings and share insights on some of its implications for our understanding of the informal backyard rental market. It is acknowledged that the sample size limits the extent to which findings can be generalised. Nonetheless, the data does provide gainful insights into contextual commonalities and differences across settlements.

The paper is purposed as explanatory document developed to help readers gain a more nuanced understanding of the social and economic dynamics of backyarding in the Cape Town context, highlighting contextual or unique issues stemming from the survey data. This data is then considered in light of available literature.

<sup>1</sup> Four of these profiles are available on the Development Action group website (links below). To access the neighbourhood profiles of Ilitha Park, Kensington, Lotus Park and Manenberg, please contact VPUU on [hello@vpuu.org.za](mailto:hello@vpuu.org.za).  
<https://www.dag.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dag-np-maitland-garden-village-lr-1.pdf>  
<https://www.dag.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dag-np-palm-park-eerste-river-lr-1.pdf>  
<https://www.dag.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dag-np-freedom-park-mitchells-plain-lr-1.pdf>  
<https://www.dag.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dag-np-lost-city-mitchells-plain-lr-1.pdf>



## About the Backyard Matters Project

**The backyard sector is widely recognised as a critical and growing component of housing provision in South African cities. However, an absence of data, particularly at the neighbourhood level, has meant that the nature of backyarding is not well understood. In turn, this contributes to a lack of public policy offering guidance and programmatic responses.**

The following insights and arguments motivate for the project:

- The backyard sector offers a rapidly growing accommodation option for an increasing number of people, especially in South African cities.
- There is a lack of data and understanding of the nature and dynamics of backyard rental markets in different cities and neighbourhoods.
- There is no clear definition of backyarding or backyard dwellings to guide policy and programmatic responses.
- Government responses to backyarding have mostly been untargeted and ad-hoc.
- New actors have emerged that are likely to shape backyard rental markets.

**An absence of data has meant that the nature of backyarding is not well understood.**

Against this background, the Backyard Matters project seeks to:

- Improve understanding of the backyard rental market as an affordable housing option;
- Support tenants and landlords in understanding their rights and pursuing opportunities for collective bargaining;
- Inform targeted policy, financial and technical interventions to ensure backyard rental accommodation is an affordable, dignified housing solution; and,
- Support landlords seeking to improve the quality of backyard rental housing stock.



Isandla Institute / Eric Miller. Hangberg.

## Research methodology

In line with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the community-owned solution that is the backyard rental sector, the primary focus of the project in the first phase (October 2019 – December 2020) was on data collection and analysis.<sup>2</sup> Data was collected based on a participatory data collection process by way of sample surveys and focus group discussions in eight selected neighbourhoods across the Cape Town metropolitan area.

**Conducting field research on the subject of backyarding has historically proven to be challenging, in part because researchers do not always have a relationship with the residents of a particular neighbourhood.**

### *Covid-19 and its impact on the research process*

The national lockdown declared in March 2020 due to the onset and impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Backyard Matters project. The pandemic required the halting of fieldwork that had just recently commenced, further requiring a rethinking of various aspects of the project methodology such as ensuring adherence to various safety measures to be put into place to comply with the law, prevent spread of the virus and protect staff, fieldworkers and residents from being infected. Limited time in the field further meant that fewer households could be surveyed than anticipated due to time constraints. Focus group discussions were then also limited to two neighbourhoods.

Acknowledging the impact of Covid-19 on livelihoods/household income and housing affordability as well as the urgent need for quality basic services and living space as protective measures against infection, the project included Covid-19 related questions in the questionnaire to assess immediate vulnerabilities and challenges stemming from the pandemic. Recognising that Covid-19 has both immediate and long-term impacts, other project outputs further explored the implications of the pandemic on tenure security, affordability, evictions and land occupations, amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

### *Neighbourhood selection criteria*

The project team identified a list of selection criteria, including neighbourhood age and type, demographic make-up, and the type of housing and backyard housing existing in the neighbourhoods. Conducting field research on the subject of backyarding has historically proven to be challenging, in part because researchers do not always have a relationship with the residents of a particular neighbourhood. To ensure community buy-in, the project partners opted to conduct fieldwork in neighbourhoods where they have previously established rapport. The neighbourhood selection criteria list was matched against these neighbourhoods and the following **eight neighbourhoods** were selected:

- Eerste River
- Freedom Park
- Ilitha Park
- Kensington
- Lost City
- Lotus Park
- Maitland Garden Village
- Manenberg

<sup>2</sup> As part of Year 1 of the Backyard Matters Project, Isandla Institute has developed a series of outputs aimed at expanding the understanding of backyarding in South Africa, as well as gesturing towards particular recommendations. These include 2 practice briefs and a paper, all of which are referenced in the bibliography. The documents can be accessed on Isandla Institute's website: <https://isandla.org.za/en/resources>.

<sup>3</sup> Isandla Institute. 2020. *Backyarding: An Important Urban Housing Solution. Practice Brief 1*; Isandla Institute. 2020. *Land Occupations and Covid-19. Practice Brief 2*; Isandla Institute. 2020. *Backyarding: Affordability, Dignified Shelter and Covid-19*.

## Survey design

The Backyard Matters quantitative survey was collectively designed by the project partners through a series of workshops during the early stages of the project. The survey was informed by a literature review and project narrative, determining the themes the survey would explore. The survey was administered on the Kobo software.

## Neighbourhood consultation and training of fieldworkers

Local leadership and/or organisations were identified and engaged to secure buy-in for the field work. Preliminary focus group discussions were conducted with residents and potential local fieldworkers with the intention of providing information about the project and gaining an initial understanding of how the backyard sector functions in each community. Local field workers were recruited by staff and community leaders, screened for suitability and between 5 and 10 were then trained on the purpose of the project and how to complete and troubleshoot the survey on the tablets. They were paid for this work.

## Fieldwork preparation and implementation

Before fieldwork began, the fieldworkers went door to door and a community meeting was held to ensure that as many residents as possible were made aware of the enumeration and its purpose. This preparation assisted greatly in helping to ensure the actual enumeration went smoothly.

Over a few days, field workers surveyed as many households in the area as they could access. This included information about each household living on the erf and additional information about each person in the household.

In general, a central location was designated as a headquarters during the process that could be used for daily briefing, queries and an assembly point should any incident occur. Each day, target erf numbers were identified and field workers conducted surveys in pairs and maintained contact regarding their movement with supervisors via WhatsApp.

Particular concerns arose regarding gang activity. Field workers were mostly drawn from the area and were able to navigate the neighbourhood, but were advised to enter the nearest house to avoid getting caught in crossfire. Vacant and dilapidated houses where gang or drug activity were likely to be taking place were avoided. Yards were checked for the presence of dogs.

**Each day, target erf numbers were identified and field workers conducted surveys in pairs and maintained contact regarding their movement with supervisors via WhatsApp.**

## Safeguarding

During the data collection and analysis process, partners adopted a safeguarding strategy that sought to protect all partners involved from any harm brought about by the project. The aim was to create tailored approaches that address specific risks through local safety plans. Participants in the surveys were informed of the purpose of the research and how the information acquired will be used; consent was received while maintaining anonymity of the respondents.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown regulations required partners to put in specific measures in place to prevent the spread of the virus and protect staff, fieldworkers and participants from being infected as well as managing distress and anxiety.

Other safeguarding measures put in place included identifying contacts for SAPS patrol vans and providing fieldworkers with contact details of local neighbourhood watches during the data collection process.

To mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19, focus group discussions have been limited to only two of the eight neighbourhoods, namely Maitland Garden Village and Lotus Park.

Where possible, permission was obtained from landlords before entering backyards and speaking to tenants. Consent was obtained and photos were taken of each house that was enumerated.

### Data capturing and analysis

The data collected was cleaned, verified and analysed by the project partners. Key themes were identified and guiding questions for focus group discussions were drafted.

### Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with both tenant and landlord households who had participated in the survey and had given consent to be contacted. To mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19, focus group discussions have been limited to only two of the eight neighbourhoods, namely Maitland Garden Village and Lotus Park. Two separate sessions allowed tenants and landlords to give voice to their perspectives about the informal backyard rental sector within the same neighbourhood.

### Project sample size

In total 1,486 households were covered by the fieldwork. Of these, 58% were tenant households (867) and 42% (619) were landlord households. As explained later in the paper, the number of 'effective' landlords and tenants is slightly higher; this denotes instances where more than one person identified as the head of household. As Table 1 shows, the total number of residents included in the survey was 4,875.

<b>LANDLORD PROFILES</b>	<b>KN</b>	<b>MGV</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>ER</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>FP</b>	<b>LP</b>	<b>LC</b>	<b>Sum</b>
<b>Total # Landlord HH</b>	17	36	60	99	42	211	53	101	<b>619</b>
<b>Total # effective landlord</b>	19	40	71	111	51	243	51	125	<b>711</b>
<b>Total # household residents</b>	56	112	220	404	224	846	79	390	<b>2331</b>
<b>TENANT PROFILES</b>	<b>KN</b>	<b>MGV</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>ER</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>FP</b>	<b>LP</b>	<b>LC</b>	
<b>Total # Tenant Household</b>	32	90	43	158	65	322	26	131	<b>867</b>
<b>Total # Effective tenant</b>	33	91	51	189	66	383	19	166	<b>988</b>
<b># Household resident</b>	98	181	162	495	88	1046	26	448	<b>2544</b>

Table 1. Total number of households included in the Backyard Matters survey of 2020.



## Research limitations

The project has identified a number of limitations affecting the fieldwork and research findings.

First, as noted previously, settlement selection was limited to areas in which partner organisations have an existing presence. While the neighbourhood selection criteria were carefully defined, this particular condition inadvertently resulted in the omission of certain backyarding contexts in the City of Cape Town, which would have shown different results. For example, neighbourhoods like Du Noon or Delft reflect different backyard rental dynamics which were not captured in the fieldwork.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the sample selection is not reflective of the overall backyarding context in Cape Town.

Secondly, the sampling size is relatively small and cannot be considered to be representative. Similarly, disparities in sample sizes across the neighbourhoods surveyed mean that this paper can't make direct comparisons between the eight neighbourhoods. We therefore cannot make generalisations about the backyarding context in the City of Cape Town, let alone the South African context more broadly. The study is nonetheless useful for understanding some of the features of the backyarding sector, and in particular its contextual nature.

Thirdly, there are a number of data exclusions. Some neighbourhood data is not represented in this paper for reasons such as incorrect capturing and fieldwork omissions. In some instances, respondents did not answer certain survey questions, which influences the consistency of data gathered.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the survey was not able to capture the details of landlord households which do not reside on the property.

Lastly, Covid-19 seriously disrupted the processes of data collection and verification. As a result, the number of households surveyed and the number of focus group discussions conducted were limited. Focus group discussions were projected to be conducted in all neighbourhoods, but due to Covid-19 related restrictions this was limited to two neighbourhoods.

Despite these limitations, the enumeration results provide valuable insights into how backyard rental markets operate in different neighbourhoods, what some of the underlying logics of these rental markets are and what this may mean for policy, programmes and other supportive interventions aimed at ensuring that the informal backyard rental markets provides and affordable, dignified housing option.

**Despite research limitations, the enumeration results provide valuable insights into how backyard rental markets operate in different neighbourhoods.**

<sup>4</sup> This emerged during a virtual meeting between the project partners and the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements, held on 8 December 2020, where preliminary findings from the Backyard Matters survey were shared. Further reading on this can be found on: Parliamentary Monitoring Group. 2018. Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme: Human Settlement Policies and Processes Working Sessions. <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/27038/>

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that for some of the survey questions respondents provided data on behalf of members in the household. There are also sections where respondents did not answer. This affects the numbers presented in the data. Care has been taken to reflect this in the formulas used.

**The neighbourhoods selected for the Backyard Matters data collection process reflect varied socio-spatial histories and conditions.**

## About selected settlements

**In *The rhythm of the yards: Urbanism, backyards and housing policy in South Africa*, Bank (2007) stresses that differences in histories of spaces need to be acknowledged and accommodated in our understanding of backyarding and in developing appropriate policy or programmatic responses. It is recognised that local social, historical and economic factors impact on the nature of backyarding that emerges in different contexts.**

Bearing this in mind, the neighbourhoods selected for the Backyard Matters data collection process reflect varied socio-spatial histories and conditions. Criteria such as age of settlement, neighbourhood location, housing typology (e.g. ownership vs council housing) and demographic characteristics were used to select a variety of contexts and conditions.

Below are brief socio-spatial descriptions of the neighbourhoods selected in the project.<sup>6</sup> The neighbourhoods are presented in chronological order with respect to the age of the settlement.

**Kensington (KN)** was established in the 1920s as a predominantly informal neighbourhood. In the 2000s, the KFM Backyarder's Association was formed to address issues of absent social development and the desperate need for low-cost affordable housing. Currently, Kensington is characterised by residential development characterised by flats and houses.

**Maitland Garden Village (MGV)** was established in the 1920s as a segregated public housing scheme built predominantly for coloured municipal workers by the then City of Cape Town Council. In the 1990s, long-term tenants were afforded the opportunity to purchase the old council housing at a nominal amount. Backyard units were later established to accommodate growing families.

Although officially established in the 1950s, **Manenberg (MB)** developed as a Coloured township in the 1960s housing people evicted during the apartheid forced removals. To date, the neighbourhood consists predominantly of double or triple storey public housing that have degraded.

**Eerste River (ER)** developed as a suburb in the 1980s. Residential erfs in the area were purchased by predominantly Coloured Afrikaans speaking households who then built their own homes. Recently, there has been an increase in public housing in the area.

**Ilitha Park (IP)** is a planned development area in the township, Khayelitsha. Formed in 1989, the neighbourhood is noted as an investment area and has had a notable growth in property prices as well as a boom in the development of second-dwellings in the form of housing conversions to multiple dwelling, the building of flats and establishment of backyard units.

There is little available data available on **Lost City (LC)** as this is a relatively new area in Tafelsig; the exact date of establishment is unclear, but it is thought to be

<sup>6</sup> Individual neighbourhood profiles provide detailed contextual analysis for the particular neighbourhoods.

<sup>7</sup> There are no accessible published records of when Lost City was established, but community leaders have given the early 1990s as an approximation.

in the early 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Residents in Lost City are housed informally in private or subsidised units and backyard dwellings. Mitchells Plain was developed as a coloured township by the apartheid government in the 1970s to accommodate victims of forced removals.

**Freedom Park (FP)** was occupied by local residents previously residing in backyard accommodation in 1998. Rudimentary services were installed in 2001 including shared toilets, standpipes and refuse collection. Houses were later constructed from 2007.

**Lotus Park (LP)** was official established as a relocation site for flood victims previously residing in informal settlements along the Lotus River Canal. Protests against the bucket system and unsafe living conditions occurred in 2009 resulting in improvements to basic service access from 2010.

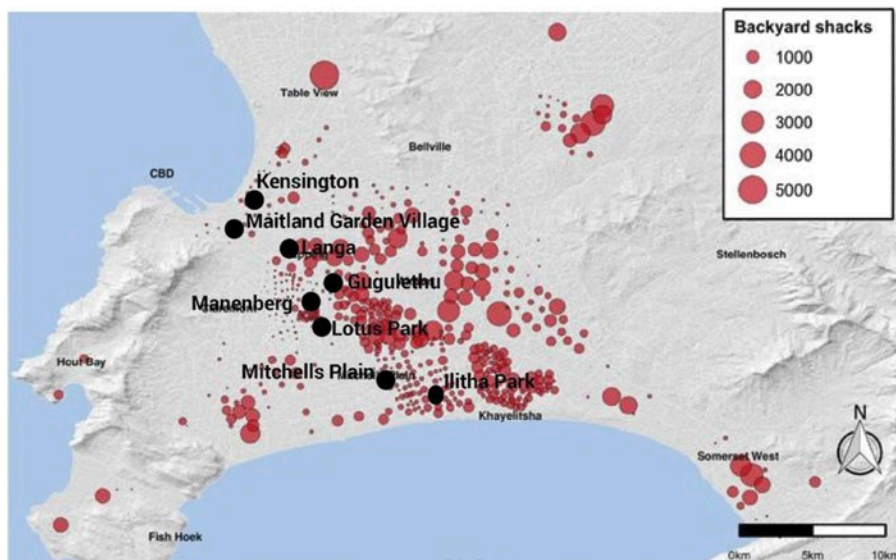


Image 1:  
Map depicting  
enumerated / surveyed  
neighbourhoods in  
Cape Town for Backyard  
Matters. Map overlaid  
with location of  
'backyards' across  
the CoCT.

(Source: GeoTerraimage,  
building, base land use,  
dataset, 2014 CoCT).

NEIGHBOURHOOD	Established	Population group	Neighbourhood type
Kensington (KN)	1920	Coloured Afrikaans speaking	Former informal settlement Subsidised flats and houses
Maitland Garden Village (MGV)	1920	Coloured Afrikaans speaking	Purchased public housing Ownership
Manenberg (MB)	1960	Coloured	Public housing
Eerste River (ER)	1980	Coloured Afrikaans speaking	Housing ownership New public housing
Ilitha Park (IP)	1989	Black African IsiXhosa Speaking	Housing ownership through bond finance
Lost City (LC)	Early 1990s	Coloured, Afrikaans and English speaking	Subsidy and bond houses
Freedom Park (FP)	1998	Coloured Afrikaans speaking	Former backyard residents Subsidized services
Lotus Park (LP)	2003	Black African IsiXhosa speaking	Informal settlement

Table 2: Surveyed neighbourhoods at a glance

## Key findings

**The backyarding sector encompasses a broad array of structural typologies governed by an interplay of social and market related factors. In addition to questions of affordability, quality of structures and of services; demographic factors, social networks (SALGA, 2014), and what is referred to as the ‘rhythm of the yards’ is incredibly important in highlighting the workings of this subsector (Bank, 2007). This synthesis paper provides some insights into how social factors trickle into the market component of backyarding; influencing the types of landlordism, tenancy, and market related relationships present across the eight neighbourhoods.**

The following section presents some of the key findings of the *Backyard Matters* survey. The survey data was analysed at two levels: the level of the effective landlord<sup>8</sup> and effective tenant<sup>9</sup>, and, where appropriate, at the household level for both landlords and tenants.

**Across the neighbourhoods, 96% of all respondents identified as South African citizens.**

Findings from the data confirm much of what is evidenced in existing literature on backyarding. There are, nonetheless, interesting patterns that emerge that share new insight into some of the features of backyarding that aid in working towards an improved understanding of backyarding as a subsector of the informal rental market.

### **Landlords and tenants are South African citizens, but some neighbourhoods have a relatively high proportion of foreign landlords**

Across the neighbourhoods, 96% of all respondents identified as South African citizens. Among effective tenants, 98% identified as South African citizens across the neighbourhoods. Landlord respondents showed an interesting variation: 93% of landlords overall indicated that they are South African citizens.

However, in Lotus Park almost 29% of effective landlord households identified as foreign nationals, almost all of whom have permanent residency status. In contrast, about one in ten tenant households in Lotus Park identified as foreign

<sup>8</sup> Determining the demographic profile of landlords was problematic because the survey did not ask specifically who the landlord is in each household. There are further challenges in determining landlords due to factors such as landlord residence, de facto landlordism, and the absence of title deeds. As a result, for this analysis we have deemed a household member to be the effective landlord where they are living in the main house, own the land, and are considered to be the head of the household. As this was based on self-identification in the survey, the number of effective landlords and tenants can exceed the number of recorded landlord and tenant households as at times respondents identified more than one head of household.

<sup>9</sup> As was the case with determining effective landlords, the survey did not ask respondents to name the effective tenant. The demographic profile of the head of tenant household and/or the person who owns the structure in the yard was used to determine the effective tenant. This is likely to be the person primarily responsible for honouring the rental agreement and paying rent for the household. As noted in the previous footnote, the number of effective tenants can exceed the number of tenant households in instances where more than one head of household was identified by respondents.

<sup>10</sup> This point was noted in a virtual meeting between the project partners and the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements, held on 8 December 2020, where preliminary findings from the *Backyard Matters* survey were shared.

nationals. It is notable that Lotus Park is an informal settlement which for migrants (both internal and international) has the benefit of providing transient, flexible and affordable housing. Kensington, too, showed a significantly higher proportion of landlords identifying as foreign nationals compared to tenant households. In Kensington, only 63% of landlord households indicated their nationality as South African.

The finding that more foreign nationals are landlords as opposed to tenants was surprising. The higher presence of non-South African landlords in Kensington could be explained by the selling of RDP houses (formally and informally), as has commonly been noted with RDP and BNG housing. The low number of foreign nationals among tenants suggests that our neighbourhood selection inadvertently left out an important dimension of the informal backyard rental market, as other neighbourhoods in the City of Cape Town are known to have a much higher proportion of foreign tenants.<sup>10</sup> The finding further confirms the point that informal backyard rental markets are highly localised and contextual, which is a key finding of the Backyard Matters project.

	KN	MGV	MB	ER	IP	LC	FP	LP	Average
<b>Landlord Household Nationality (%)</b>									
Permanent resident	11	0	0	0	2	5	0	28	3,4
Prefer not to answer	5	0	0	1	0	5	1	2	1,7
Non-South African	21	10	0	1	0	1	0	2	1,5
South African	63	90	100	98	98	89	99	69	93,4
<b>Tenant Household Nationality (%)</b>									
Permanent resident	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0,6
Prefer not to answer	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0,6
Non-South African	0	3	0	2	2	1	1	11	1,3
South African	97	96	100	98	96	97	98	90	97,5
<b>Total Landlord and Tenant Household Nationality (%)</b>									
Permanent resident	4	0	0	0	3	2	1	20	1,8
Prefer not to answer	4	1	0	0	0	3	1	1	1
Non-South African	8	5	0	2	1	1	0	4	1,4
South African	85	94	100	98	97	94	99	74	95,8

Table 3. Nationality of landlord and tenant households included in survey.

\* Note: Totals may exceed 100% due to rounding off.

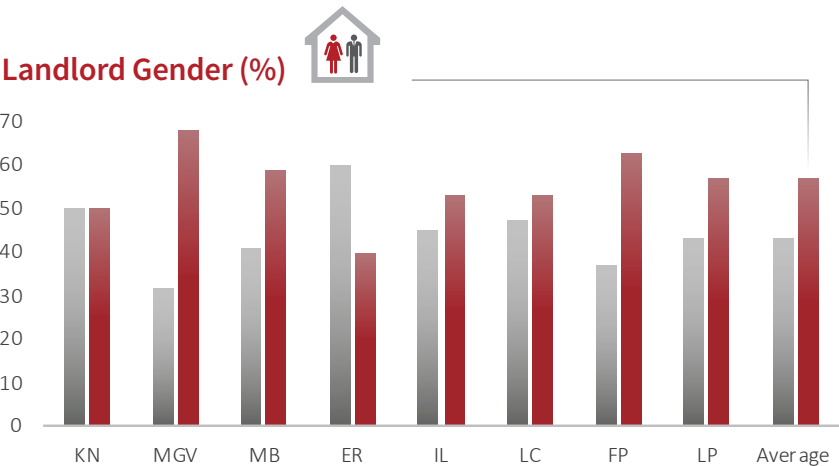


The survey data shows interesting gender dynamics. Whereas women are more prevalent as effective landlords, the majority of tenants are men.

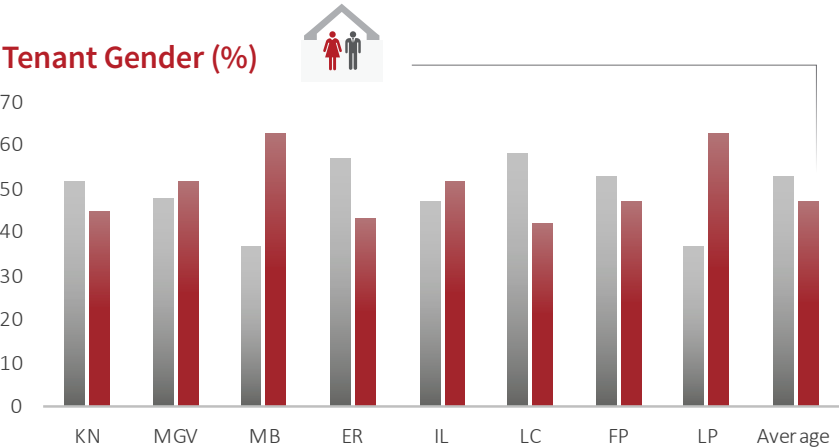
Landlords are often older women, while tenants are more likely to be younger men

The survey data shows interesting gender dynamics. Whereas women are more prevalent as effective landlords, the majority of tenants are men. Across the eight neighbourhoods, women made up 57% of effective landlords. Effective landlords are more likely to be older women, who are unmarried. Six out of 10 (62%) landlords are 50 years and older and 39% are between 50-59 years old. Nonetheless, there are interesting variations across the neighbourhoods surveyed. For example, as shown in Graph 1, Eerste River is the only neighbourhood where the majority of landlords are men, whereas Kensington shows an even split between male and female landlords. Furthermore, the majority of landlords in Lotus Park (84%) are younger than 50 years old (see Graph 3). Ilitha Park stands out for having a significantly younger landlord profile, with 53% being between the ages of 20-29. This is significant as Ilitha Park is made up predominantly of young professionals who own bond financed houses, and where tenants are slightly older than landlords.

Graph 1:  
Gender  
breakdown of  
landlords (%)



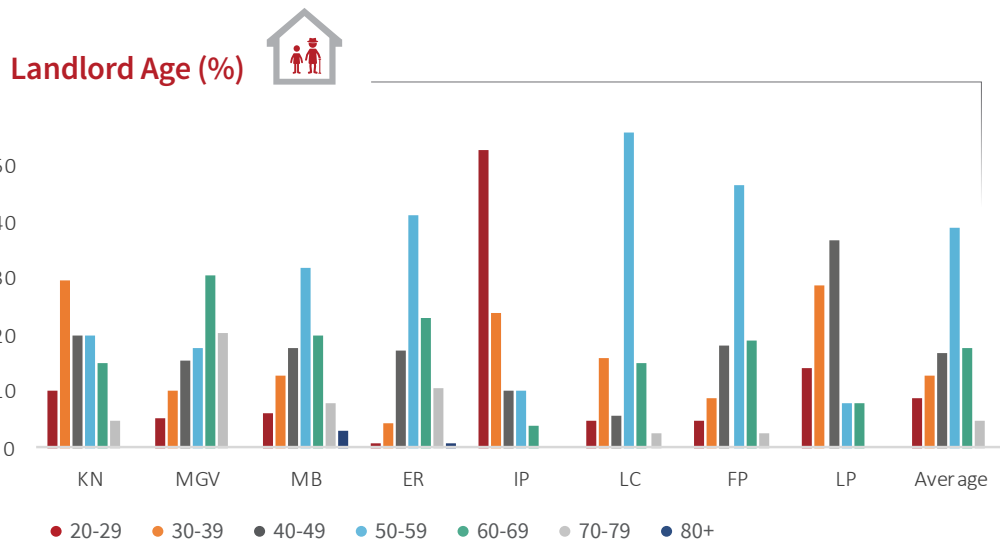
Graph 2:  
Gender  
breakdown of  
tenants (%)



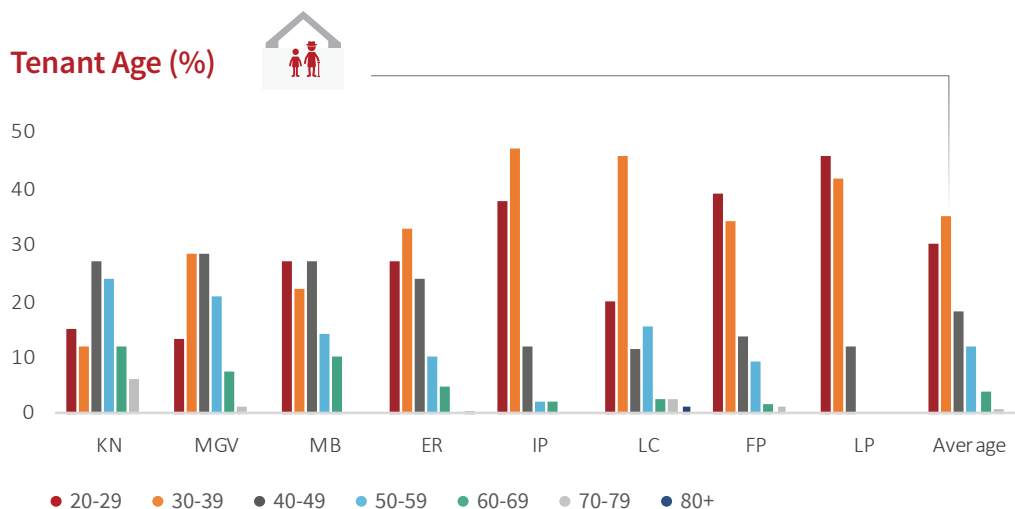
In contrast, men make up 53% of effective tenants (see Graph 2). As Graph 4 shows, backyard tenants are generally younger than landlords, with 65% falling in the age bracket of 20-39. Graph 4 further shows significant variations in the age profile of tenants across different neighbourhoods. For example, while only one in five tenants (18%) is between 40-49 years old, this demographic is particularly represented in Kensington, Maitland Garden Village and Manenberg. Older tenants in these neighbourhoods are often adult children of landlords or extended family. These settlements are interesting, because they are previous council owned housing stock that has been translated into housing ownership.

The data further reveals that whereas effective tenants are more likely to have never been married, there are interesting gender differences with regards to marital status among effective landlords. Female landlords are likely to have never been married or be widowed, whereas male landlords are more commonly married.

**The data reveals  
whereas effective  
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with regards to marital  
status among effective  
landlords.**



**Graph 3:**  
Average age of  
landlords (%)



**Graph 4:**  
Average age  
of tenants (%)

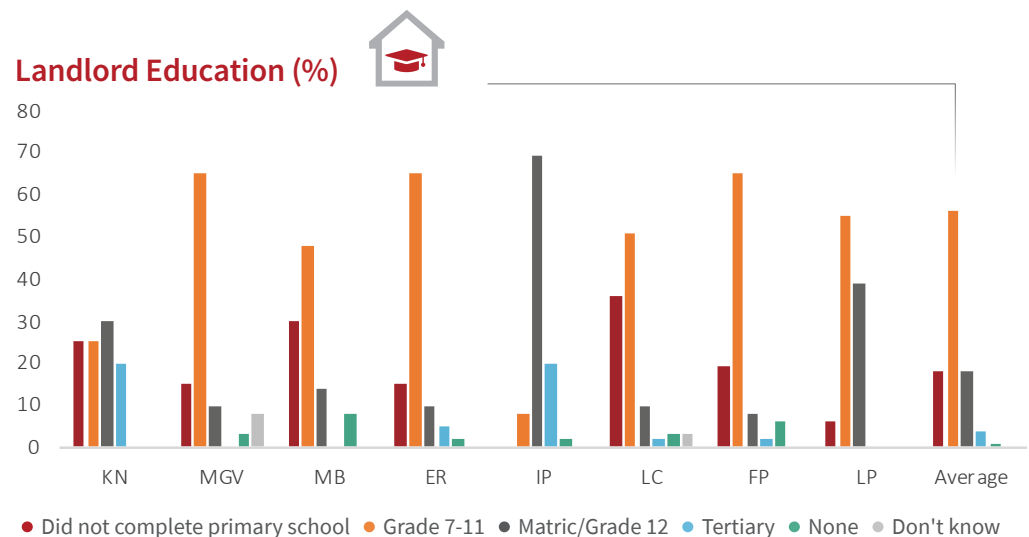
**The onset of Covid-19 has heightened the necessity to rethink urban housing on a global scale.**

### Tenants have attained higher levels of education

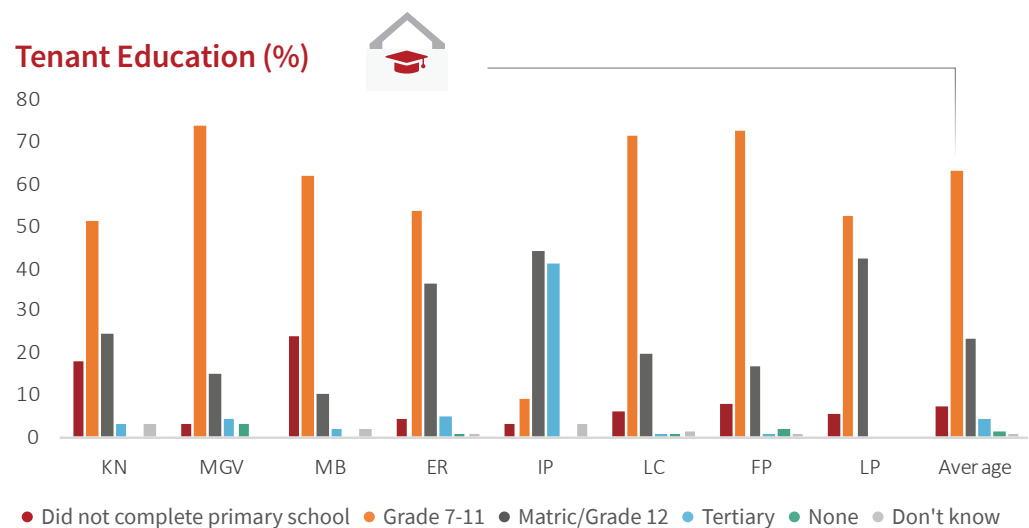
Across neighbourhoods, there are notable differences in education levels for both effective landlords and tenants, as shown in Graph 5 and Graph 6. Among effective landlords, 56% have between Grade 7 and 11 and only 18% have completed matric. In contrast, 63% of tenants have between Grade 7 and 11 and 23% have a Grade 12 certificate. The rate of tertiary education (either partial or completed) for landlords and tenants is similar, at 4%. Of particular interest is that 22% of landlord households indicated that they did not complete primary school or have not attained any educational level. Among tenants, this decreases significantly to 8%.

Interestingly, higher tertiary levels (either partial or completed) were noted in Ilitha Park among both landlords and tenants, and in Kensington among landlords (20%). In Ilitha Park, tenants have the highest rate of tertiary education (41%); in this neighbourhood, education was identified as one of the top three expenses for tenant households. This was not the case in any of the other neighbourhoods.

**Graph 5:**  
Education  
levels of  
landlords (%)



**Graph 6:**  
Education  
levels of  
tenants (%)

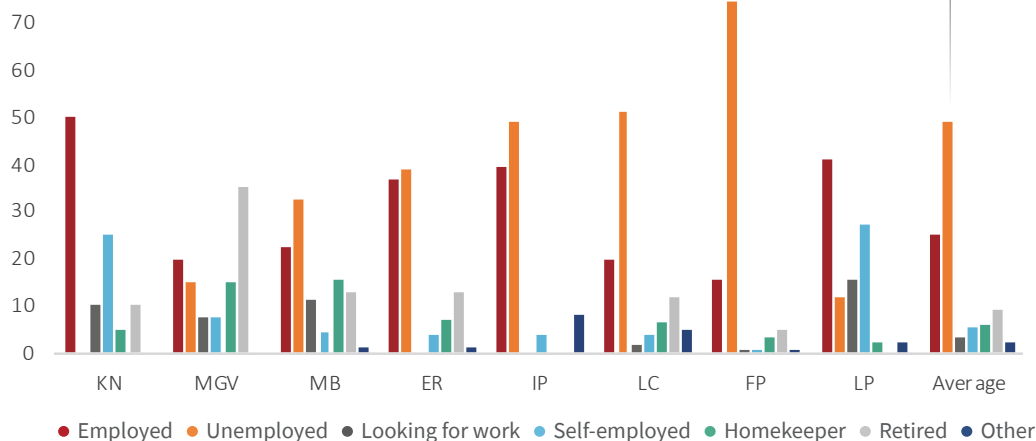


### Tenants are more likely to be employed, but unemployment is high for both landlords and tenants

The employment status of landlord and tenants is shown in Graph 7 and Graph 8 respectively. Four out of ten tenants (42%) are employed, compared to 25% of landlords. Nonetheless, both landlord and tenant households have rather high unemployment rates at above 40%: 43% of tenant households reported that they were unemployed compared to 49% of landlords. For both tenant and landlord households, unemployment in Freedom Park is considerably high at 61% and 75% respectively. Despite neighbourhood contrasts, Kensington and Lotus Park stand out for having the lowest rates of unemployment among landlords, with Ilitha Park and Lotus Park recording almost no unemployed tenants. Where unemployment is high among tenant households, landlords are also often related to the tenants. In this instance, backyard accommodation arrangements are tied to family support. In Ilitha Park and Lotus Park the opposite is true, where tenancy is based more on market related components. In Lotus Park and Kensington, about one quarter of landlords interviewed responded that they are self-employed.

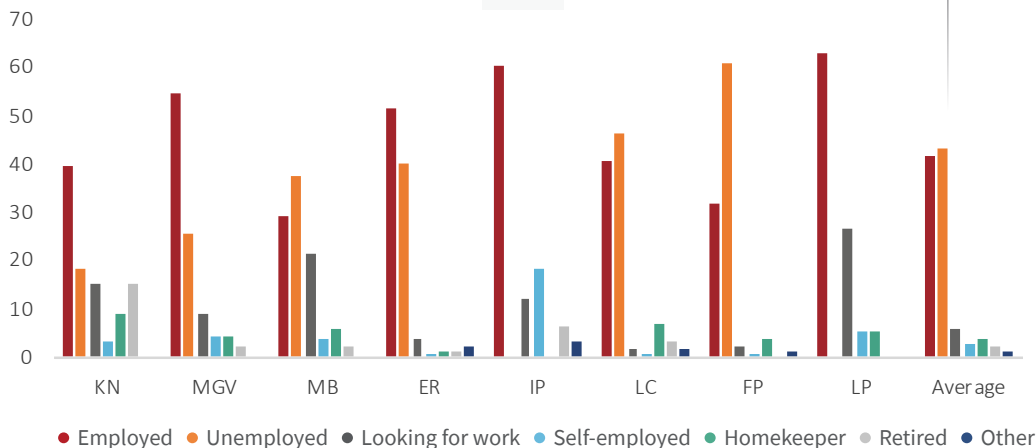
**Covid-19 seriously disrupted the processes of data collection and verification. A number of households surveyed and the number of focus group discussions conducted were limited.**

#### Landlord Employment Status (%)



Graph 7:  
Employment  
status of  
landlords (%)

#### Tenant Employment Status (%)



Graph 8:  
Employment  
status of  
tenants (%)

### Salaries are the most important source of income for both landlords and tenants

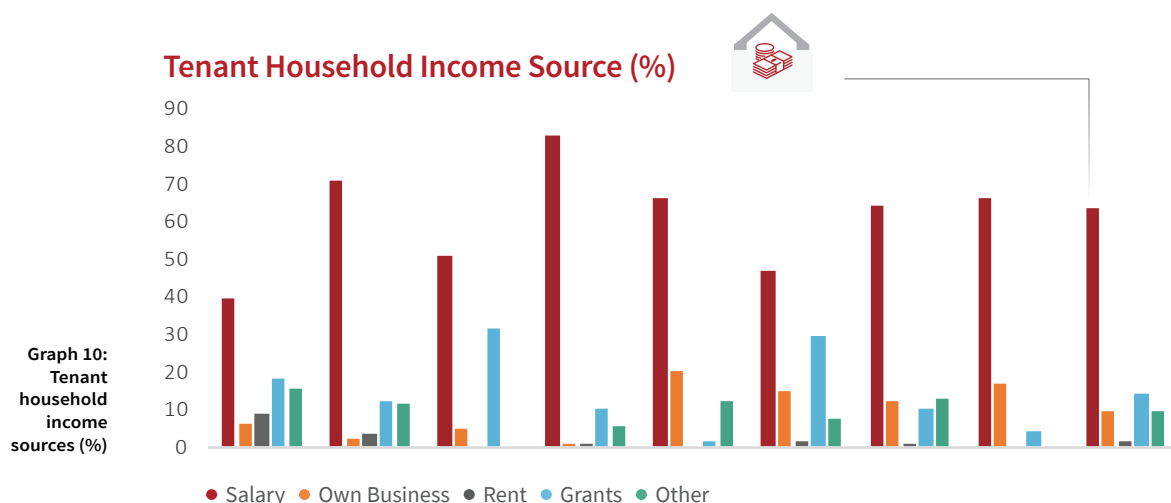
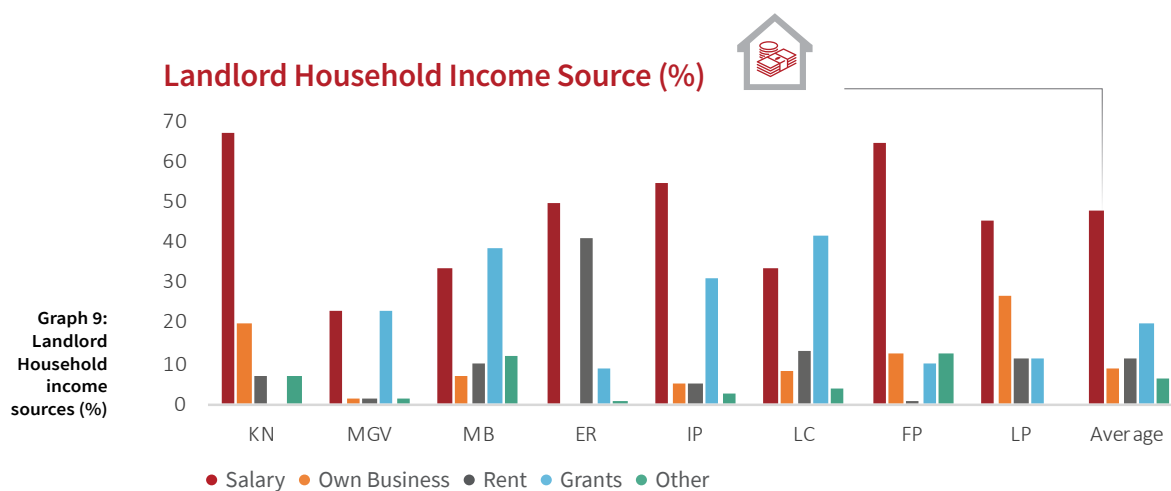
When asked about sources of income, respondents could give multiple answers. As respondents are often reticent to answer questions about financial matters, particularly where they may not want to disclose certain financial information, the responses may not be an accurate reflection of the state of affairs.

Salaries are the predominant source of income for landlord (48%) and tenant households (64%) (see Graph 9 and Graph 10). Given that tenant households recorded higher levels of employment, it is not surprising that salaries feature more prominently as a source of income.

**Given that tenant households recorded higher levels of employment, salaries feature more prominently as a source of income.**

Landlord households display a wider range of income sources, with grants following as the second most important income source at 19.7%. In third place, with 11%, rental income is identified as a key source of income for landlord households. Notably, landlord respondents in Eerste River (41%) record rental income as an income source significantly higher compared to the respondents from other neighbourhoods.

Surprisingly, in Maitland Garden Village and Freedom Park rent hardly features as an income source. Given the high level of unemployment among landlord respondents in Freedom Park (61%), it is particularly surprising that salaries are most prominently identified as a source of income in this neighbourhood.

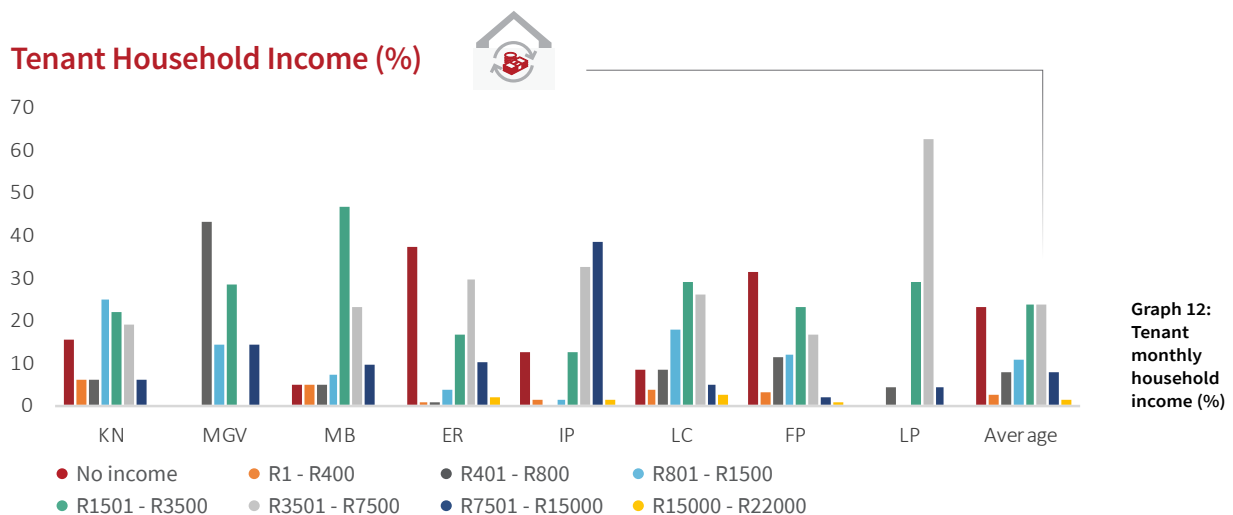
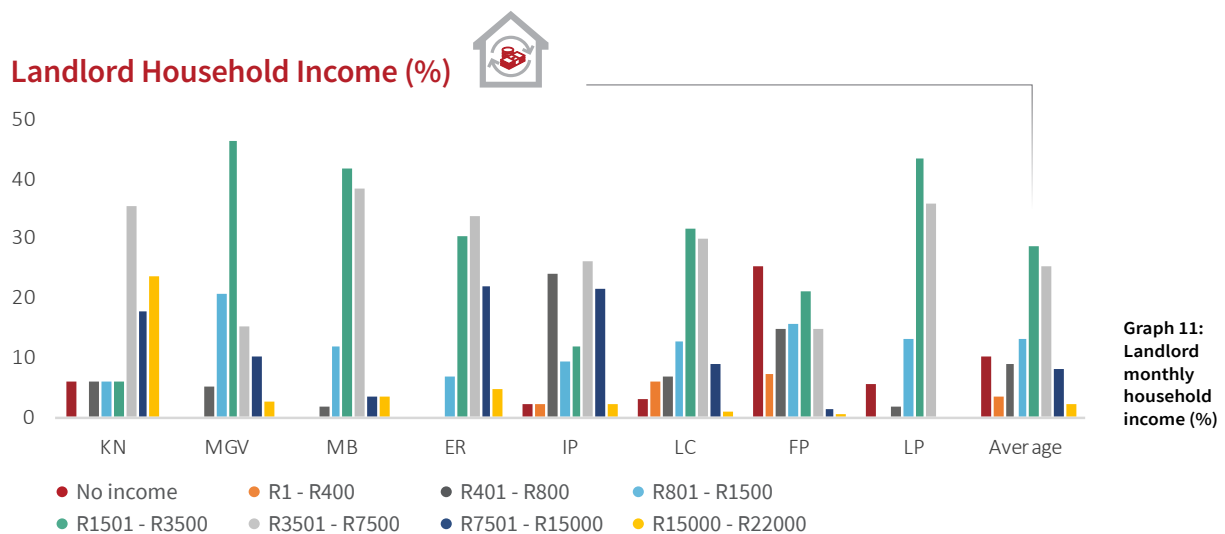




### *Variations between landlord and tenant household income are highly contextual, with significantly more tenant households recording no income*

As shown in Graphs 11 and 12, landlord and tenant household earnings are spread across categories, but are predominantly clustered between R1,501-R7,500 in both groups. Although effective tenants are more likely to be better educated, employed and have salaried income, on aggregate household earnings between landlord and tenant households do not reveal a significant difference. In fact, 64% of effective landlord households and 68% of effective tenant households have a monthly income of less than R3,500. When comparing landlord and tenant income in specific neighbourhoods, it is interesting to note that in the four oldest neighbourhoods (Kensington, Maitland Garden Village, Manenberg and Eerste River) landlords appear to be clustered in somewhat higher income categories compared to tenants. In Ilitha Park and Lotus Park, the picture is reversed: in these neighbourhoods, tenant household income tends to exceed landlord household income. For example, seven out of ten (71%) households in Ilitha Park tenant have a monthly income of between R3,501–R15,000, whereas 50% of landlord households earn R3,500 or less. This confirms that there is likely to be a correlation between household levels of education and household incomes, explaining higher tenant earnings.

In Freedom Park and Lost City, income patterns between landlord and tenants show very similar trends, except that in Lost City a higher proportion of tenants indicated that they have no income. Considering that salaries and social grants are the main source of household income, it is suggested that rental income is in some contexts not central to subsistence, but an important component of 'getting by' and supplementing other sources of income for landlord households. Among tenant households, it is notable that 23% cite having no household income; this finding serves as evidence of familial and social networks as a social and economic safety net.



### Landlord and tenant households spend their money on similar expenses

Although tenant households generally have higher earnings, the main categories of expenses for both landlord and tenant households are largely the same.

For landlord households the highest expenses are:





 1. Food  2. Bond payment or rent   3. Transport and electricity

Table 4 shows the top three landlord household expenses per neighbourhood, with red being the highest, orange the second highest and green the third highest expenses.

Expense categories	KN	MGV	MB	ER	IP	LC	FP	LP
Food/Groceries	16%	28%	47%	21%	28%	27%	32%	29%
Bond repayment/rent	31%	10%		16%	20%	11%	20%	
Transport	9%		7%			12%	12%	
Electricity		11%	18%					
Medical				22%				
Clothing					19%			14%
Refuse								13%

Table 4: Top three landlord household expenses and percentage of total expenditure.

For tenant households, the highest expenses are:




 1. Food  2. Rent  3. Transport

Table 5 shows the top three tenant household expenses per neighbourhood, with red being the highest, orange the second highest and green the third highest expenses.

Expense categories	KN	MGV	MB	ER	IP	LC	FP	LP
Food/Groceries	33%	28%	46%	19%	26%	23%	28%	24%
Bond repayment/rent	30%	10%		19%	26%	14%	16%	12%
Transport	12%		10%				14%	
Electricity		11%	12%					
Medical				20%		14%		
Clothing								25%
Refuse					12%			

Table 5: Top three tenant household expenses and percentage of total expenditure.

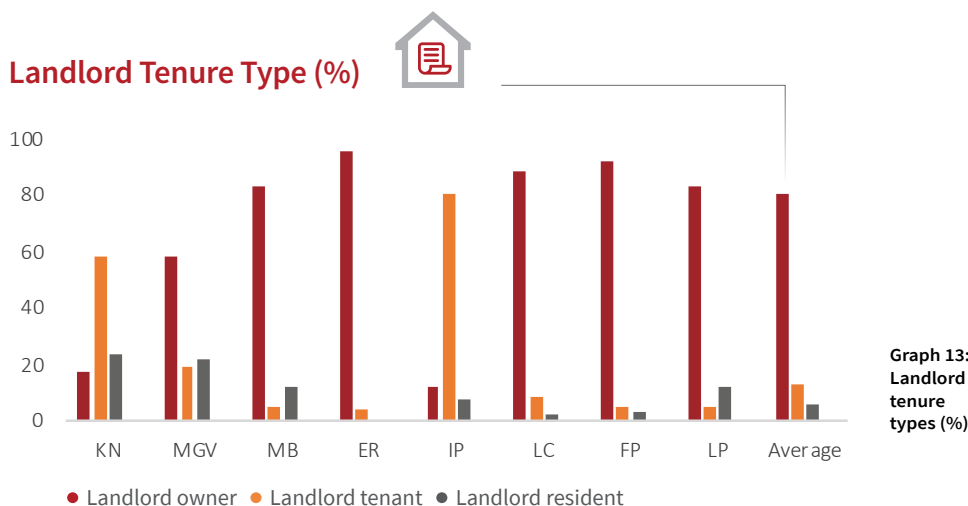
### Landlord and tenant typologies are diverse, nuanced and complex

Operational definitions emerging from the literature and survey are used to unpack the complexity of landlord and tenant tenure types.<sup>11</sup> The survey used the following delineations for landlords<sup>12</sup>:

- **Landlord owners:** Landlord households which own the property and live in the main house. They rent out rooms and/or structures and space in the yard.
- **Landlord tenants:** Landlord households which rent the main house themselves and sublet rooms and/or structures and space in the yard.
- **Landlord residents:** Landlord households which have some other kind of tenure and rent out room and/or structure and space in the yard.

The fieldwork data suggests that 81% of landlord households own the main house. Landlord tenants are less common at 13%, but appear quite prominently in Ilitha Park (81%) and Kensington (59%), and more moderately in Maitland Garden Village (19%). Although Lotus Park shows a high proportion of landlord owners, focus group discussions revealed that a significant number of tenants rented out their dwellings from landlords who were 'away'.<sup>13</sup> Landlord tenants may also suggest "hidden" tenants in landlord households - most often boarders, adult singles, couples and elderly members of landlord households who contribute to the household (or household income) in some manner, but consider themselves to be part of the household or extended household. None of the landlords were living in the backyard themselves. There is fairly consistent pattern here of landlord households living in the main house and renting rooms, yard space or backyard structures to tenants.

**There is a fairly consistent pattern here of landlord households living in the main house and renting rooms, yard space or backyard structures to tenants.**



<sup>11</sup> See Banks (2007), Lemanski (2009), SALGA (2014), Scheba and Turok (2020).

<sup>12</sup> The literature makes a key distinction between 3 types of landlords: subsistence landlords, homeowner landlords and entrepreneurial landlords. The survey did not use these distinctions.

<sup>13</sup> Away landlordism is another important landlordism emerging from the data. As is the case in Lotus Park, landlords resided as far as the Eastern Cape and made use of communication tools such as WhatsApp to manage rental agreements, as well as neighbours who would act as property managers.

### Tenant types operational definitions are as follows:

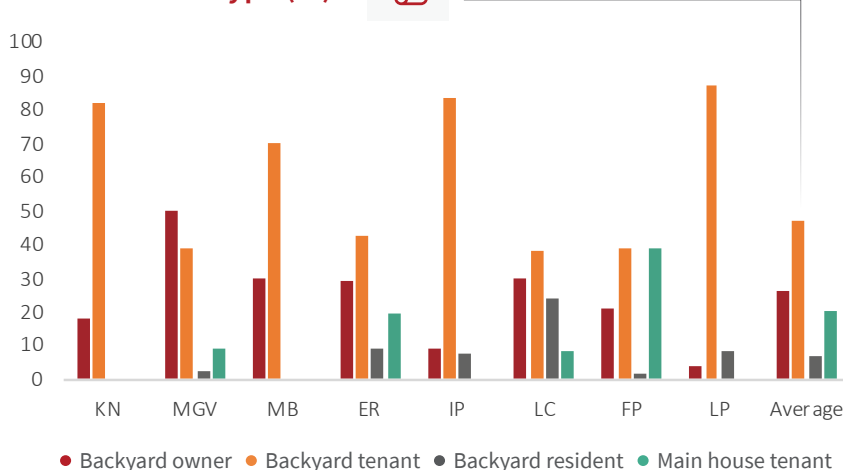
- **Backyard owners:** Tenant households which own their own structure and rent space in the yard from the landlord.
- **Backyard tenants:** Tenant households which rent both the structure and the space in the yard.
- **Backyard residents:** Households which live in a structure in the yard under some other form tenure.

**An unexpected finding is the significant presence of main house tenants, who make up 20% of tenants in the survey.**

Among tenant tenure types, the predominant tenure type is backyard tenants (47%), which shows that most tenant households are renting both the structure and the space in the yard. In second place is backyard owners, with 26% of tenants owning their structure, often through self-build, and renting space in the yard. An unexpected finding is the significant presence of main house tenants, who make up 20% of tenants in the survey. As Graph 14 shows, there are interesting variations between the neighbourhoods, with Freedom Park and Eerste River showing a relatively high proportion of main house tenants (39% and 20% respectively) and areas like Kensington, Manenberg, Ilitha Park and Lotus Park not having this phenomenon.

Graph 14:  
Tenant  
tenure  
types (%)

### Tenant Tenure Type (%)



As the survey did not ask about familial relationships between landlords and tenants, it was unable to capture the phenomenon of intergenerational households living in multiple structures on the property (nor who, in this scenario, is considered the landlord vs the tenant). The survey also didn't inquire about possible 'absent landlords', who rent out the main house and structures in the yard directly and separately. These and other complexities in tenure may require further research.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> As it stands, where individuals residing in in houses who were deemed to be separate households they were captured as tenants, but where these were deemed to be part of the landlord household they may be rendered invisible. This in large part comes down to how respondents considered what a household is, which is always a subjective determination. The survey did not impose a standard on what might be considered a household and so respondents were able to determine themselves what constituted a household.

### Social and familial relations determine backyarding choices

It is clear that social relations are important. For one, the Backyard Matters data shows that social relations and personal contacts influence how backyard accommodation is found. The vast majority of tenants said that they had found their accommodation options through family and friends, or heard of the accommodation by word of mouth, rather than through advertisements or marketing platforms.

The data further revealed that push and pull factors for residing in selected neighbourhoods are strongly related to social components, and to questions of affordability. Push and pull factors are important in understanding the reasons driving accommodation realities. For tenant households, affordable renting is the highest motivator for households choosing to reside in particular neighbourhoods, followed by 'wanting to be closer to family' and 'always lived here'.

### The quality of the neighbourhood matters

Tenants were also asked what would some of the reasons would be that would push them to leave their current neighbourhoods. These are, in order of priority: better employment opportunities; better living conditions; and, affordable rent.

When asked what the most important changes that need to take place in the neighbourhood are, it is interesting that across the neighbourhoods addressing crime was noted as the most important priority by far. The second change was better housing opportunities, followed by improved access to health care.

The data collected revealed little with regards to housing subsidies, which is important to note considering that housing opportunities came second in the list of neighbourhood priorities. The fieldwork also did not inquire whether backyard tenants were registered on the housing database.

### Tenure security is high despite informal rental agreements

Formal lease agreements are uncommon among landlord households. On average, only 15% of tenant respondents stated that they had a formal lease agreement with their owners, the majority of whom reside in Manenberg, Ilitha Park, Maitland Garden Village and Kensington. Despite this, well over 90% of tenants revealed security in tenure. Probing the aspect of relationships further reveals high feelings of safety in the yard accompanied by a general reporting of friendly landlord-tenant relationship, general social cohesion in the yard, and feeling of trust among households.

#### Three main reasons tenants choose a particular neighbourhood:

1. Affordable rent
2. Be closer to family
3. Always lived here

#### Top 3 reasons to move to another neighbourhood:

1. Better employment opportunities
2. Better living conditions
3. Affordable rent

#### Top three neighbourhood priorities:

1. Addressing crime
2. Housing opportunities
3. Access to healthcare

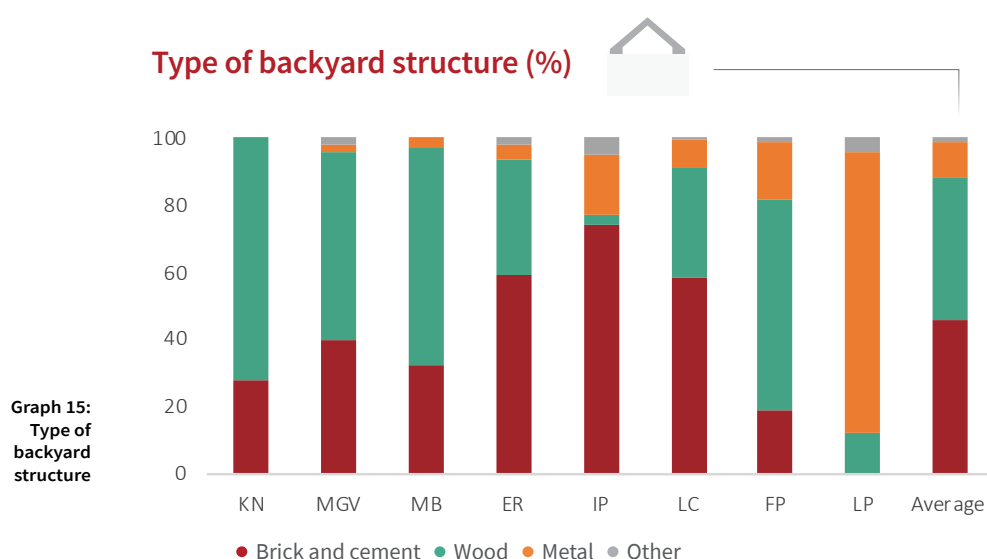
	KN	MGV	MB	ER	IP	LC	FP	LP	Average
% of tenant HH with formal lease agreement	19	21	35	4	29	11	2	12	15

Table 6: Tenant households with formal lease agreements (%)



### Most backyard structures are made of brick and cement or wood

Almost half (46%) of the backyard structures across neighbourhoods are made of brick and cement. These are followed by wooden structures (43%), which are often wendy houses. It is worth noting that although it is recorded that 10% of structures across the neighbourhoods are made of metal, great variations are found across settlements. For example, in Lotus Part, an informal settlement, 83% of surveyed structures were made of metal. In Ilitha Park and Freedom Park, roughly one in six structures were made of metal.



### Rent is relatively low and includes water and sanitation

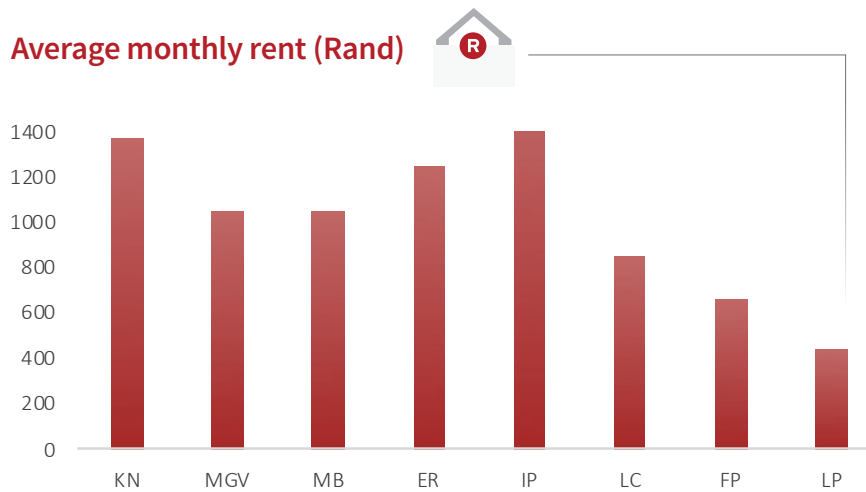
Respondents indicated that rent is fairly cheap, speaking to backyards' response to the need for affordability. The survey data reveals that the cost of rent ranges between R440 – R1 590, with the highest average rent being paid in Ilitha Park (see Graph 16). Rent seems to be associated to quality of structures, yet the associations between rent and quality of structures, proximity to transport and other infrastructure, and quality of services are less obvious and were not explored in the fieldwork.

Across six of the settlements for which data was available, backyard residents pay on average a higher rent compared to other types of tenants (see Graph 17). However, the significantly higher rental amount paid by backyard residents in Maitland Garden Village, which is on average R1,750 per month, skews the aggregate picture. As shown in Graph 17, interesting variations can be observed between the neighbourhoods surveyed.

**Almost half (46%)  
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and cement.**

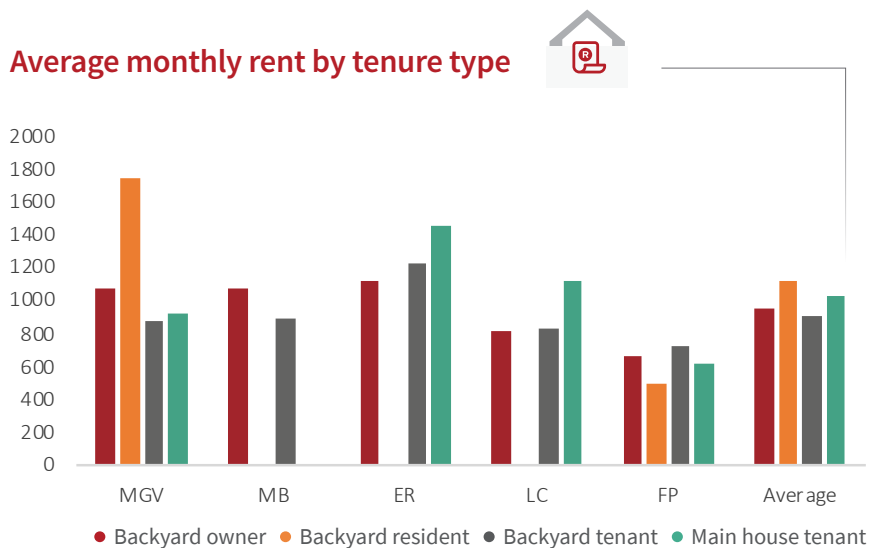
The cost of water and sanitation is typically included in the rent; these services are often accessed through the main house, although in Lost City, Manenberg and Maitland Garden Village tenants indicated that they contribute between R188 and R274 towards water per month. Electricity is most often a separate expense, charged at between R200 and R500. As Graph 18 shows, significant variations exist between neighbourhoods, with backyard tenants in Maitland Garden Village contributing 2-3 times more towards electricity compared to tenants in other neighbourhoods.

## Average monthly rent (Rand)



**Graph 16:**  
Average  
monthly rent  
(Rand)

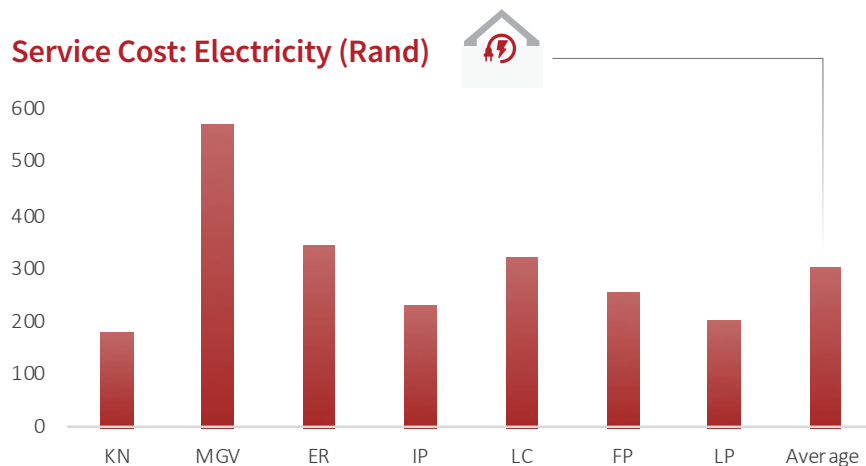
## Average monthly rent by tenure type



**Graph 17:**  
Average monthly  
rent by tenure type

*\* Data not available for Kensington, Lotus Park and Ilitha Park. Average monthly rent therefore only for these five neighbourhoods.*

## Service Cost: Electricity (Rand)



**Graph 18:**  
Average monthly  
electricity  
expenses  
in Rand

*\* Data not available for Manenberg*

## Making sense of the findings

The data presented above indicates a vibrant backyard rental sector that has multiple benefits: it provides affordable accommodation; it creates an important source of income; and, it offers a valuable social safety net for family, friends and acquaintances. This section seeks to interrogate the findings a bit more and distils 10 key take-away points.



### 1. Backyarding is an important and affordable housing solution, but is also expected to be temporary.

The data confirms that backyarding provides people with an important housing option. Across the eight neighbourhood surveyed, monthly rent paid by backyard tenants is between R400-R1,500 and the average monthly rent is R1,050, making informal backyard rental accommodation more affordable than other rental options (including, in most instances, social housing). Not only does backyarding offer an affordable housing solution, responses from across the neighbourhood surveyed show that it also provides tenants with a sense of physical safety in the yard.

**Not only does backyarding offer an affordable housing solution, responses show that it also provides tenants with a sense of physical safety in the yard.**

Nonetheless, focus groups held in Maitland Garden Village and Lotus Park revealed that tenants typically viewed renting as temporary and transitional, convenient for the time being. For many tenants, home ownership remains the ultimate goal. The feedback is particularly interesting when read against the identified 'pull factors' by tenants: in Manenberg, Maitland Garden Village, Kensington and Freedom Park 'always lived here' was among the top three reasons why tenants chose to live in a particular neighbourhood. With the exception of Freedom Park, these neighbourhoods tend to have older tenants, many of whom are older than 40 years of age. This suggests that while the desire may be for backyarding to be transient, in reality it may well be a more enduring housing experience.



### 2. Backyarding is an important source of income, especially for older women

On average, rent contributes 11% of total household income among surveyed landlords, which is not insignificant. However, as shown in Graph 9, rent as a proportion of household income varies significantly across neighbourhoods. Different landlord tenure types<sup>15</sup> matter in this regard: subsistence landlords rely on rental income to sustain or support their livelihoods, whereas entrepreneurial landlords pursue it as a primary income stream and possibly for profit. For the most part, landlords surveyed fall in the category of homeowner landlords. Considering that these landlord households have low household incomes, they would most likely be considered subsistence landlords, with rental income an important component of other strategies of "getting by".

The data further shows that women aged 50-59 years make up a significant proportion of landlords. The gendered nature of backyarding in South Africa has been recognised in the literature (SALGA, 2014). Housing thus provides a valuable asset to women with informal landlordism aiding as a strategy for mitigating poverty and, in cases of female entrepreneurial landlords, in providing economic opportunity. Enabling the backyard rental market may be an important strategy to support positive economic outcomes for women.

<sup>15</sup> The different landlord types are outlined in footnote 11.



### 3. Social relationships matter

The backyard rental market operates beyond a simple economic logic; the survey results show that social and familial relations are a significant factor influencing how and where people find backyard housing opportunities. Housing is acquired through word of mouth by family and friends, and in most areas was not difficult to find. In the focus group discussions, landlords reported that they are not keen to rent out to non-family members for concerns on safety, particularly gender-based violence. Typologies of backyard landlords and tenants are influenced by these relations, complicating the conventional landlord-tenant binary. For example, not all tenants pay rent; some contribute towards basic services and household expenses. In such cases, rent and services are likely paid as part of familial contributions and not necessarily governed by market related costs.

Respondents further noted that relationships in the yard, among tenants and between the landlord and tenants, are friendly or very friendly. None of the respondents identified those relationships as either difficult or very difficult. Social cohesion, where people in the yard help each other out, was rated highly across six of the neighbourhoods, with Ilitha Park and Lotus Park indicating that this happened 'sometimes'. In Lotus Park, tenants noted that a significant proportion of landlords does not live on the property.

While familial and other close relations are generally preferred, the focus groups revealed some drawbacks as well. In Maitland Garden Village landlords reported tenants taking advantage of family relations through non-payment. Tenants, in turn, observed that lack of independence and privacy when renting from family is a cause of tension. The quality of relationships between landlords and tenants also determine access to services and security of tenure.

**Respondents further noted that relationships in the yard, among tenants and between the landlord and tenants, are friendly or very friendly.**



Isandla Institute/Eric Miller. Dunoon.

**Despite the fact that backyard tenants typically do not have a formal lease agreement, tenure security among tenants was reported as very high and the risk of eviction was not a notable concern.**



#### **4. Location! Location! Location!**

The backyard rental market has features that mirror the formal rental market. One of these is the adage that ‘location matters’ – but not necessarily in the same way that it plays out in the formal housing market. Indeed, in some instances being close to work opportunities and amenities (like transport) seem to inform locational choices made by tenants; this is particularly evident in Lotus Park, and possibly Ilitha Park.

In the other neighbourhoods surveyed, however, location is strongly associated with a social premium, where neighbourhoods are selected on the basis of familiarity and existing social capital. An analysis of push and pull factors reveals that social factors, such as proximity to family and familiarity with the neighbourhood (‘having always lived in the neighbourhood’) are important considerations for tenants in deciding where to reside. The survey did not determine whether and how tenants and landlords were related to each other; nonetheless, the focus group discussions suggested that familial relations between landlords and tenants are not unusual. In these instances, residing closer to ‘home’ may be part of an economic strategy to reduce living costs. As is the case in formal markets, neighbourhood location with regards to access to economic opportunities and public infrastructure remains an important factor, but possibly to a lesser extent than is generally assumed.



#### **5. Quality of structures and services is variable, with tenants expressing a desire for more control**

Poor quality of housing structures, overcrowding and inadequate service provision are often identified as key health and safety concerns associated with backyard accommodation (Di Lollo, 2020; Govender et al, 2011; Scheba & Turok, 2020). Contrary to what the literature suggests, in most neighbourhoods surveyed backyard shacks are not the dominant form of backyard accommodation. The exception is Lotus Park, which is an informal settlement. In other neighbourhoods, most structures are made of wood or brick and cement. This does not, however, give a clear indication of the quality of these structures. It was nonetheless evident that concern over quality is mostly related to the provision of services.

The vast majority of tenant households surveyed access basic services through the main house; the cost thereof is typically included in the rent, with electricity generally considered a separate expense. Focus group discussions illuminate that landlords may exercise control over services by cutting off electricity supply, rationing water or water cuts. Other concerns have to do with costing; for example, historical municipal debt may be transferred to tenant households, who are presented with electricity bills that are higher than should be expected. There are also inconsistencies in the charging of tenants for services in the same yard. Services are therefore often a source of tension.

Strategies used to alleviate this include tenants purchasing electricity on their own, rather than paying the landlord. Some tenants expressed a preference for a separate electricity meter box as a means to ensure tenant households are only paying for what they consume, especially in contexts of existing outstanding municipal bills.

The survey found that a quarter of tenants own the structure they live in. In the focus group discussions, a desire was expressed for tenants to be allowed to build their own structure, as it gives them greater control over the quality of the structure. This resonates with the preference expressed by some tenants for unmediated access to services, such as electricity.





## 6. Tenants have a significant sense of security, but Covid-19 seems to undermine this

Despite the fact that backyard tenants typically do not have a formal lease agreement, tenure security among tenants was reported as very high and the risk of eviction was not a notable concern. This suggests that the informal tenure system is by and large effective. However, this perceived sense of tenure security does not protect against arbitrary changes to the verbal agreement, such as hiking the price of services and, in more extreme cases, blocking or limiting service access as an indirect form of eviction.

Focus group discussions further revealed that Covid-19 has affected income security and housing affordability; as a result, there is increased perception of risk related to evictions.<sup>16</sup> Participants in the focus groups expressed an increased appetite for education on the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants.



## 7. Zoning can be an enabler of the affordable housing market

The zoning provisions across the eight neighbourhoods allow for the erection of 2-3 formal backyard structures, with the specification for particular building norms and standards. The majority of erven surveyed had two to three additional structures in the backyard, although in some instances there were four or five structures. This then suggests that for the most part the number of backyard structures are aligned with zoning provisions. Nonetheless, a significant number of structures fall short in terms of building specifications as backyard structures (made out of wood and zinc) are rarely constructed in a similar architectural style.

Another important consideration is whether bulk infrastructure capacity corresponds to the zoning provisions that allow additional structures on the plot. As noted previously, access to services can be unreliable and a source of tension between tenants and landlords. Servicing is not only important at the household level, but also at the neighbourhood level, with overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure affecting the quality and reliability of basic services (Sheba & Turok, 2020).

**The findings of the fieldwork show that in different neighbourhoods, the backyard rental market can have distinctive characteristics.**



## 8. The quality of the neighbourhood and public realm is important

While housing and other household level issues matter, survey respondents indicated that the main challenge across all eight settlements by far related to the issue of safety and that the primary intervention required was to address crime and violence. This suggests that improvements in the public realm, and particularly area-based violence and crime prevention interventions, need to be given greater attention. The fact that improved access to healthcare followed closely on the heels of housing opportunities as the third and second most important changes required in the neighbourhood shows the importance of social services and amenities aimed at improving quality of life.

<sup>16</sup> Land occupations in 2020 suggest that Covid-19 has increased housing insecurity for backyard tenants who have resorted to land occupations as a means of securing housing and maintaining some proximity to economic opportunities in cities. More details on these land occupations and possible interventions can be found at Isandla Institute. 2020. Backyarding: Housing vulnerabilities and land occupations under Covid-19. Each of the eight neighbourhoods surveyed are zoned as either Single Residential 1 (SR1), General Residential 1 (GR1), Single Residential 2 (SR2) or General Residential 2 (GR2).

**Despite the fact that backyard tenants typically do not have a formal lease agreement, tenure security among tenants was reported as very high and the risk of eviction was not a notable concern.**



### **9. Backyard rental markets are highly contextual**

The findings of the fieldwork show that in different neighbourhoods, the backyard rental market can have distinctive characteristics. Local history, socio-spatial contexts, location and demographic make-up are among the factors that influence the shape and form of backyarding. There are multiple markets operating on diverse logics across social and market-related planes. Location, for example, determines rental cost to an extent when considering proximity to employment and public transport. In instances where location is a social, rather than an economic, premium (see point 4), the relationship with rental costs may be an inverse one: the closer the relationship, the lower (or more negotiable) the rental contribution. Social factors, such as the accommodation of relatives in the backyards, the presence of self-build, and the impact of landlord-tenant relationships are but some of the factors that show that the picture is more complex than a conventional rental market. Understanding contextual differences is critical to developing suitable, targeted responses and supportive interventions.



### **10. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all response to diverse backyard rental markets**

Given the highly contextual nature of the backyard rental market, the different types of landlord and tenants and their different needs and interests, there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing some of the deficiencies or strengthening latent potential of the sector. This is not to suggest that there are no common themes that relate to specific types of backyard rental markets or a particular profile of landlords or tenants, for example. Some of these themes include: improved access to services; increasing backyard both entrepreneurial landlords and tenants), including access to finance and technical support; bulk infrastructure improvements; public realm improvements (including area-based violence prevention interventions); and education and legal support related to rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords. A single approach to the sector is not feasible as there is in actual fact not one, but multiple backyard rental markets in operation.



Isandla Institute/Masixole Feni. Bus Terminal.

## Conclusion

**Backyard housing has a long history in South Africa as a sector providing affordable private rental accommodation. For tenants, this form of housing has historically facilitated access to urban opportunities and improved quality of housing (compared to informal settlements) despite the sector's shortfalls.**

**The findings largely confirm a consensus view on backyarding found in the literature: that backyard accommodation is an affordable housing solution, and that the backyard rental market has been operating fairly well with little to no assistance from the state or private institutions.**

For landlord households, the provision of backyard accommodation can be an important source of income and is often associated with an increased sense of safety. Nonetheless, there has been a long-standing gap in understanding the backyarding sector in South Africa. This knowledge gap is compounded by the fact that historical and social contextual differences affect the nature of backyarding. As such, backyarding in different provinces, municipalities and neighbourhoods may have significant differences that ought to be accounted for in developing appropriate interventions.

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted in eight neighbourhoods in the City of Cape Town. Although the findings cannot be generalised across Cape Town as a whole, let alone South Africa, they begin to shed light on a sector whose workings are often hidden. The findings largely confirm a consensus view on backyarding found in the literature: that backyard accommodation is an affordable housing solution, and that the backyard rental market has been operating fairly well with little to no assistance from the state or private institutions. This is predominantly a community-based initiative or solution.

This is not to suggest that backyard accommodation is always dignified, affordable or secure. The findings indicate that concerns around basic service provision, quality of structures (and in particular the desire from some tenants to build their own structures) and the impact of Covid-19 on housing security exist. In addition, safety in the neighbourhood has come through as the biggest concern respondents share. There is therefore both a need and an opportunity to develop appropriate interventions to ensure backyard accommodation is an affordable, dignified and safe housing option and to invest in violence and crime prevention.

A major finding of the research is that social factors are very important in how the informal backyard rental market operates, who it provides for and what it offers. This certainly differs across neighbourhoods, but it offers an important critique of a more conventional perspective on the backyard rental market as operating purely on a financial logic.

The data presents a rather complex and contextual picture of backyarding in Cape Town, which suggests that interventions need to be nuanced in responding to relevant contextual factors and opportunities.





Isandla Institute / Masixole Feni. Well built apartment in Dunoon.

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