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The Transformative Power of Citizenship:

Findings from the 2024 Socioeconomic Study of the Shona Community in Kenya

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Executive Summary

Statelessness denies millions globally the right to nationality, limiting access to basic services and economic opportunities. In Kenya, the Shona community, who migrated in the 1960s and 1970s to Kenya, remained stateless until December 2020, when they were granted citizenship by the Government of Kenya. This pivotal decision ended decades of legal invisibility, marking a historic step in addressing the broader challenge of statelessness in the country and providing a foundation for transformative socioeconomic changes.

Since gaining citizenship, the Shona community reports significant improvements in their quality of life, demonstrating the critical link between legal recognition and social inclusion. The majority of Shona (86 percent) now have access to at least one official form of documentation, opening new doors for development. Over 88 percent indicate that their lives have improved as a result of citizenship, citing reduced discrimination, increased access to services, and enhanced personal security. Many also report a stronger sense of national identity, greater community trust, and optimism about their future, underscoring the broader social benefits of citizenship.

Access to public services has been a key driver of these improvements. The majority of Shona (86 percent) now have access to at least one official form of documentation, opening new doors for School attendance rates increased, particularly among older age groups who had previously been excluded, although challenges in secondary and tertiary education persist. Healthcare access improved for 52 percent of households, supported by a rise in health insurance coverage from 3.6 percent to about 11 percent. However, affordability remains a critical barrier, highlighting the need for sustained policy efforts to ensure equitable service access.

The economic impact of citizenship is also evident, with improved labor market participation and financial inclusion illustrating how legal recognition translates into tangible economic benefits. Employment rates increased from 74 percent to 76.8 percent despite the lingering effects of the pandemic-induced shock (where employment rate hit an all-time low of 14 percent for Shona in Q3 of 2020), with wage earners reporting enhanced job security and income stability. Financial inclusion surged, with mobile money wallet ownership rising to 97 percent and bank account access quadrupling to over 30 percent. Nevertheless, challenges persist in achieving gender equity and reducing reliance on informal employment, indicating the need for targeted economic support. The community also has an improved asset index compared to prior to obtaining citizenship.

To sustain these gains and build on the Shona community's progress, policymakers should prioritize inclusive development strategies that address remaining gaps in education, healthcare, and economic integration. Expanding financial inclusion programs, promoting formal employment opportunities, and strengthening service access can accelerate the Shona's full integration into Kenyan society. Kenya's experience with the Shona offers a replicable model for tackling statelessness globally, demonstrating that inclusive citizenship policies can drive social cohesion and economic development.

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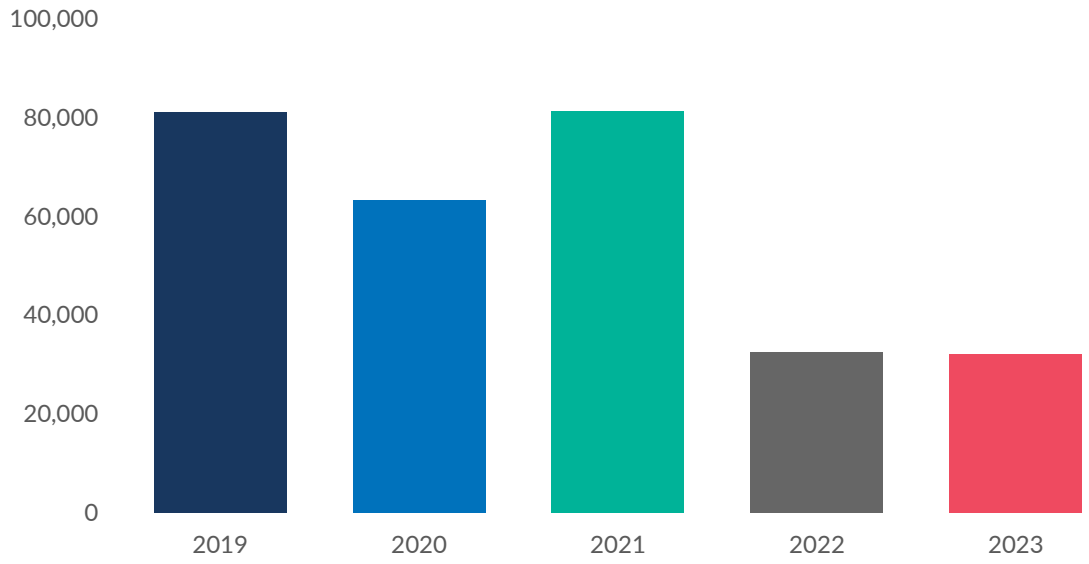
1 Statelessness and the Shona

1.1 Statelessness

Statelessness remains a significant global challenge, affecting millions of people across various regions. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are an estimated 4.4 million stateless people globally, though the real figure could be much higher due to gaps in data collection[1]. Stateless individuals often live without legal recognition from any country, depriving them of basic rights such as access to healthcare, education, employment, and social services. This legal invisibility exacerbates poverty and exclusion, perpetuating cycles of marginalization, especially for vulnerable populations such as ethnic minorities and displaced people.

In the last decade, global efforts to eradicate statelessness have gained momentum, with initiatives like the #IBelong Campaign driving policy reform. Launched in 2014, the #IBelong Campaign aims to end statelessness within ten years through advocacy, legal reform, and heightened awareness, and has since seen over half a million stateless individuals acquire citizenship. The Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, created alongside the campaign, outlines ten critical actions for states to take, including improving birth registration, addressing gender discrimination in nationality laws, and granting nationality to stateless people. Significant milestones include the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness, which featured concrete pledges made by governments, and the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum, where further pledges were made by 135 states and stakeholders. The campaign has also seen success stories, such as Kyrgyzstan becoming the first country to eradicate statelessness in 2019 by resolving all known cases and issuing documentation to over 13,700 people.

Figure 1: Number of stateless persons globally who have acquired a nationality or had it confirmed | 2019 – 2023.



Source: UNHCR Global Report 2023[2].

[1] UNHCR (2024). *Global Trends Report 2023*.
[2] UNHCR (2024). *Global Report 2023*.

The root causes of statelessness are multifaceted, stemming from gaps and inconsistencies in nationality laws and discriminatory practices. Many countries have laws that fail to provide safeguards against statelessness, particularly for children born on their territory or to parents of uncertain nationality. Discriminatory policies, based on ethnicity, gender, or religion, further exacerbate statelessness in certain regions, with women in some countries still unable to pass on their nationality to their children. Additionally, conflicts and forced displacement across borders complicate the ability of individuals to claim or retain nationality, especially in cases where documentation is lacking.

Kenya has made notable progress in addressing statelessness, though challenges remain. Over the past decade, Kenya has taken steps to recognize stateless communities, including the Shona, Pemba, and members of other formerly stateless populations. In 2016, Kenya granted citizenship to the Makonde people, and in 2020, it extended this recognition to the Shona community, and then subsequently to the Pemba in 2022, as well as some individuals of Asian origin, and of Rwandan descent. These efforts represent a positive shift towards reducing statelessness in the country. However, many stateless people remain, especially among other unrecognized communities and groups such as descendants of migrants who arrived before independence.

Despite Kenya's progress, it still hosts a significant stock of stateless people, underscoring the need for sustained policy attention. According to recent estimates, there are still thousands of stateless individuals in Kenya, including populations in coastal regions and northern pastoralist communities, as well as individuals born to foreign nationals who lack clear documentation. Nationally, the stateless population continues to face severe barriers to economic participation and access to education, healthcare, and social protection programs. Policy gaps, especially concerning the formal registration of individuals and access to identification documents, need to be addressed to prevent future generations from falling into statelessness.

International cooperation has proven crucial in addressing the legal and social barriers stateless people face, as seen in regional declarations and initiatives. In 2015, the Abidjan Declaration by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) laid out 25 commitments to eradicate statelessness, setting a regional precedent for coordinated action. Similar frameworks have emerged globally, such as the 2018 N'Djamena Initiative in Central Africa and the 2024 Arab Declaration for Belonging and Identity, which aim to strengthen birth registration, address statelessness among minorities, and promote gender equality in nationality laws. These multilateral efforts show the importance of collaborative approaches in tackling statelessness at the national and regional levels.

Kenya's experience highlights the critical importance of comprehensive, inclusive reforms to nationality laws and civil registration systems to end statelessness. Going forward, Kenya's policies need to focus on both the immediate recognition of stateless communities and long-term solutions to prevent new cases of statelessness. This can be in the forms of ensuring robust civil registration systems, inclusive nationality laws, and the removal of legal and bureaucratic barriers to accessing citizenship.

1.2 Shona Community

"The day we officially became Kenyans we were overjoyed. We sang and danced."
- Vaida Gavaza, member of one of the first groups of Shona who came to Kenya in 1969. © UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo.

The Shona community in Kenya traces its origins to a small group of missionaries who migrated from Zimbabwe as late as 1970s. The first Shona arrived in Kenya as part of the Gospel of God Church, a religious mission that sought to spread Christianity across East Africa. The group, originally from present-day Zimbabwe, settled primarily in Nairobi and its surrounding areas. Over time, the Shona community in Kenya grew through natural population increase and subsequent migration of relatives. Despite their long-standing presence in Kenya, they remained largely invisible in terms of legal recognition, which would lead to decades of statelessness.

The structure of the Shona community has been shaped by strong cultural and religious ties, with a focus on mutual support and cooperation. As a community centered around its faith, the Shona maintained their religious practices through close-knit church activities, which fostered strong communal bonds. The Gospel of God Church continued to be a central institution within the Shona community, acting not only as a place of worship but also as a platform for social organization. Traditional leadership roles within the church helped maintain order and solidarity within the group, while also providing social services such as education and informal welfare. Despite their statelessness, the Shona managed to preserve their cultural heritage through the transmission of language, customs, and religious practices to younger generations.

The Shona's statelessness in Kenya resulted primarily from historical and legal gaps that prevented them from obtaining formal citizenship. When the first Shona missionaries arrived

in Kenya, the country was on the verge of gaining independence from British colonial rule. However, the migration of the Shona took place in an ambiguous legal period when the new Kenyan state was still defining its citizenship laws. Many Shona either lacked the necessary documentation to formalize their status in Kenya or did not anticipate the importance of doing so at the time. As a result, they failed to acquire Kenyan citizenship when it became mandatory, and, due to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, they also lost any claim to citizenship there. This left them in a legal limbo, stateless and unrecognized by any country.

For decades, the Shona community faced profound challenges due to their statelessness, living without basic rights and formal recognition. The lack of Kenyan citizenship meant that the Shona could not access critical services, including education, healthcare, and formal employment. Without national identification documents, Shona children were often denied admission to schools or faced difficulties in completing their education. Healthcare services were also limited, as many hospitals and clinics required proof of nationality to access affordable or public healthcare. The community's economic opportunities were severely restricted, as many jobs in the formal sector required official identification. Most Shona relied on informal labor, often working as street vendors or artisans, where they were vulnerable to harassment by authorities due to their undocumented status.

The lack of legal recognition also contributed to the social exclusion and marginalization of the Shona, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Being stateless meant that the Shona had no formal voice in society and were excluded from political participation. They could not vote or stand for public office, effectively silencing their representation in Kenyan civic life. This lack of political power made it difficult for them to advocate for their rights or push for legal reforms that could resolve their status. Furthermore, without proper identification, many Shona were unable to access formal banking services, leaving them economically marginalized and reliant on informal community savings groups. This heightened their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, both from law enforcement and opportunistic individuals who took advantage of their undocumented status.

Before gaining citizenship, the Shona experienced constant fear of detention and deportation, further exacerbating their insecurity and isolation. Because of their lack of official status, the Shona were often seen as illegal migrants, despite living in Kenya for decades. Many feared arrests during routine police checks, and some were subject to arbitrary detention. The threat of deportation, even to a country many had never visited, loomed large. Most Shona had no ties to Zimbabwe and no legal pathway to claim citizenship there, making deportation an even more frightening possibility. This fear of state authorities discouraged the Shona from seeking help or asserting their rights, further entrenching their marginalization.

The long wait for recognition placed the Shona community in a precarious position, cut off from the full benefits of social and economic integration. Despite their contributions to Kenyan society—through their participation in the local economy, cultural life, and religious networks—the Shona's lack of formal status meant that they remained outsiders. For years, the community struggled in legal and social limbo, with successive generations born stateless in a country they considered home. It wasn't until 2020, when the Kenyan government officially granted them

citizenship, that the Shona were finally recognized as full members of the society they had lived in for over half a century.

The granting of citizenship to the Shona community in 2020 marked a significant step toward ending decades of statelessness, but challenges remain in ensuring full integration. While the official recognition of the Shona's citizenship rights has been a major victory, the process of obtaining national identity cards and accessing services remains bureaucratic and slow for some community members. Furthermore, overcoming the legacy of statelessness will take time, particularly in terms of economic and social inclusion. Many Shona still face barriers to education and employment due to years of marginalization. Efforts are now focused on ensuring that the community can fully integrate into Kenyan society, reclaim their rights, and build a future free from the challenges of statelessness.

1.3 About the Study

A UNHCR staff in conversation with a Shona member during the Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024. © UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo.

To understand the rarely studied impact of obtaining citizenship for stateless populations, UNHCR conducted a socioeconomic survey amongst the Shona population in Kenya. This report is primarily based on this household survey conducted in September 2024 across Nairobi, Machakos, Kiambu and Kajiado counties, with a sample size of 386 households, and is largely considered a survey of the full population of Shona members living in Kenya. The questionnaire was administered to one informed adult in each interviewed household, and the labor module was administered to a select breadwinner of the household. This survey included select questions from previous surveys which included Shona population as a stratum to allow for a pre- and post-citizenship analysis. Key indicators include improved access to public services, formal employment opportunities, education enrolment, and financial inclusion.

The analysis draws on a combination of this primary data as well as a combination of previous surveys on or that included the Shona population as a representative stratum to evaluate the socioeconomic impact of obtaining citizenship for the formerly stateless Shona population in Kenya. The analysis provides a pre- and post-citizenship evaluation, offering insights into how the granting of legal status has influenced key outcomes such as access to services, economic opportunities, and overall well-being. The secondary sources include:

- 2019 Socioeconomic Survey of the Shona Population[3] (pre-citizenship period): This dataset, generated jointly by UNHCR and the World Bank, captures detailed information on the Shona community's socioeconomic conditions before the Kenyan government granted them citizenship in 2020. It was conducted on the heels of a Voluntary Registration Exercise led by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and provides baseline data on key indicators such as household income, education access, healthcare, employment, and social integration. This survey serves as a critical reference point for assessing changes that have occurred post-citizenship.
- Kenya COVID-19 Rapid Response Phone Surveys[4] (impact of COVID-19 on Shona population): Conducted by the World Bank during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, these phone surveys assessed the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on national and vulnerable populations, including the Shona community. The data offer important insights into how the stateless Shona were affected by the pandemic's disruptions, particularly in terms of income losses, access to healthcare, and food security. The surveys also highlight the compounded challenges faced by the community due to their lack of legal recognition during the crisis.

The report provides a descriptive multi-topic analysis of the socioeconomic and living conditions of the Shona community within and around Nairobi. While it does not provide sufficient comparisons with the national population as a counterfactual, it shows the advancements made in the Shona community before and after obtaining citizenship. Sections 2-3 cover demographics and legal status. Sections 4-8 address socioeconomic conditions. Section 9 focuses on food security and coping mechanisms. Section 10 considers civil-political areas (subjective well-being, attitudes to others, trust, and political participation).

The primary comparison is between the 2019 and 2024 Shona socioeconomic surveys. Where relevant (education, labor market) additional comparisons are made to the Kenya COVID-19 Rapid Response Phone Surveys. Selected references are also made to the Kenya national population and to observations from focus groups and qualitative sources. Further research is foreseen to expand these comparisons using additional national data sources.

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[3] Nimoh, Florence Nana Pokuaah; Beltramo, Theresa Parrish; Fix, Jedediah Rooney; Appler, Felix Konstantin; Pape, Utz Johann; Rios Rivera, Laura Abril. *Understanding the Socioeconomic Conditions of the Stateless Shona Community in Kenya: Results from the 2019 Socioeconomic Survey (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

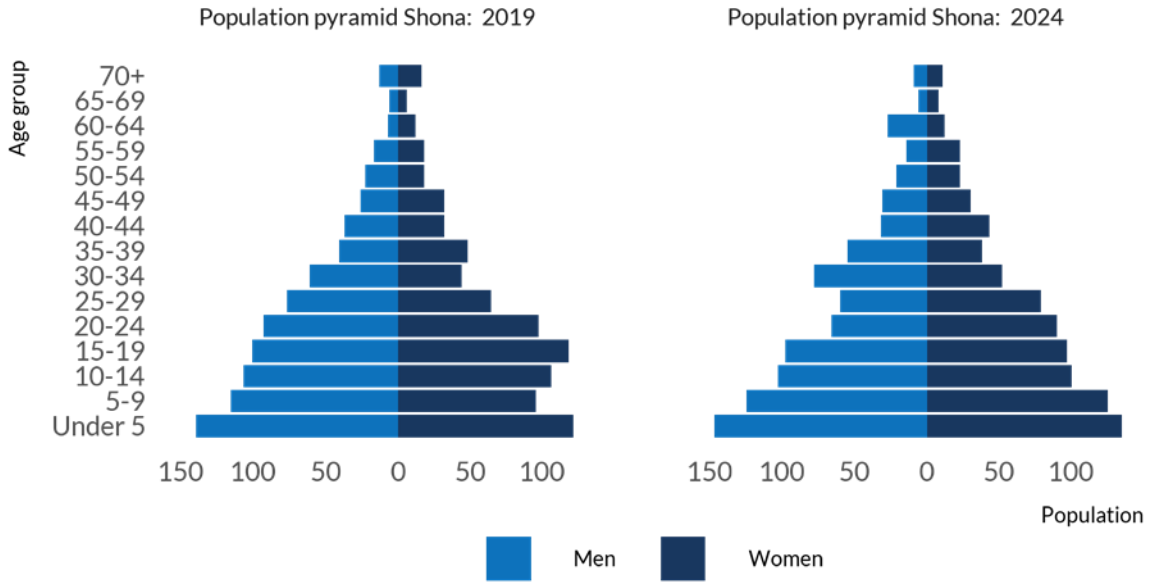
[4] Pape, Utz Johann; Delius, Antonia Johanna Sophie; Vintar, Mirko; Gupta, Rhea; Haynes, Alastair Peter Francis; Rios Rivera, Laura Abril; Fontep, Eugenie Rose; Beltramo, Theresa Parrish; Nimoh, Florence Nana Pokuaah. *How COVID-19 Continues to Affect Lives of Refugees in Kenya: Rapid Response Phone Survey - Rounds 1 to 5 (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

2 Demographics

2.1 Household Composition

The demographic composition of the Shona community living in Kiambu and Nairobi County between 2019 and 2024 remain relatively stable over time. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the acquisition of full Kenyan citizenship, most Shona remain in the sampled area and the household structure remains similar. The median age is 18 years for the Shona across 2019 (mean: 21.77) and 2024 (mean: 21.87). Figure 2 displays the age distribution of the Shona community. The socioeconomic profiling of the Shona community in 2019 already revealed a young population with a large group of individuals under 5 years of age, few individuals over 65, and about half of the population under 18 years. The young demographic profile has important implications for human capital development as many of the potential benefits from citizenship acquisition may translate in better schooling, education, and labor market outcomes for current children of the Shona.

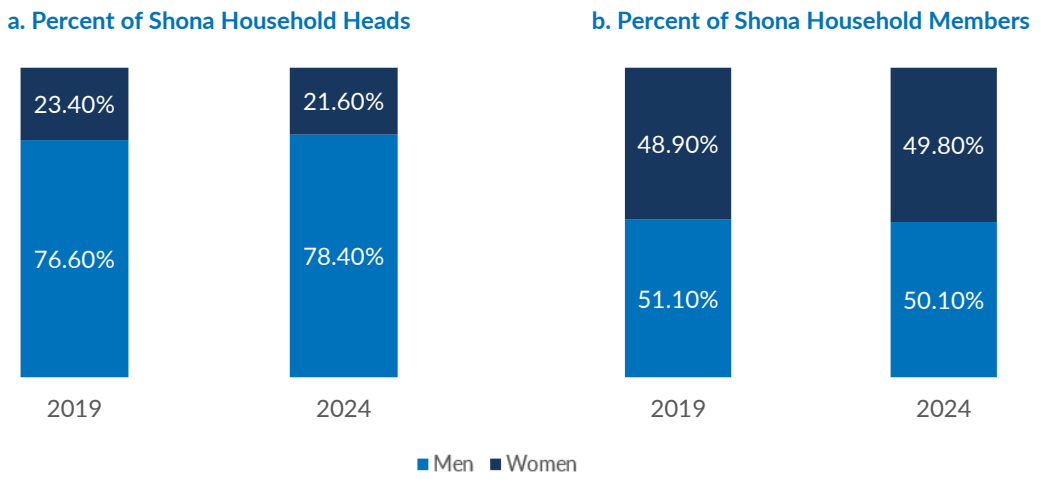
Figure 2: Demographic profile of the Shona community in 2019 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

The gender distribution of the Shona has also stayed similar across both years. Half of the Shona individuals are women in both years (see Figure 3, right panel). Most household heads (see Figure 3, left panel) are male with a slight but insignificant increase from 2019 to 2024. Over four years of obtaining citizenship, this indicates that households have not majorly restructured and norms within the household have not changed. The household size has also stayed similar with 4.83 household members in 2019 and 4.51 household members in 2024.

Figure 3: Gender distribution of household heads and household members in the Shona community in 2019 and 2024.

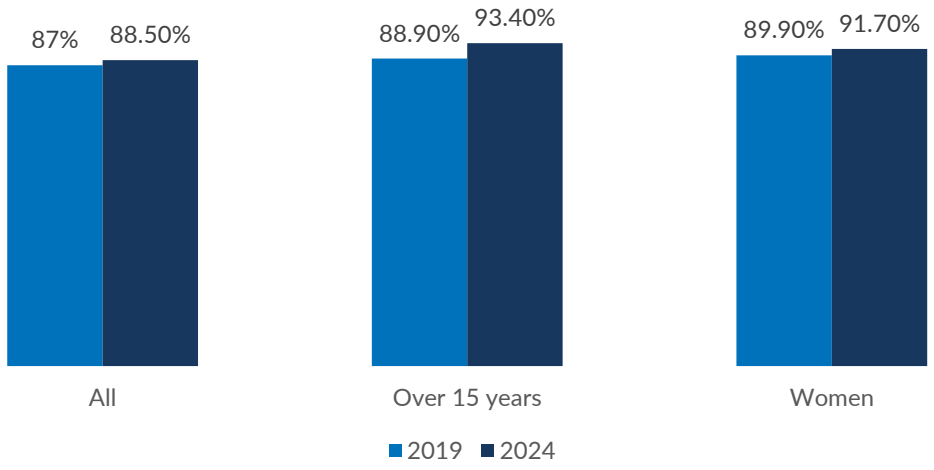


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

The average dependency ratio for the Shona community – the number of dependents to working-age household members (above 15 and below 65) – has slightly increased since 2019. While every working-age Shona in 2019 was responsible for 0.87 dependents in their household on average, one working-age Shona in 2024 is on average responsible for 0.93 dependents. The sex ratio of adult women to men within Shona households has remained stable with roughly one adult women per adult men (1.00 in 2019 and 1.02 in 2024).

There are some improvements of the literacy rate amongst Shona that are over 15 years old. Figure 4 visualizes the literacy rate for all household members in the Shona community. In addition, the literacy rate is broken down for women and for those over 15 years old. We find that individuals over 15 years have significantly improved in terms of literacy since 2019 by around 4.5 percentage points ($p < 0.001$) although the overall literacy rate has remained comparable across the population.

Figure 4: Literacy rate in the Shona community in 2019 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

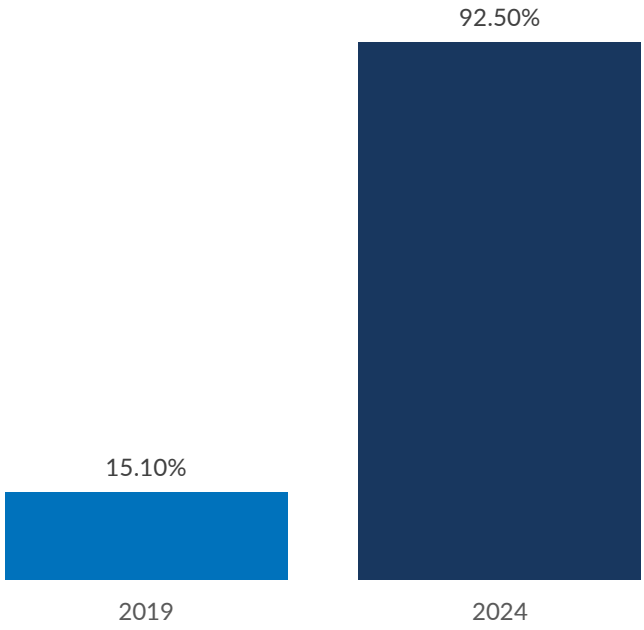
3 Citizenship and Access to Documentation

3.1 Citizenship

Citizenship – and the accompanying access to official documentation – is a recognized enabler for development. Citizenship gives rights which may include voting, transmission of citizenship to family members and children and eligibility for some jobs. Government-issued identification documents which come with citizenship further enable access to a wide range of services, including social benefit payments, school registration, medical care, and financial services[5]. In Kenya, an estimated 91 percent of the Shona population hold a national identification card, which is in turn also associated with higher levels of financial inclusion. Beyond financial constraints, lack of a national identification card was the primary reason for non-use of bank accounts (cited by 9 percent of the non-banked respondents).

More than 90 percent of the Shona now report that they have acquired Kenyan citizenship – an increase of over 75 percentage points since 2019. In 2019, 15.1 percent of the household members in the Shona community reported having their names and their citizenship recognized by the Kenyan government. Of the remaining 84.9 percent of Shona household members without Kenyan citizenship, the vast majority reported being stateless, with fewer than 10 individuals carrying some other nationality (e.g. Zimbabwe, Zambia). By 2024, the share with citizenship soared to a reported 92.4 percent, of which 25.2 percent were registered as Kenyan at birth and 67.3 percent received citizenship through the nationalization process. Of the those remaining, 3.7 percent are waiting for their registration to be processed, and 3.4 percent have not yet received or registered their citizenship.

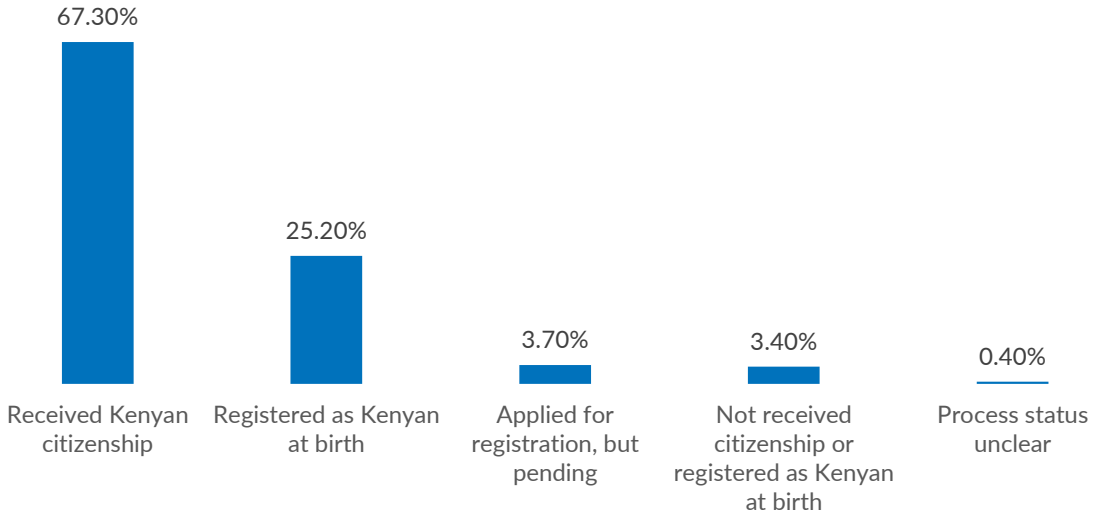
Figure 5: Percentage of Shona household members with Kenyan citizenship.



[5] World Bank (2021). *Principle on Identification for Sustainable Development (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

Figure 6: Progress towards obtaining citizenship among Shona individuals in 2024.

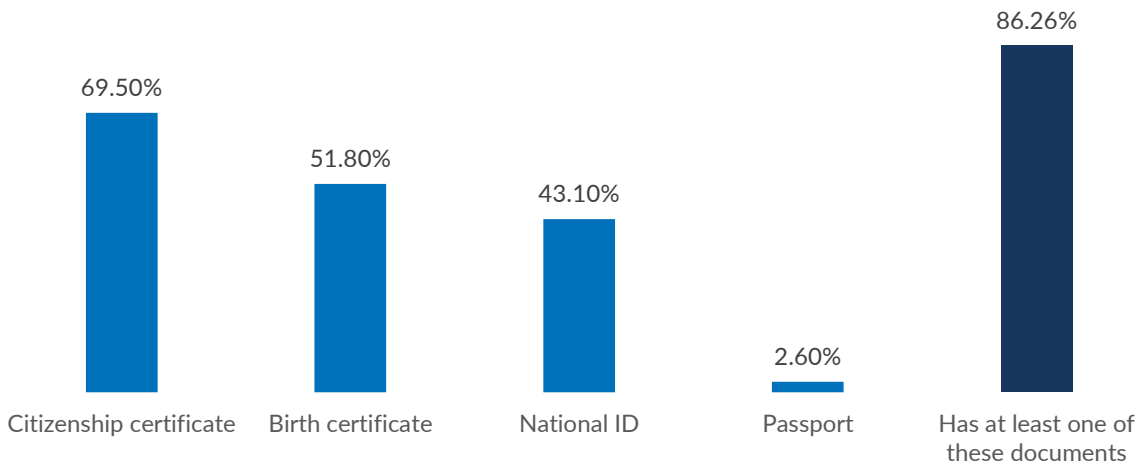


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

3.2 Access to Documentation

In turn, most Shona with Kenyan citizenship now have at least one form of official documentation, which allows for increased access to school/ education services, financial services, and labor formalization opportunities as well as decreased risk of harassment. Overall, most respondents hold at least one form of government documentation (86.26 percent). Citizenship certificate is the most common form of identification (69.5 percent), followed by birth certificate (51.8 percent) and national identification card (43.10 percent). Fewer than 3 percent have a passport. Despite the positive progress, the large number of Shona still missing vital government documents such as national ID cards, citizenship certificates or birth certificates constitutes a development opportunity going forward.

Figure 7: Ownership of documentation among Shona individuals in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

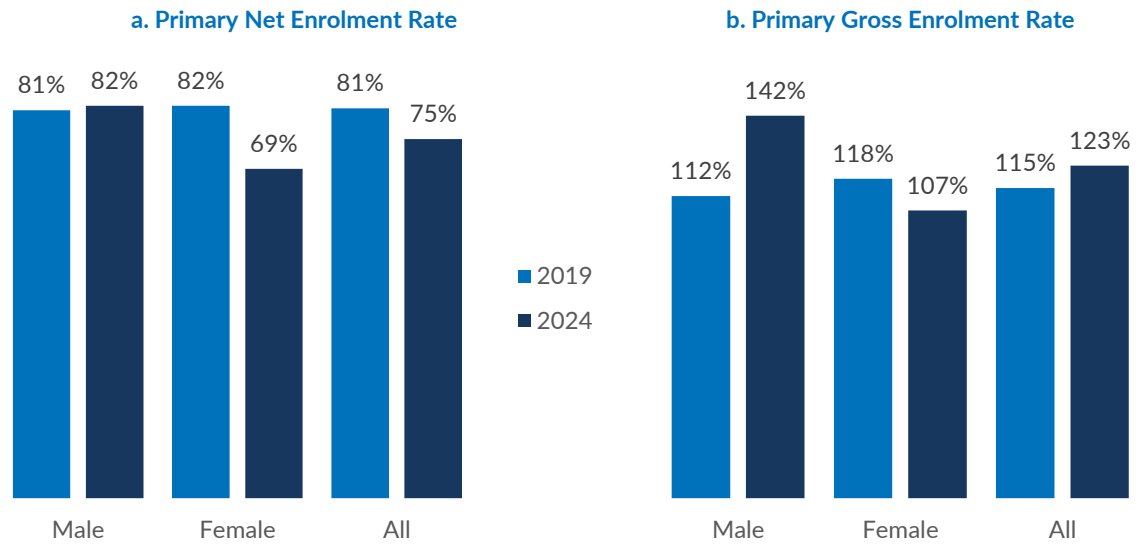
In follow up interviews, Shona households offered different explanations for the lack of identification documents. Some people applied and continue to wait for their documents, while others received birth certificates with errors and are still waiting for corrected versions. Several people claim not to have received information on the citizenship process, suggesting they may not understand how to get documents, while a few others claimed a lack of resources to complete the process or other issues with completing the application. Overall, however, the process appears to have gone smoothly for most community members.

4 Education

Primary net enrolment rates (NER) for Shona children appear to have declined since 2019 – when they were shown to match or exceed comparable national enrolment figures – but this may also be a result of methodological changes rather than a true reduction in attendance. In 2019, the age bracket for primary school enrolment was defined as 6 to 13 years, whereas by 2024, it had been revised to 6 to 11 years. This shift in age brackets has led to an underestimation of enrolment rates in the 2024 data, particularly in metrics like the NER and gross enrolment rates, which measures the proportion of children in the official school-age group attending school. For instance, the NER for Shona children in primary school age (now 6 to 11 years) is recorded at 75 percent in 2024, down from 81 percent in 2019. However, this may not necessarily reflect reduced enrolment but rather an artifact of the redefined age range. The apparent decline is particularly evident for girls, who may still face challenges in accessing education.

The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), which accounts for all students attending primary school regardless of age, provides a broader perspective on participation. This measure highlights the participation of overage students who are outside the official school-age group. As shown in the second panel of Figure 8, gender differences in the GER among the Shona community are slightly less pronounced, suggesting that many Shona girls who missed school during periods of disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may have re-enrolled at a later age. If so, this underscores the resilience of the community and highlights the importance of addressing barriers to timely school attendance, particularly for girls, while also recognizing the challenges inherent in interpreting attendance trends amidst changes in age definitions.

Figure 8: Primary Net and Gross Enrolment Rates among Shona individuals in 2019 and 2024.



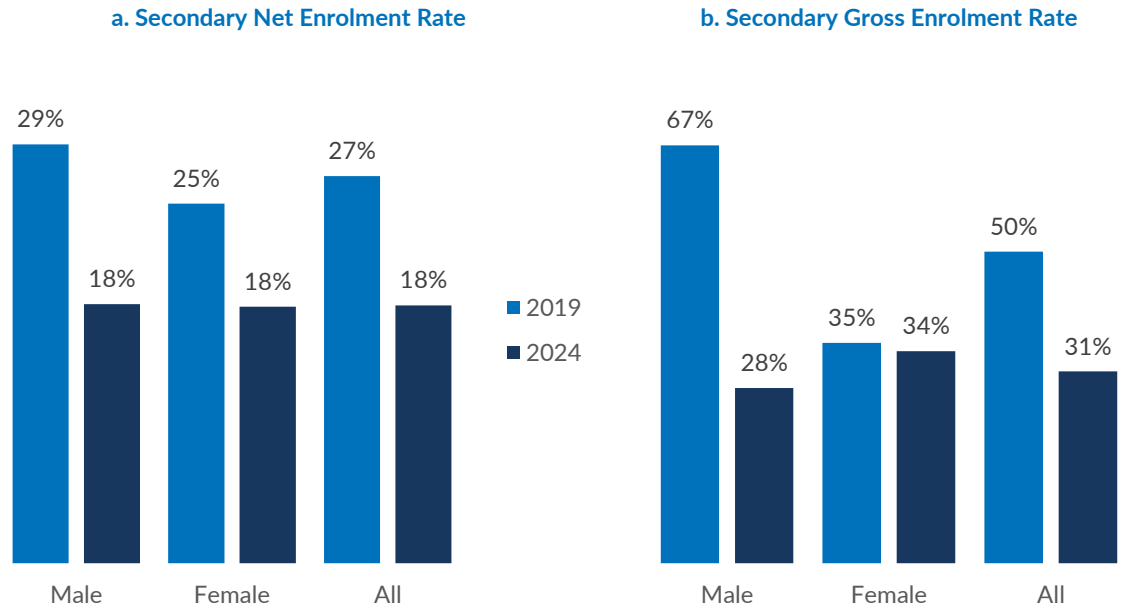
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

At the secondary school level – when primary school certificate is required for enrolment – the net enrolment for Shona children has decreased between 2019 and 2024, with both genders now showing equal enrolment rates. In 2019, 27 percent of Shona children within the

official secondary school age bracket (14 to 17 years) attended secondary school, compared to only 18 percent in 2024 at the new secondary school age bracket (12 to 17 years). The decline in secondary NER is consistent for both males and females, whose attendance rates are now both at 18 percent, down from 29 percent and 25 percent, respectively, in 2019.

The Secondary gross enrolment, which captures all students attending secondary school regardless of age, provides additional insights. In 2024, the GER for Shona secondary students stands at 31 percent, down from 50 percent in 2019. Notably, gender differences in secondary GER have narrowed, with female GER increasing slightly from 35 percent in 2019 to 34 percent in 2024, while male GER declined sharply from 67 percent to 28 percent. This suggests that while overall enrolment has decreased, Shona women are more likely to enroll in secondary school later than the official age bracket, reflecting their resilience and determination to pursue education despite initial delays. Since due to change in age brackets, it not possible to clearly compare the NER and GER between 2019 and 2024, the next paragraphs outline data on ever attending school, which paints a much clearer comparison between the two time periods.

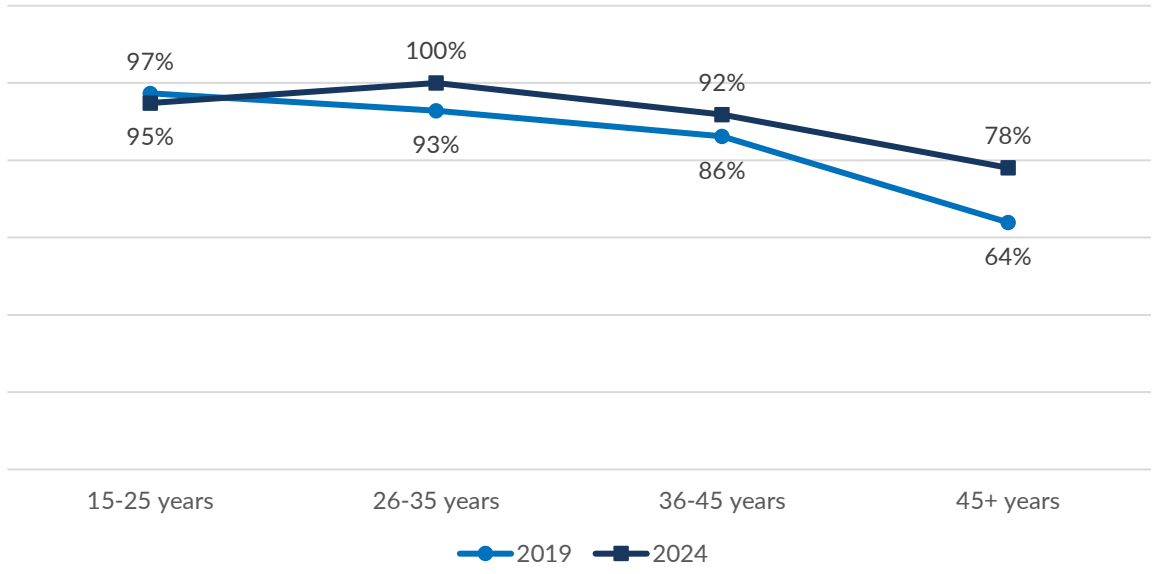
Figure 9: Secondary Net and Gross Enrolment Rates among Shona Individuals in 2019 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

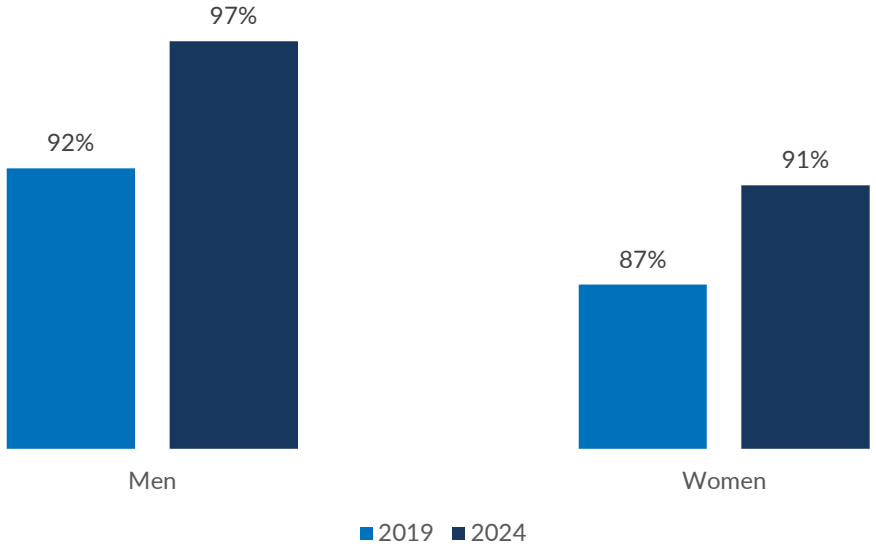
While most Shona already reported having attended school at least once in their life in 2019, the overall school attendance has further increased since the acquisition of citizenship for the Shona community. In 2019, 89.4 percent of the Shona population aged 15 years and above have attended school at least once in their lives. In 2024, 94.1 percent of the Shona community above 15 years report having attended school. This increase in overall school attendance ($p < 0.001$) is not driven by the youngest age cohorts but rather by individuals above 45 years. While only 63.9 percent of Shona aged above 45 reported ever going to school in 2019, this number is much higher in 2024 with 78.1 percent reporting attending school ever in their lives (see Figure 10). There are also gender differences with women reporting less school attendance but experiencing an improvement in 2024.

Figure 10: Reported percentage of school attendance (ever) for Shona individuals above 15 years in 2019 and 2024, broken down by age group.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

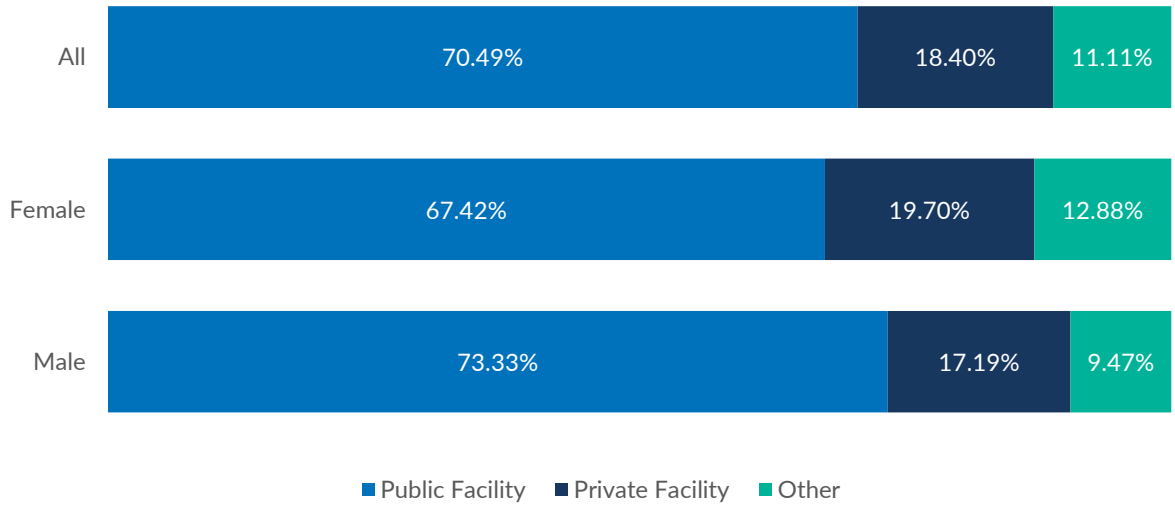
Figure 11: Reported percentage of school attendance (ever) for Shona individuals above 15 years in 2019 and 2024, broken down by gender.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

Most Shona community members that currently report being in school are predominantly attending primary school while higher education, such as university degrees, are very rare. The most common institution are public facilities for Shona community members in 2024 although women attend more private facilities and other institutions. The low secondary school attendance might suggest that the legacy challenge of not being able to enter secondary education or higher due to lack of documentation has continued and more time is needed for the community to see the benefits in education enrolment and attendance. It is also possible that the Shona face the pressure of needing to enter the labor market rather considering high opportunity costs of going to secondary school.

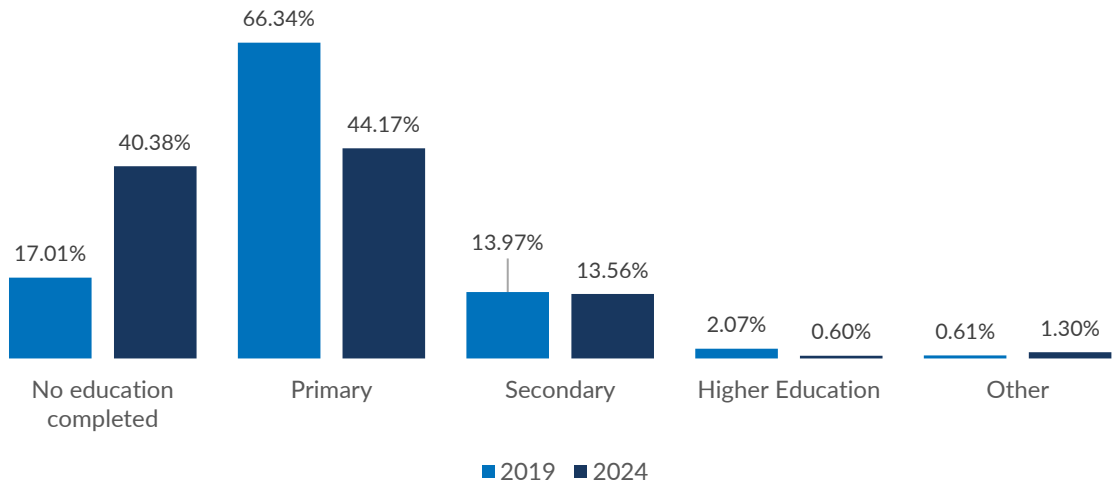
Figure 12: Types of educational facilities among current school-goers in Shona community.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

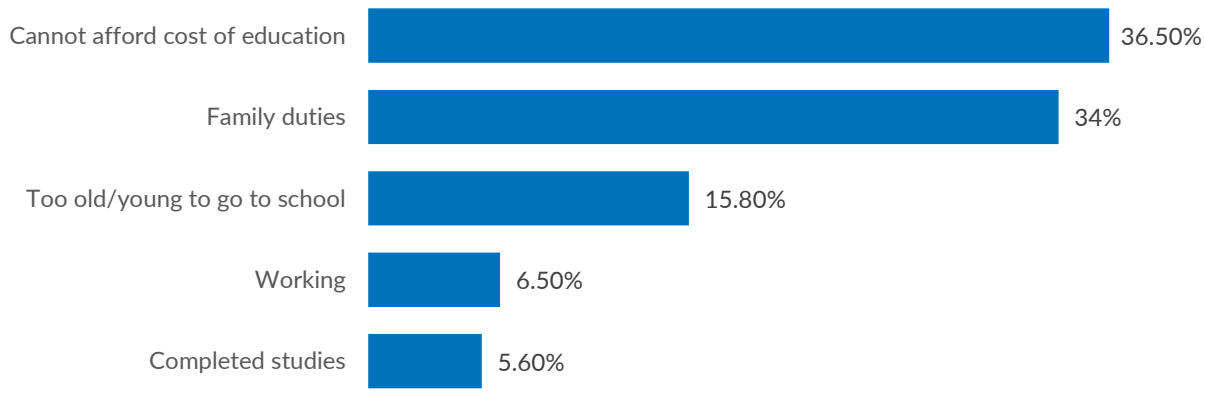
Despite an increase in attending school facilities across various age groups, completion of school degrees is relatively lower amongst the Shona compared to 2019. While the largest share of Shona community members over 14 years in both years have completed primary school, a large proportion of Shona (40.38 percent) have not completed primary school in 2024. This may again relate to the detrimental effects of Covid-19 on school completion and attendance. In 2019, 87.2 percent of Shona men over 14 years had completed at least primary school or even a higher degree compared to 79.2 percent of women. In 2024, the completion rate for Shona men was only 79.1 percent. Only about half of the women in 2024 have completed at least primary school (53.6 percent). One likely explanation is that this set of individuals who have not completed their education yet are new entrants into education system having received their documentation. In such case, it is expected that the completion rates shall normalize over time.

Figure 13: *School Grade Completion Rates for Shona Individuals aged 15 and above.*



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

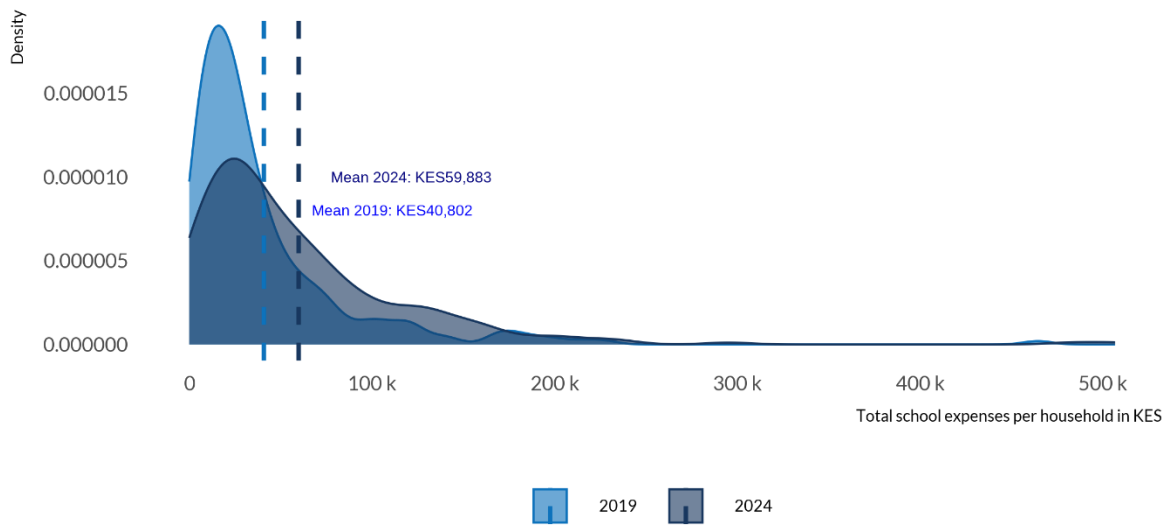
Figure 14: *Reasons for not attending school.*



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Cost of education remains one of the largest challenges to entering or continuing education for the Shona community, closely followed by family obligations. The 2019 and 2024 Shona surveys also ask about the total household expenses for school and education. On average, Shona households in 2019 spent nearly 41,000 Kenyan Shillings (KES) per year on education. This number has risen in 2024: Shona households now spend on average nearly 60,000 KES per year on education. This increase in school expenses may make it particularly challenging for the Shona to improve their educational outcomes, explaining to some extent the lower school attendance and completion rates. The Shona report an average of KES 67,190 per year in costs to send their children to secondary school, KES 47,810 to send children to primary school, and KES 15,438 per year to send children to pre-primary educational facilities.

Figure 15: *Total household expenses for school in 2019 and 2024 in the Shona community.*



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

The table below provides an overview of the type of expenses that have particularly risen since 2019. The Shona community reports an average increase in educational expenses of more than 51 percent in school fees. Remedial tuition and the costs of a feeding program have also risen

sharply. In contrast, they spent less on boarding fees, pocket expenses and medical fees since 2019.

Table 1: School expenses for Shona community by category between 2019 and 2024.

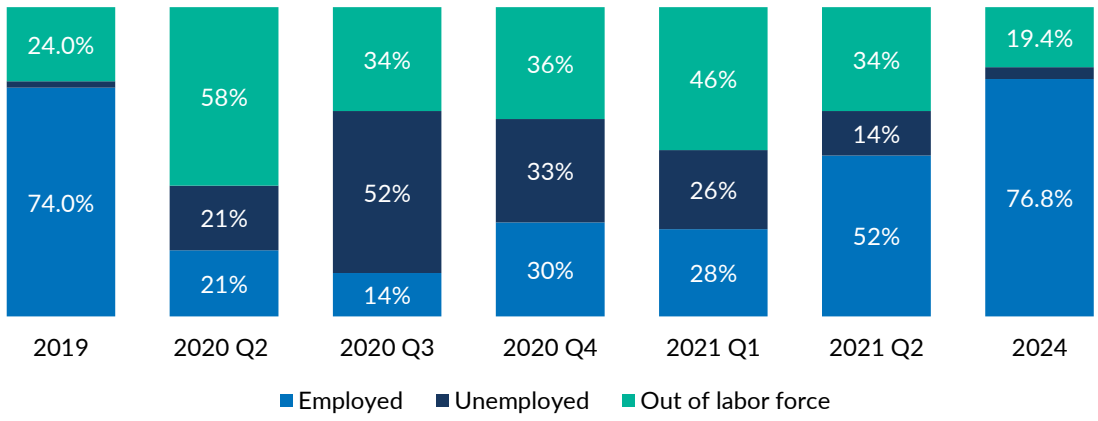
Expense type	2019	2024	Change
School fees	13380.62	20205.12	51%
Remedial tuitions	2334.45	5528.14	137%
Feeding programme	4173.21	7128.9	71%
Books Stationery	1588.52	3883.46	144%
Uniform	3949.57	5756.95	46%
Exam fees	936.17	2309.69	147%
Textbooks	1937.63	2696.94	39%
Activity fees	1123.42	1583.76	41%
Other fees	492.92	815.4	65%
Transport	3283.15	3564.62	9%
Other charges	516.98	661.35	28%
Caution money	160.83	282.35	76%
Medical fee	780.63	293.63	-62%
Pocket expenses	3154.58	2546.92	-19%
Boarding fees	2989.37	81.58	-97%

5 Labor Market and Household Income

5.1 Participation in Labor Market

Job opportunities have not kept pace with the number of people entering the job market, a situation exacerbated by the lingering effects of COVID-19 on the Shona community. Although employment rates increased from 74 percent in 2019 to 76.8 percent in 2024, and the proportion of those economically inactive (out of the labor force) fell from 24 percent to 19.4 percent, the overall unemployment rate rose from 2.0 percent to 3.8 percent. In fact, employment rates showed a modest recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional drought, inflation crisis, and ongoing global economic turbulence. Data from the Kenya COVID-19 Rapid Response Phone Survey (RRPS) indicated that the Shona community experienced significant job losses during the pandemic, particularly between July and September 2020, when unemployment surged dramatically.[4] This period of economic disruption led to fluctuating employment rates. Despite these challenges, the proportion of unemployed individuals has remained relatively low, suggesting that many are still re-entering the labor market or seeking new employment opportunities.

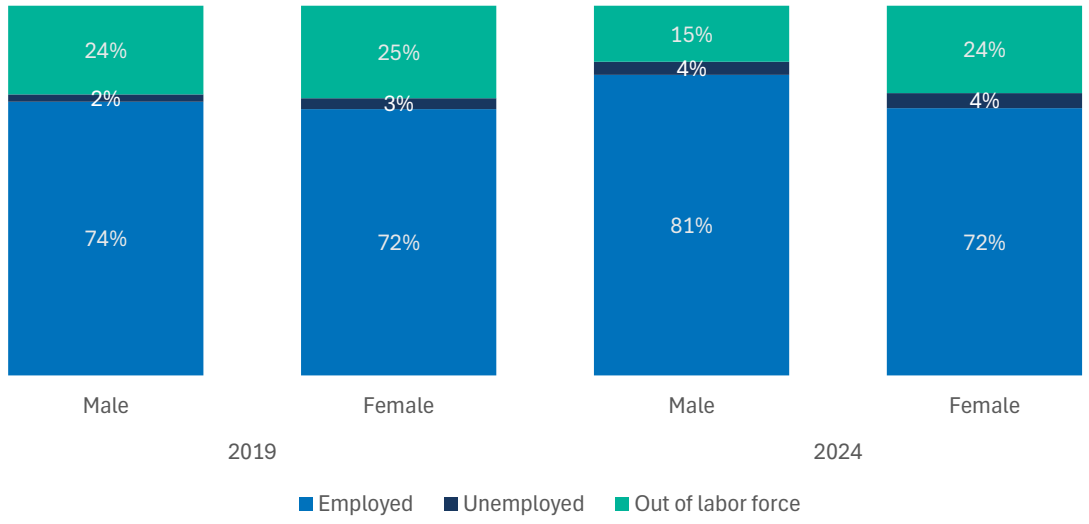
Figure 16: *Labor force participation among the working age population (15-64 years) between 2019 and 2024.*



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2019 and 2024, and Kenya COVID-19 Rapid Response Phone Surveys.

There is a significant gender gap, with women less likely to be employed. While employment among women has started to improve, it has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. The employment rate for women stagnated at 72 percent between 2019 and 2024 while unemployment rates edged up slightly. This stagnation can largely be attributed to the job losses incurred during the pandemic and the slower recovery in female-dominated sectors, which were further impacted by the food price crisis and global economic headwinds. In contrast, male employment increased from 74 percent to 81 percent during the same period, reflecting a quicker rebound in male-dominated occupations.

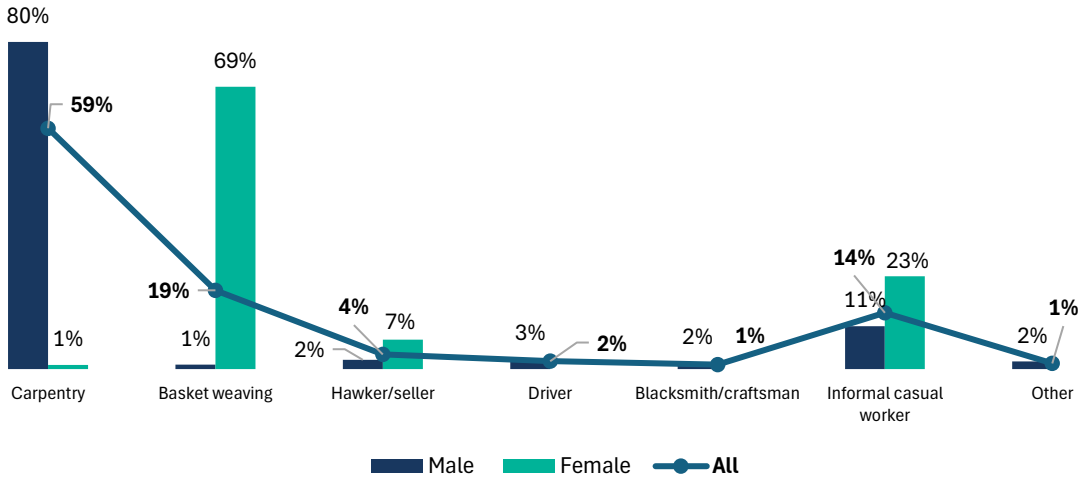
Figure 17: *Labor force participation by gender among the working age population (15-64 years) between 2019 and 2024.*



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

Gender differences exist according to the type of economic activity, with women more likely to be involved in more precarious economic activities. Most of the Shona community (59 percent) is engaged in carpentry, with about 80 percent of those in this field being men. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be engaged in basket weaving, with 69 percent of women participating in this activity. Additionally, women are more likely to be hawkers and employed as informal casual workers. Thus, although both men and women are engaged in precarious economic activities, women tend to be worse off.

Figure 18: *Type of activity in main job/business, for those in employment.*

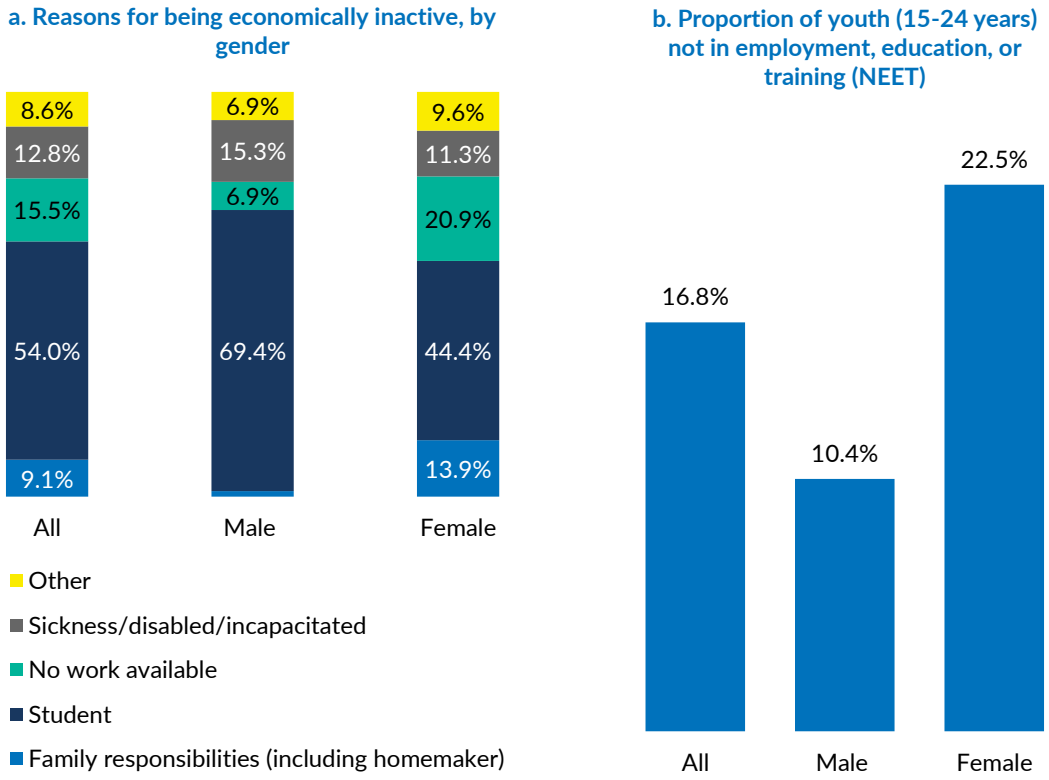


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

5.2 Out of Labor Force

Even in terms of economic inactivity, gender differences are evident. These differences are partly due to varying factors. Compared to men, women are more likely (13.9 percent) to report family responsibilities as the reason for their economic inactivity. They are also more likely to cite a lack of job opportunities as a reason for being economically inactive. In contrast, men are more likely to report being students as their reason for economic inactivity. Reflecting these gender differences, 22.5 percent of women are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), compared to 10.4 percent of men.

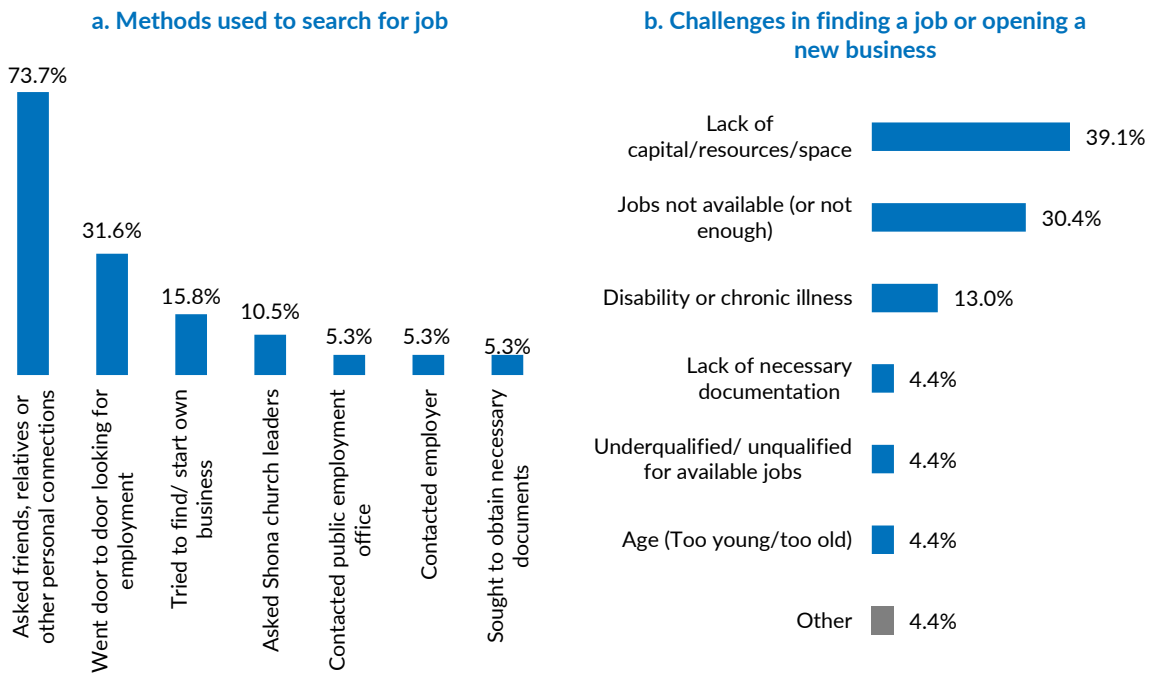
Figure 19: Economically inactive participants and their reasons.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Those seeking jobs tend to rely on informal networks, but job opportunities are limited. About 9.8 percent of households have no breadwinner, and of these, 87 percent are interested in finding a job or starting their own business. Most rely on asking friends, relatives, or other personal connections, with 73.7 percent using this method. Additionally, 31.6 percent have gone door-to-door looking for employment. Around 15.8 percent have attempted to start their own businesses, while 10.5 percent have sought assistance from Shona church leaders. Only 5.3 percent have contacted a public employment office. The most commonly cited challenge in starting a business is the lack of capital, resources, or space. For job searches, the most frequently mentioned obstacle is the lack or inadequacy of available jobs. The evidence also suggests a need to address the mismatch between the skills that the market demands and to facilitate the acquisition of the necessary documentation for employment.

Figure 20: Job search channels and challenges.

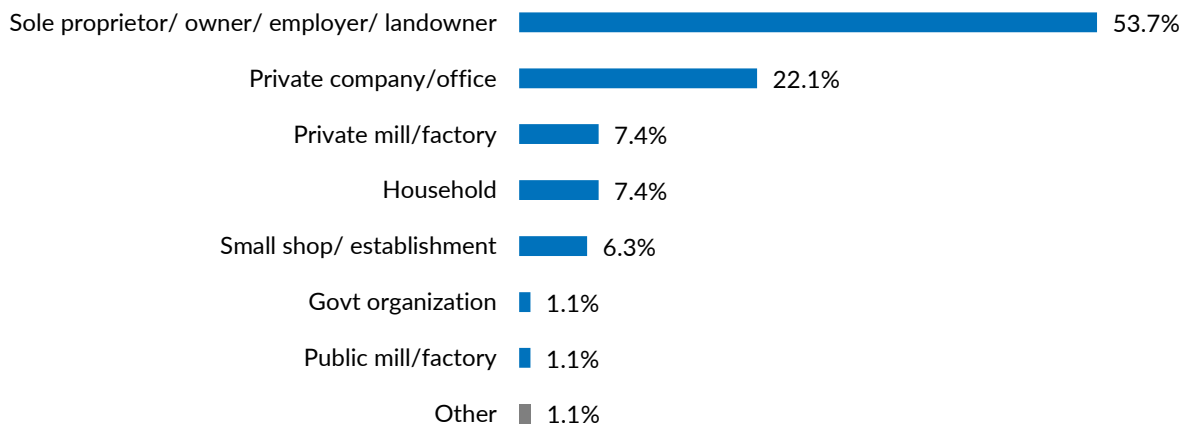


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

5.3 Employment Types and Earnings

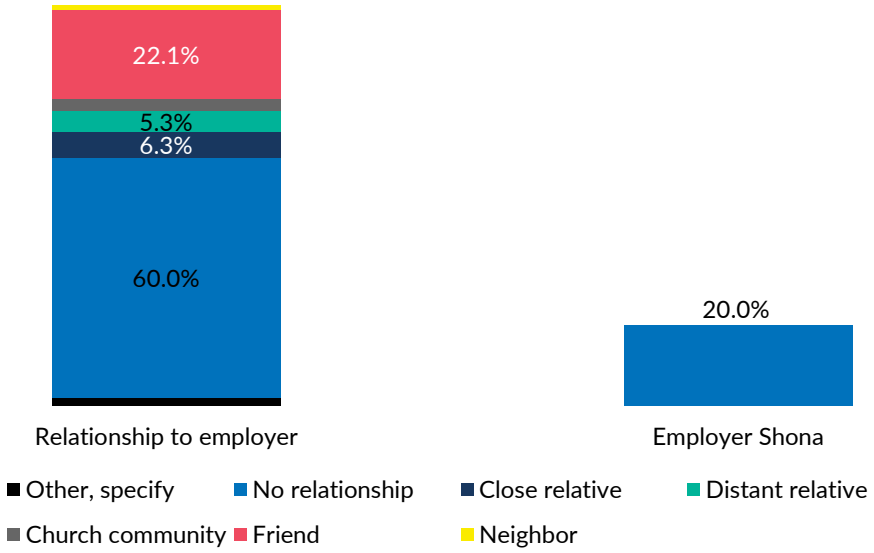
Most wage earners are employed by a sole proprietor, owner, employer, or landowner, with approximately 53 percent of wage earners falling into this category. About 22.2 percent are employed in a private company or office. Employment in households accounts for 7.4 percent, like the share employed in private mills or factories. Employment in government institutions is low, at only 1.1 percent. Around 60 percent of wage earners have no personal relationship with their employer, while for 20 percent, the employer is a friend. Notably, there is a significant share of the Shona community creating jobs for their community, with 20 percent of wage earners indicating their employer is from their community.

Figure 21: Type of employer (organization) among wage earners.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Figure 22: Relationship to employer and proportion of employers that are Shonas.

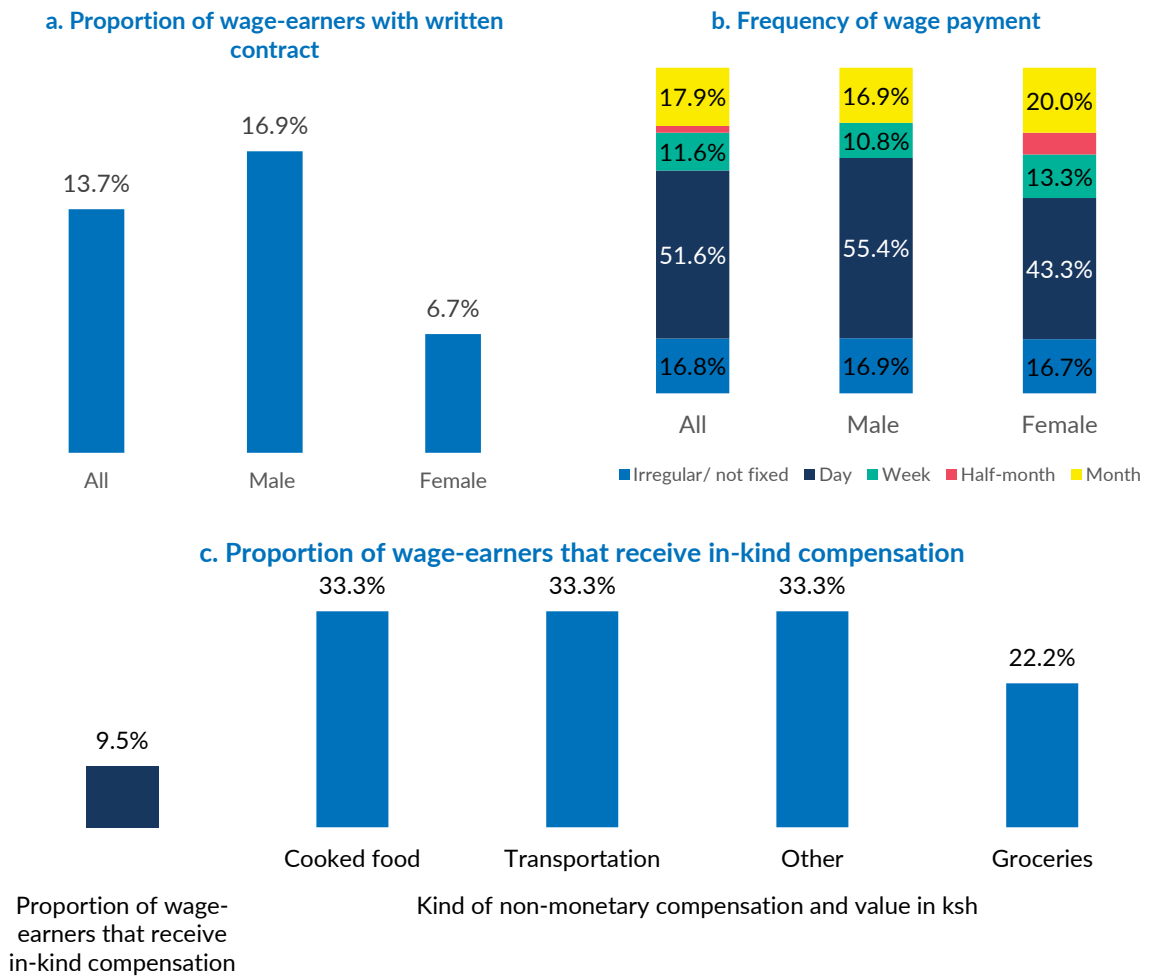


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

The prevalence of informal arrangements is high, especially among women, indicating job insecurity. Only 13.7 percent of Shona wage earners have a written contract. Women are less likely to have a written contract, with only 6.7 percent having one compared to 16.9 percent of men. Consistent with this, about 16.8 percent of wage earners have no fixed frequency of payment, with no significant difference between men and women. Most wage earners are paid daily. In the 12 months prior to the survey, most wage earners earned an average amount of about KES 118,000 with men earning higher than women (KES 151,762 vs. KES 51,789). Close to 10 percent of wage earners are paid in kind, receiving compensation in the form of cooked food (33.3 percent), transportation (33.3 percent), groceries (22.2 percent), and other forms.

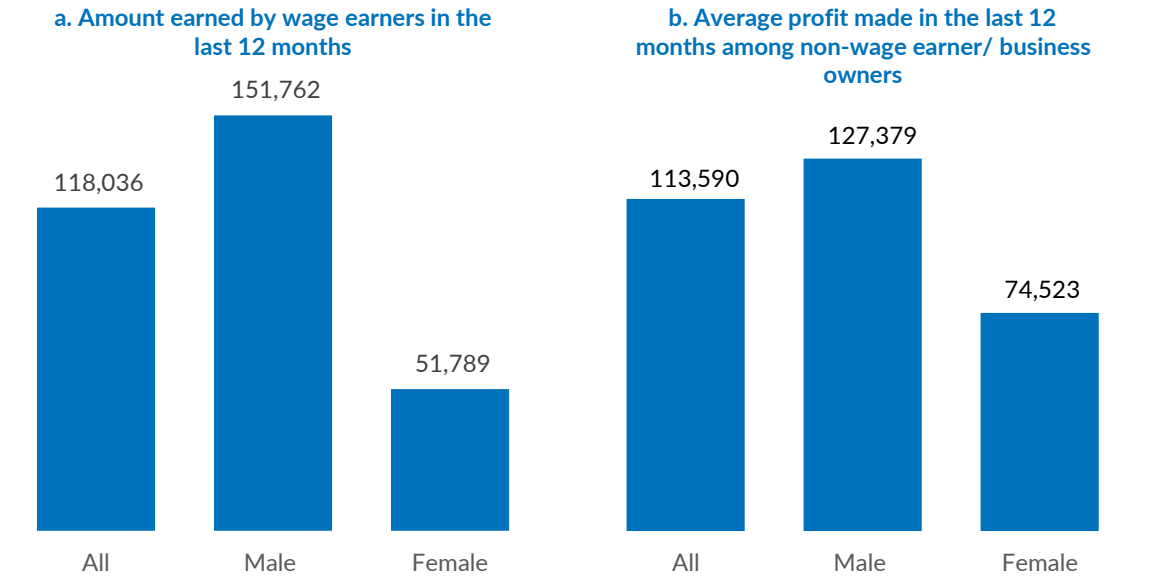
"Thanks to being granted Kenyan citizenship, I now have a bank account. For those of us who never gave up on our dreams, it's easier to go back to school," – a Shona member working as a carpenter in his shop, a trade passed on to him from his previous generation. © UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo.

Figure 23: Job security among Shona wage earners.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Figure 24: Annualized earnings in Kenyan Shillings among wage and non-wage earners in 2024.

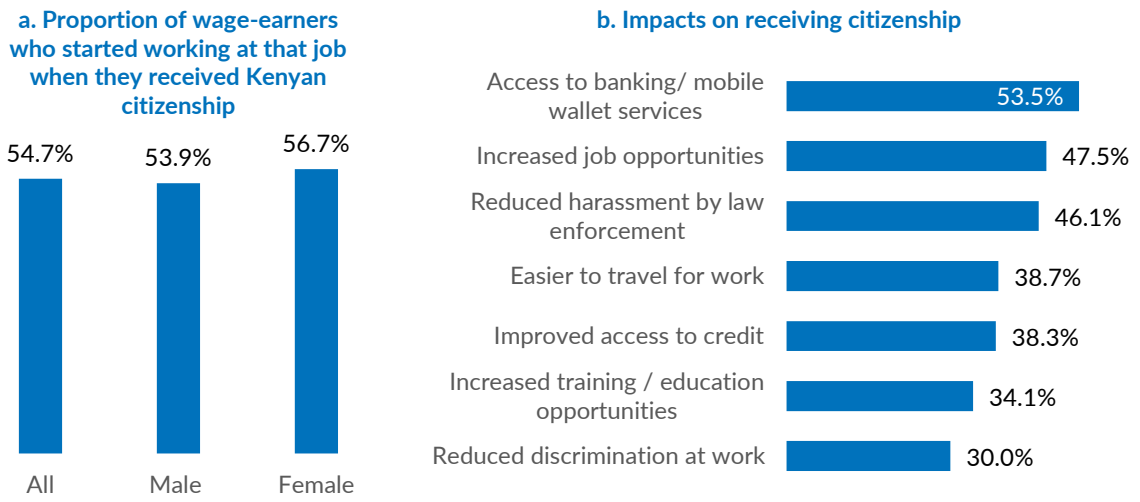


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

5.4 Impact of Citizenship on Livelihoods

Overall, receiving citizenship has had positive impacts on the livelihoods of the Shona community. Notably, 54.7 percent of wage earners started working at their current job after receiving Kenyan citizenship, with a slightly higher proportion among women (56.7 percent) compared to men (53.9 percent). However, focusing on the primary earner reveals that 78.2 percent of primary income earners had the same job or business prior to obtaining citizenship. This proportion is higher among men (83.3 percent) compared to women (64.8 percent). Overall, receiving citizenship has enhanced livelihood opportunities. More than half of the community (56.2 percent) indicated that citizenship has impacted their livelihoods in some way. Of these, 53.5 percent reported that it positively impacted access to banking and mobile wallet services, while 47.5 percent indicated it resulted in increased job opportunities. Other positive impacts include reduced harassment by law enforcement (46.1 percent), easier travel (38.7 percent), improved access to credit (38.3 percent), increased training and education opportunities (34.1 percent), and reduced discrimination at work (30 percent).

Figure 25: Impact of receiving citizenship on economic participation.

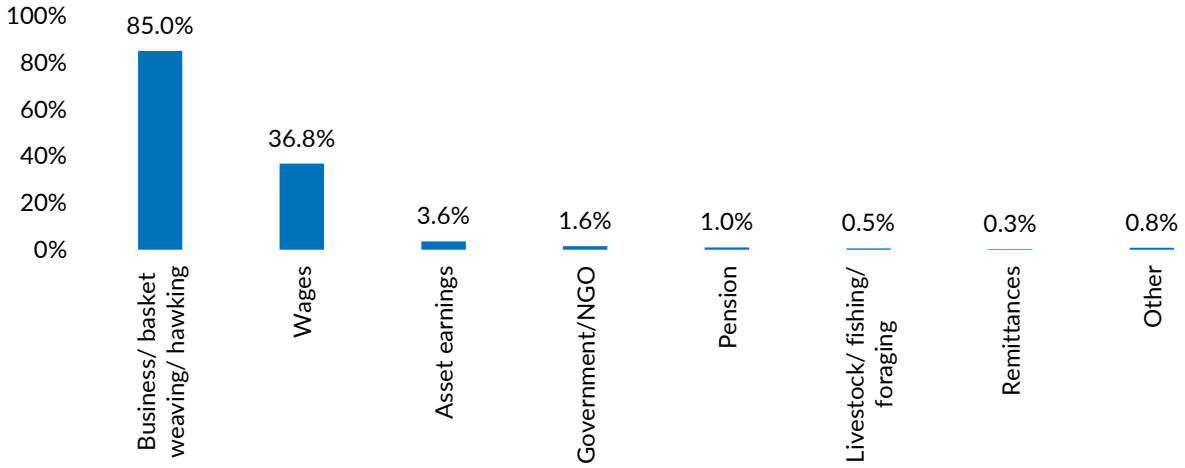


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

5.5 Sources of Income

Income from business activities is the primary source of livelihood for the Shona community, followed by wages. In 2024, 85 percent of household income in the Shona community was derived from business activities such as carpentry, basket weaving, and street hawking, indicating a strong reliance on entrepreneurship and self-employment. Wages from employment and daily labor activities constituted 36.8 percent of the income, while other sources, including asset earnings and assistance, contributed a total of 7.8 percent. This data highlights a limited diversification in income streams. The heavy dependence on business activities suggests that the Shona community continues to rely on traditional income sources, which may increase their vulnerability to market fluctuations and economic shocks affecting their businesses.

Figure 26: Source of household income in the last 12 months.

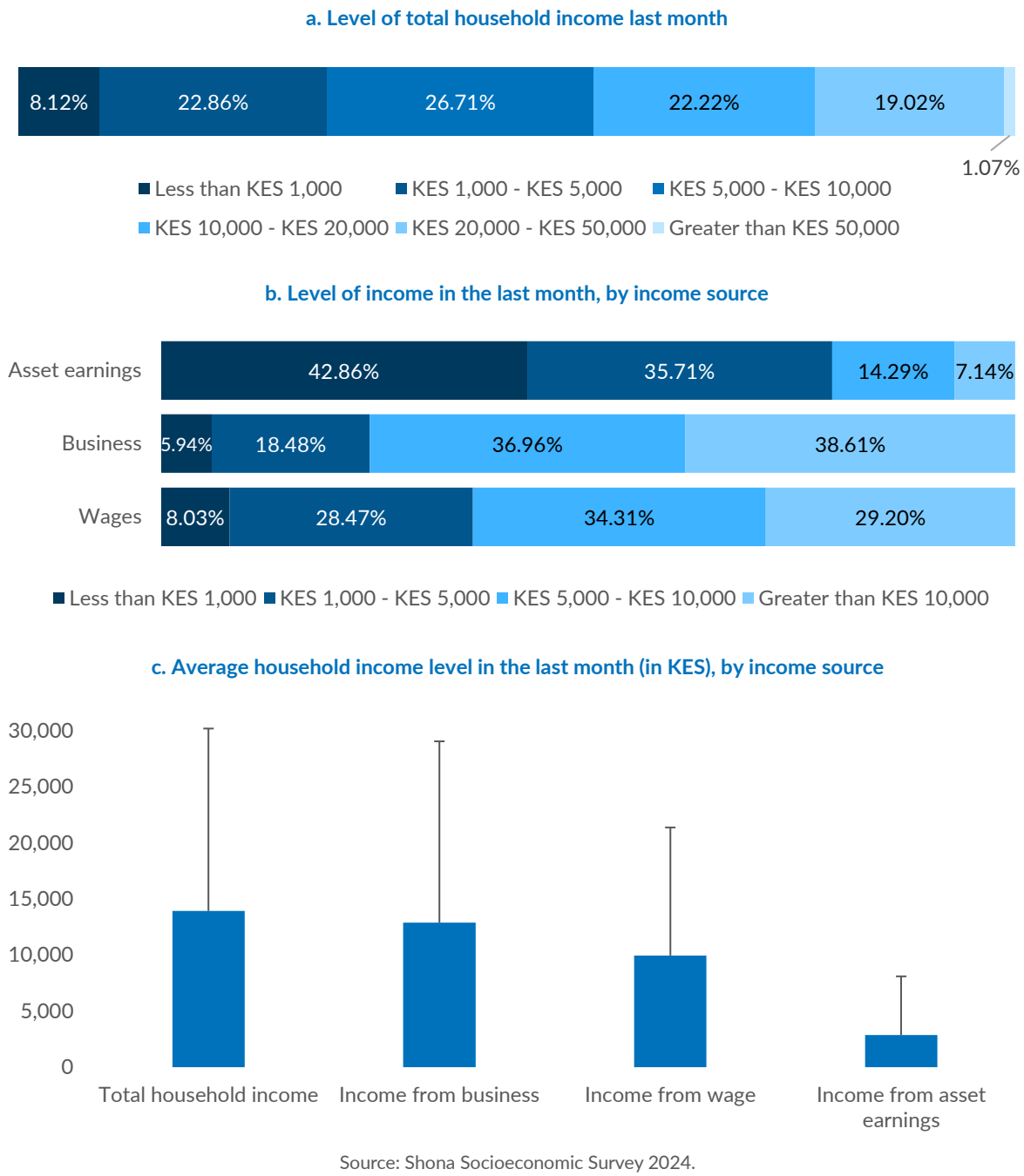


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

A young Shona member weaving a basket, a traditional handicraft produced by the Shona. © UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo

Not only is there limited diversity in income sources, but the need to increase household incomes remains pressing. In 2024, approximately one-third of households reported a monthly income of less than KES 10,000 in the month before the interview. The average household income during this period was around KES 13,900. When considering the primary source of income—business activities—slightly over 60 percent of households earned less than KES 10,000, with an average income of around KES 12,870. For income from wages, 70 percent of households had incomes below KES 10,000, and for those relying on asset earnings, this figure was 92.9 percent.

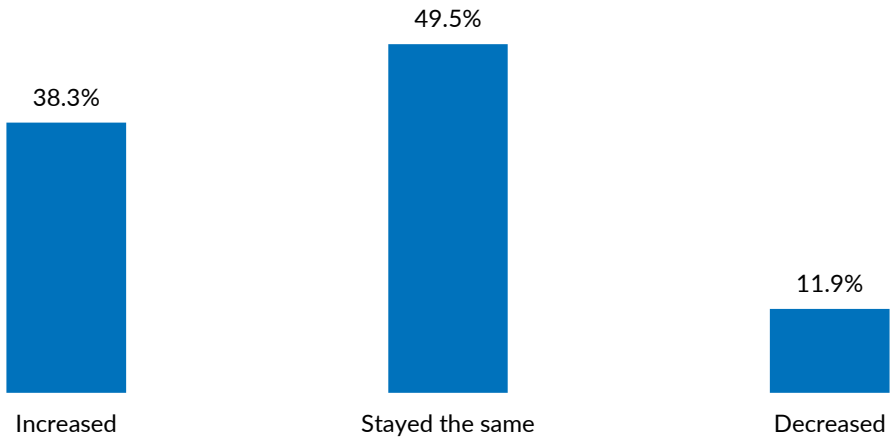
Figure 27: Level of household income.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Citizenship has had a stabilizing effect for many households, but it has not yet resulted in widespread economic gains. The need to increase incomes remains pressing, as half of the households report that their income has remained stable since gaining citizenship, while 38.3 percent experienced an increase and 11.9 percent experienced a decrease since December 2020. Although more still needs to be done to sustainably increase household incomes, the rise in income for nearly 4 out of every 10 households is a positive sign of economic progress and potential for further growth as the community continues to integrate more fully into the Kenyan economy.

Figure 28: Perceived changes in income before and after receiving citizenship.

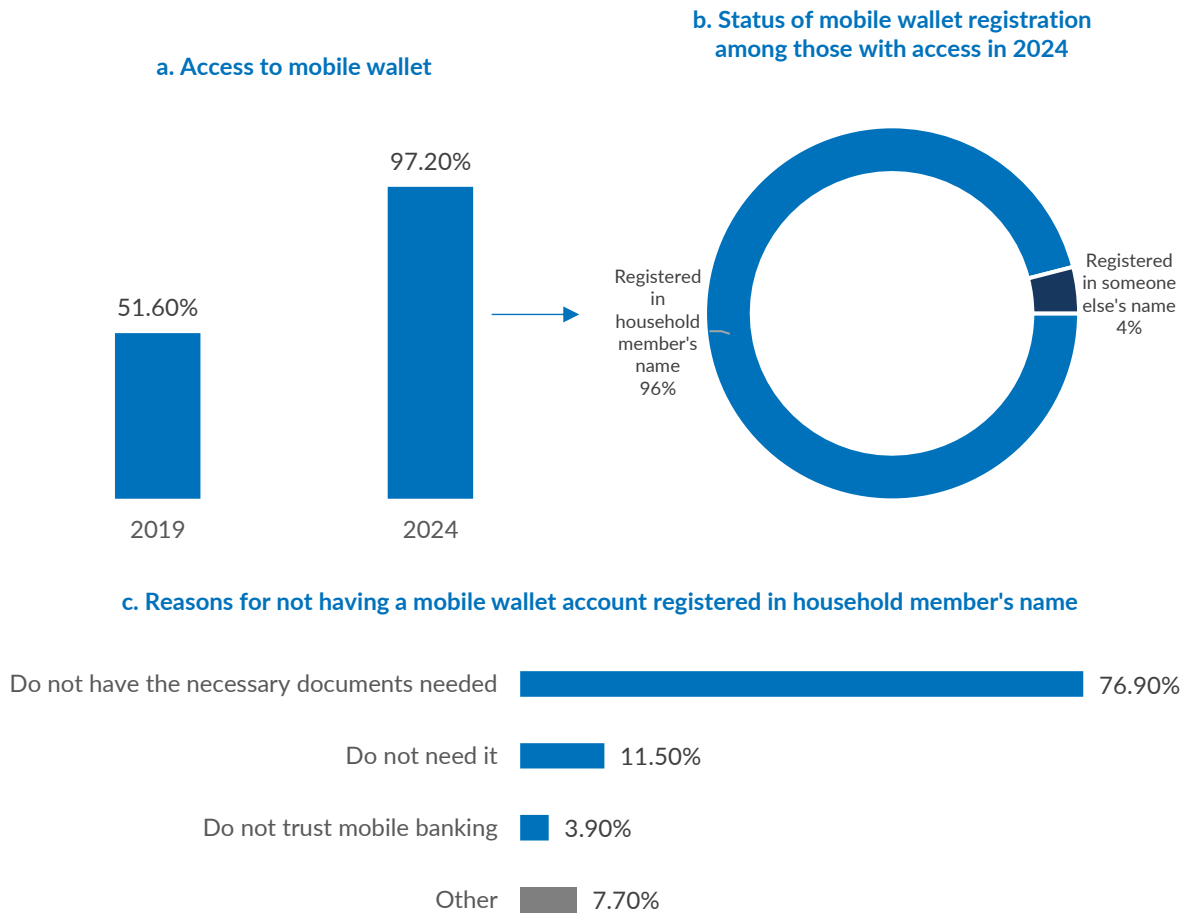


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

6 Financial Inclusion

Access to a mobile SIM card – a prerequisite for a mobile money wallet - has significantly increased, facilitating greater access to mobile money services. About 89.4 percent have access to mobile sim card. In 2019, just over half (51.6 percent) of the Shona community had access to a mobile wallet. An overwhelming majority – 97.2 percent – now have access to a mobile money wallet, with most of these (96 percent) having the mobile wallet account registered in the name of a household member. Among those without access to a mobile money wallet, 76.9 percent cite the lack of necessary documents as the primary barrier. This suggests that while citizenship allows the community to register a SIM card, there may still be barriers that prevent them from accessing mobile money services, thus hindering financial inclusion efforts.

Figure 29: Access to mobile money services for Shona households in 2024.

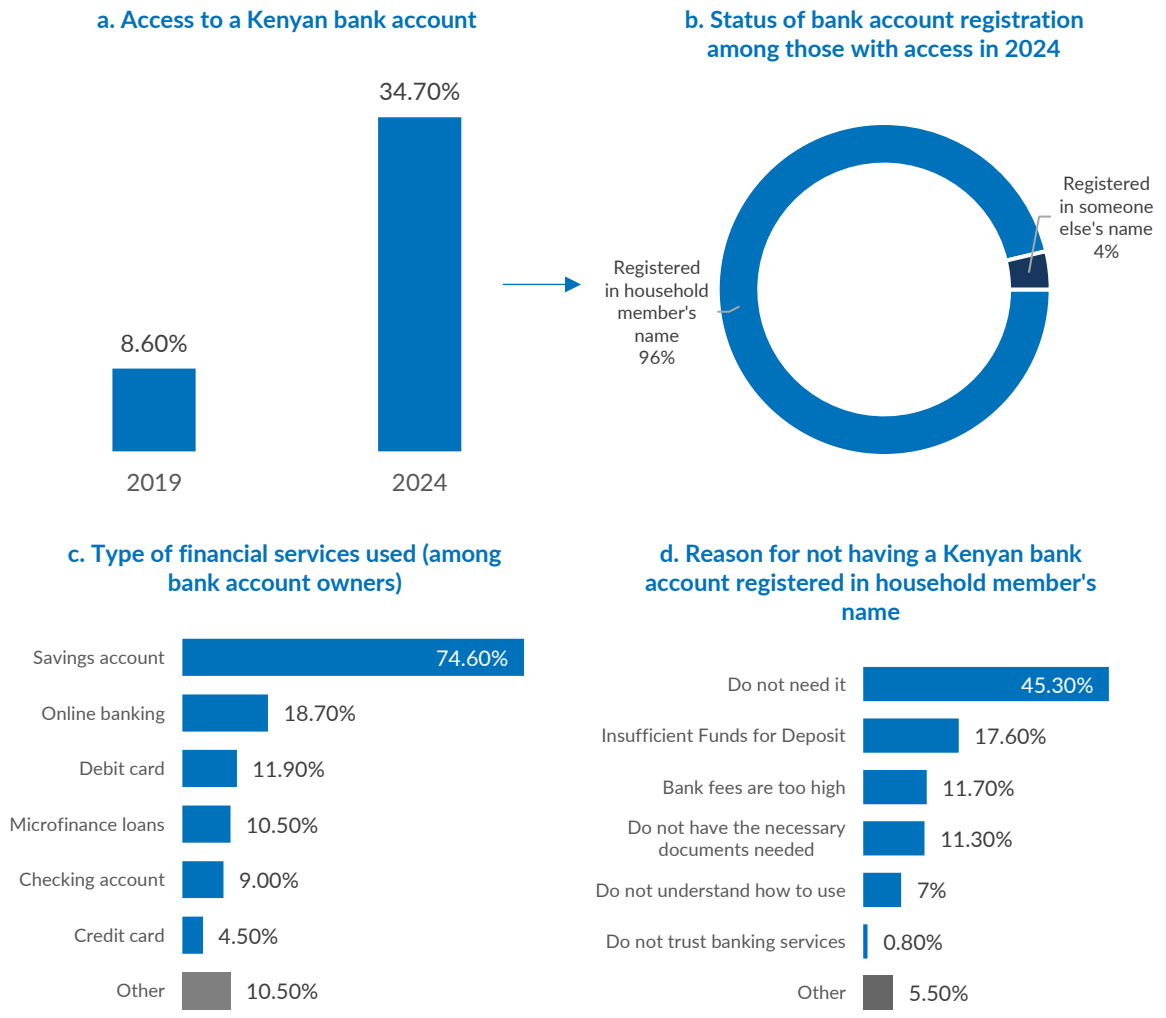


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

Access to bank accounts has surged, yet further efforts are needed to deepen financial inclusion. The proportion of community members with bank accounts jumped from 8.6 percent in 2019 to 34.7 percent in 2024. Most accounts in 2024 are registered under a household member's name (96.3 percent). A significant 74.6 percent use their accounts for savings, while 18.7 percent primarily engage in online banking. The low usage of accounts as checking

accounts may indicate limited formal employment or economic participation within the community. Additionally, those without bank accounts often cite a lack of necessity. Despite progress in integrating into the formal financial system, more work remains. Addressing the reasons for not having a bank account is crucial. This includes creating an environment conducive to job creation and economic opportunities, reducing banking fees, simplifying documentation requirements, and educating the community on the process and benefits of opening and using a bank account.

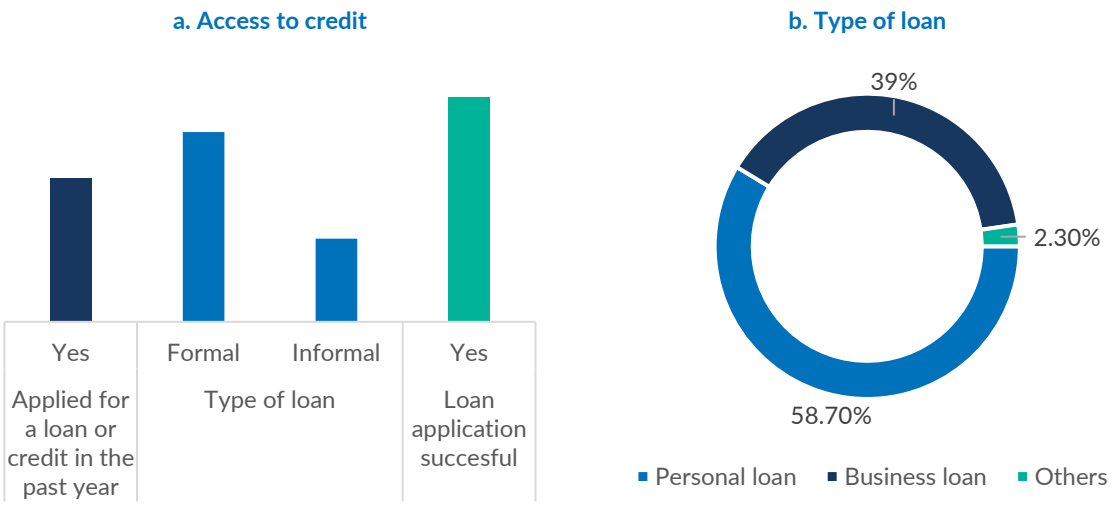
Figure 30: Access to bank account for Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

Access to credit has improved, driving the expansion of small businesses and the creation of new ventures. In 2024, over half (56.5 percent) of the community applied for a loan or credit, with the majority (74.7 percent) using formal institutions. Most applications (88.5 percent) were successful. Personal loans accounted for 58.7 percent of all applications, while business loans made up a significant 39 percent, highlighting the positive impact of credit access on business growth. These changes highlight the transformative impact of citizenship in helping the Shona community overcome economic barriers and build sustainable livelihoods.

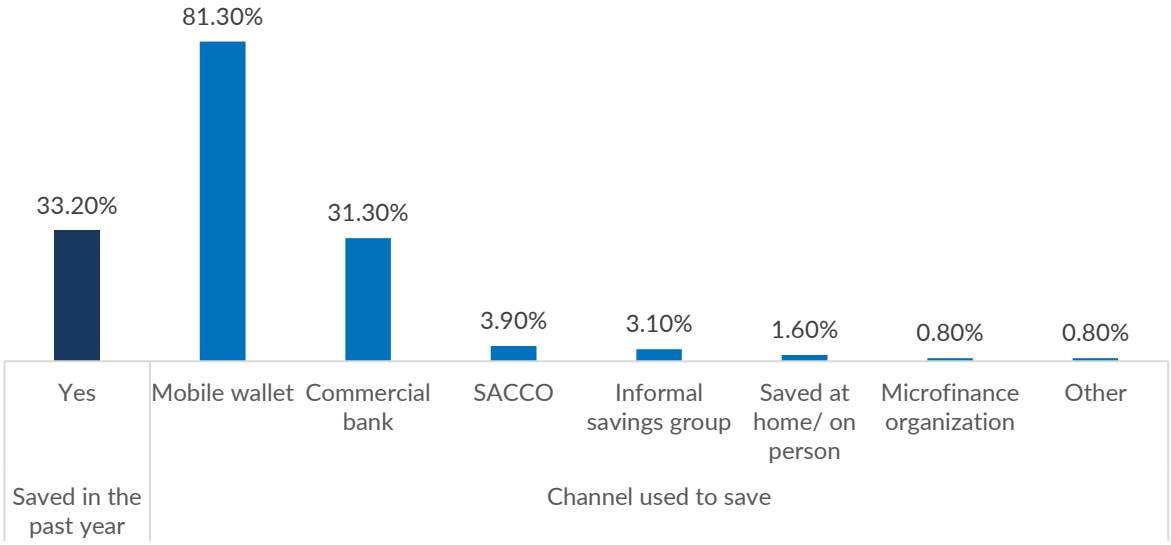
Figure 31: Access to credit and types of credit accessed by Shona.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

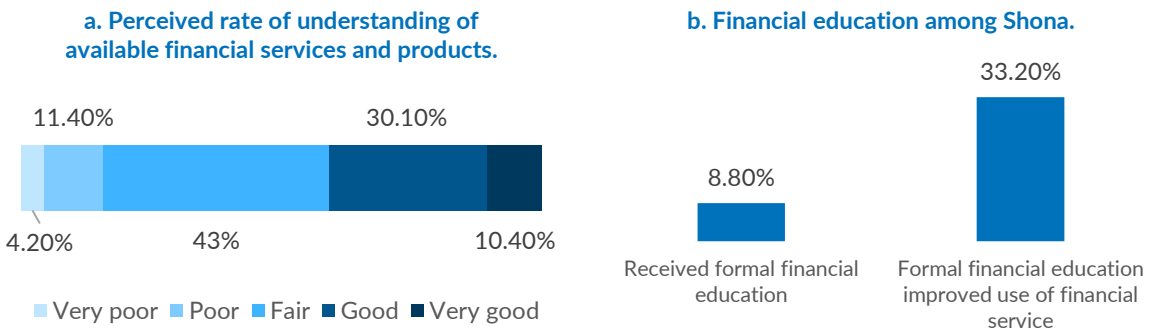
Savings rates and financial education remain low, reinforcing evidence that these factors are often interconnected. Only about a third of the community saved in the past year, with the majority (81.3 percent) using mobile wallets, followed by commercial banks at 31.3 percent. In 2024, a mere 8.8 percent of the community received formal financial education, aligning with the fact that less than half rate their understanding of financial services and products as good or very good. Among those who did receive formal financial education, only 33.2 percent felt it improved their use of financial services, indicating significant potential to strengthen the link between financial education and its impact on financial service utilization.

Figure 32: Savings by Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Figure 33: Financial education amongst Shona in 2024.



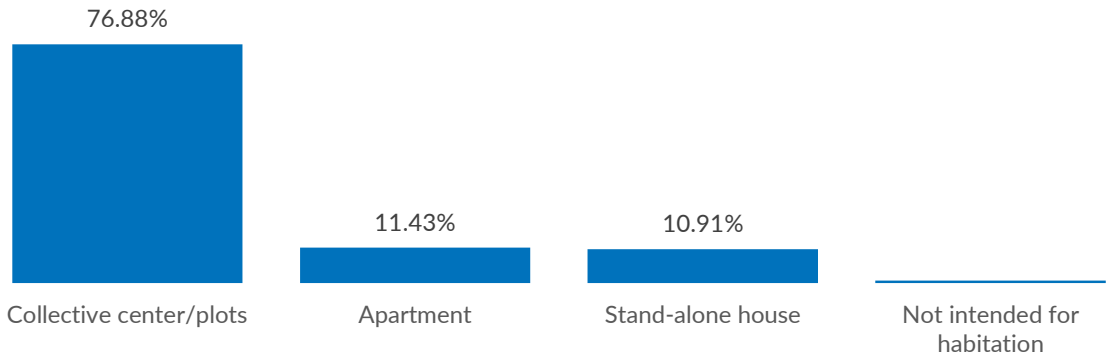
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

7 Housing and Assets

7.1 Housing Characteristics

The majority of Shona households — over two-thirds — reside in collective centers or plots, lacking ownership of the land or dwellings they occupy and relying instead on informal rental agreements. The fact that community shelters and other collective housing solutions are the most common form of housing structure that the Shona live in underscores the community's close-knit nature. However, this also means that only two households report that they own the dwelling they live in and only two households report owning the land that their dwelling is in 2024. Most commonly, the Shona report that other individuals own the dwelling (79.41 percent) or the land (78.66 percent).

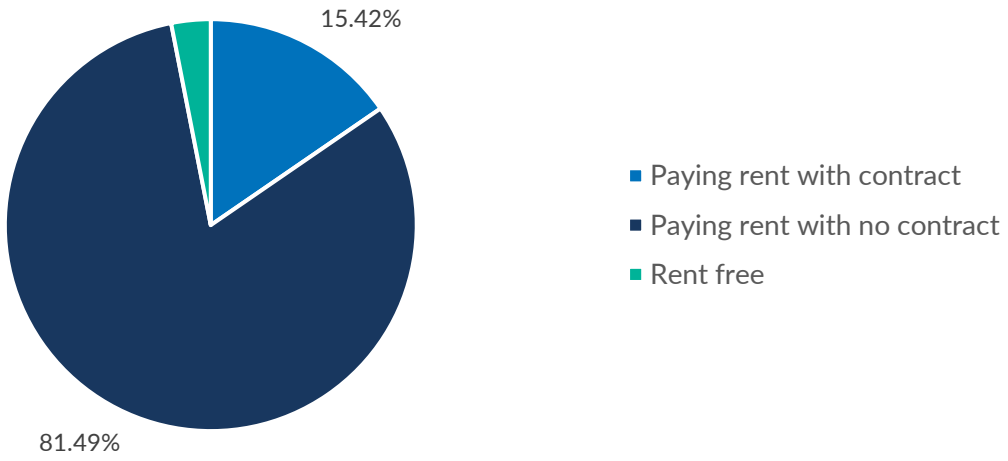
Figure 34: Type of housing structure for households in the Shona community in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Formal rental agreements are not commonplace amongst where the Shona reside. Over 80 percent of the Shona households pay rent without having a rental contract, around 3 percent live rent free, and around 16 percent pay rent with a written contract.

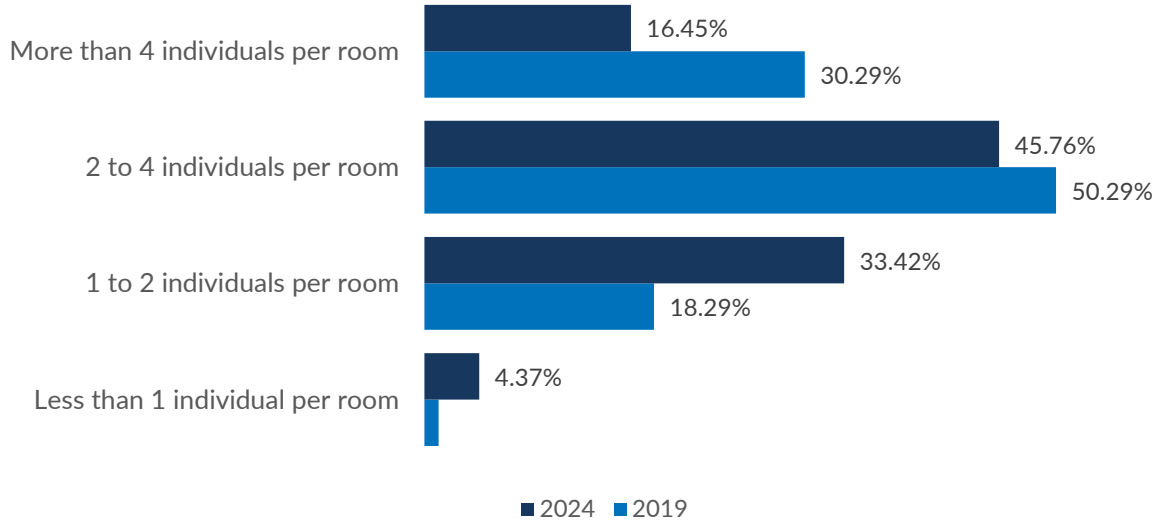
Figure 35: Rental agreement for Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

After the acquisition of citizenship, living in overcrowded conditions has reduced for the Shona community. In 2019, each Shona household occupied an average of 1.7 habitable rooms, which is comparable to Kenyan households at that time. However, significantly more Shona members shared these rooms. On average, 3.1 Shona household members occupied a habitable room. In 2024, crowded conditions – the space within a housing unit available to members of the household – have significantly improved for the Shona. A household in 2024 now lives in an average of 2.17 habitable rooms and the ratio of household members to rooms has increased to 2.39 individuals per habitable room. The significant increase in room numbers and the significant reduction in crowding will likely reduce stress for the Shona and is a good signal of improvement livelihoods and living standards. Situations in which more than 4 Shona occupied one room have strongly decreased (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Proportion of household members to available rooms as indicator for overcrowding in the Shona community between 2019 and 2024.

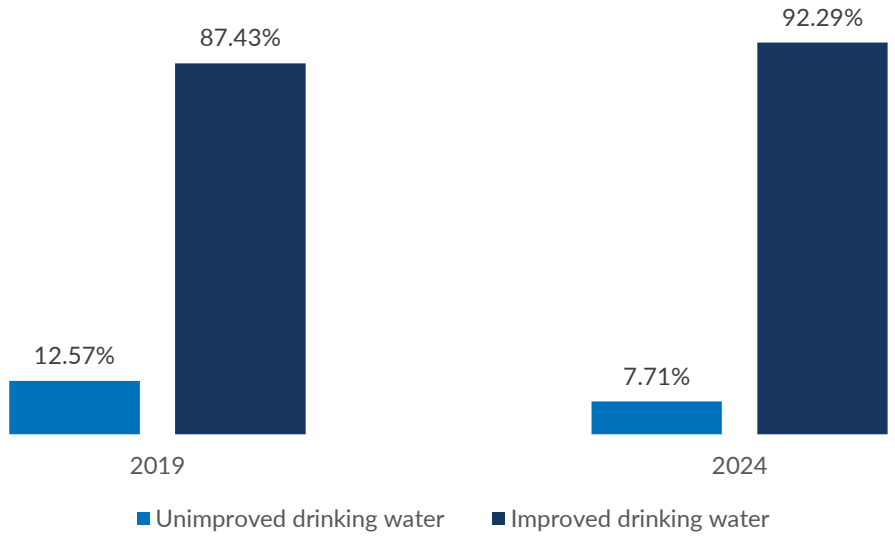


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

7.2 Water and Sanitation Services

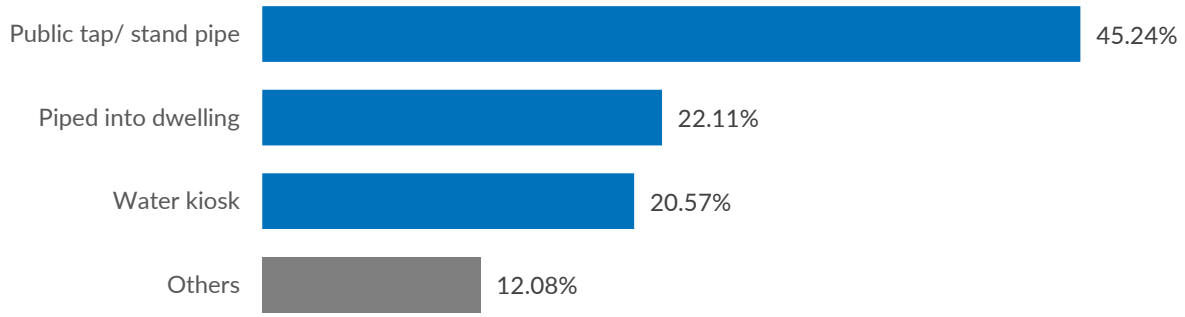
The Shona community has further improved their access to improved sources of drinking water since the acquisition of citizenship. Already in 2019, Shona households had similar access to improved drinking water as urban Kenyans (87.4 percent). In 2024, over 92.3 percent of Shona households use improved sources to access drinking water (see Figure 37), a significant increase of around 4.9 percentage points since 2019. Public taps and standpipes (45.2 percent), water kiosks (23.4 percent), and pipes into dwellings are the most common forms of accessing drinking water. These three ways of accessing drinking water are also generally the water sources the Shona use for other purposes beyond drinking water. Figure 38 displays sources of water for other purposes in 2024.

Figure 37: Proportion of Shona households using unimproved and improved drinking water sources in 2019 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

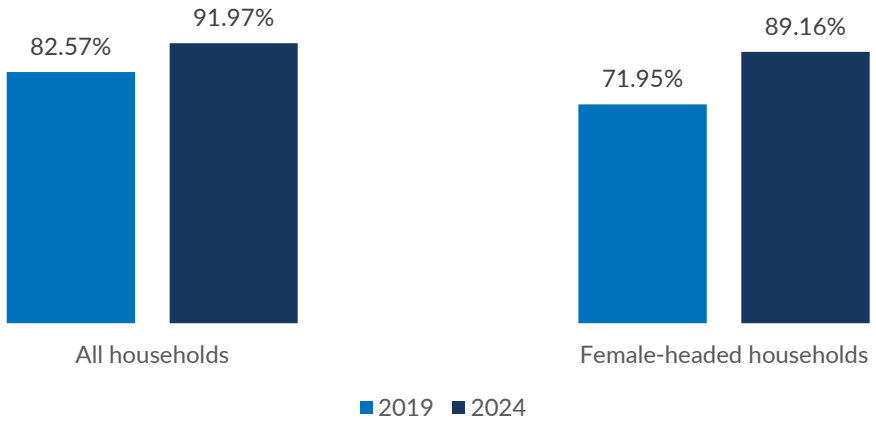
Figure 38: Sources of water for other household purposes in the Shona community in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

For the Shona community, access to improved sanitation and toilet facilities has improved by over 9 percentage points since 2019. In 2019, access to improved sanitation among the Shona community was lower than access of urban nationals (83 percent vs 87 percent). Since the acquisition of citizenship, the Shona community has increased access to improved sanitation to 92 percent on average. Female-headed households benefitted strongly from this significant increase in living conditions. Figure 39 displays the percentage of households with access to improved sanitation for the whole Shona population and for female-headed households of whom only 72 percent had access to improved sanitation in 2019 compared to over 89 percent in 2024. Despite the mentioned reduction in overcrowding and the improvements in access to sanitation, Shona households are still more likely to share toilet facilities with other households than nationals and this trend seems to increase. In 2024, 77.6 percent of Shona households used shared toilet facilities against 75.7 percent in 2019.

Figure 39: Percentage of households in the Shona community with access to improved sanitation in 2019 and 2024.



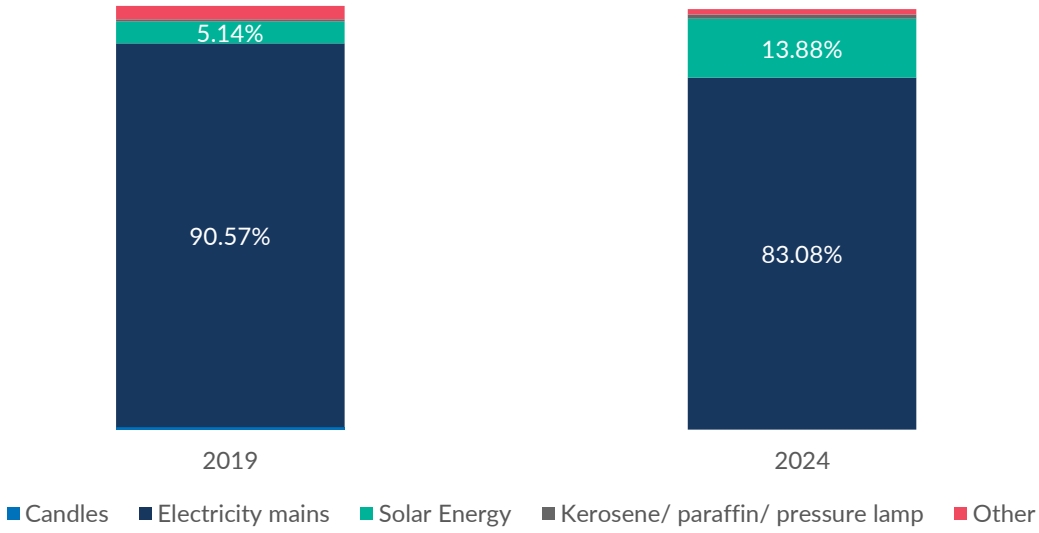
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Surveys 2019 and 2024.

7.3 Access to Energy

The Shona community maintains strong access to the national electricity grid while increasingly adopting solar energy as a sustainable lighting solution. Located in Nairobi and Kiambu, areas near the capital, the Shona had high access to the main electricity grid in 2019, with 90.57 percent of households using grid electricity for lighting. The 2019 socioeconomic report highlighted that Shona households already used solar and biogas energy more frequently than comparable national averages in Nairobi and Kiambu. This trend has strengthened by 2024, with nearly 14 percent of Shona households now relying on solar energy for lighting (Figure 40).

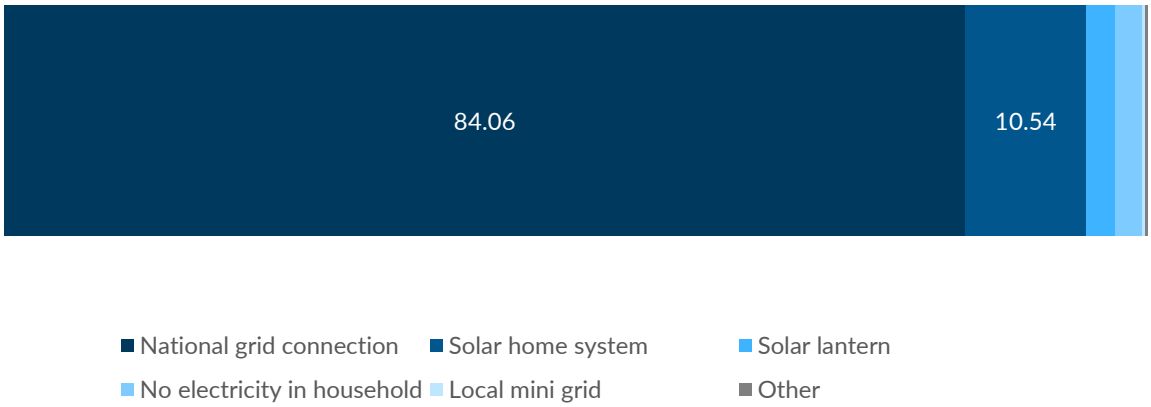
Beyond lighting, the Kenyan national electricity grid remains the primary source of power for other household needs in the Shona community. The most prevalent electricity source in 2024 is a connection to the national grid, utilized by 84.1 percent of households. Additionally, approximately 10.5 percent of households now use solar home systems, reflecting a growing diversification in energy access strategies.

Figure 40: Source of lighting for the Shona community in 2019 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

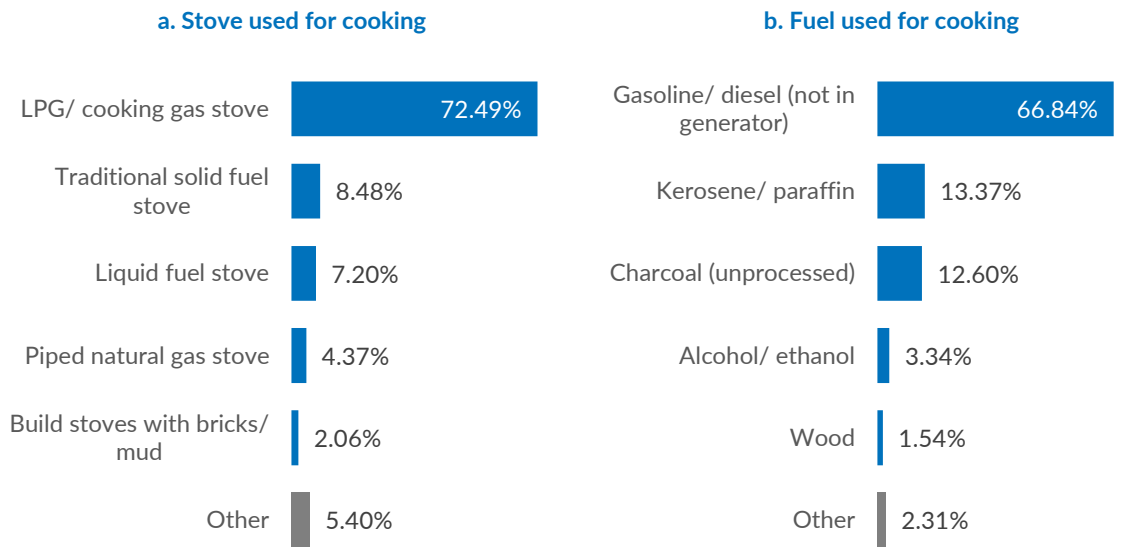
Figure 41: Main source of electricity in Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

About three thirds of the Shona use a gas stove or a stove with liquified petroleum gas for cooking compared to less clean energies. The dominant fuel used is gasoline or diesel: about two-thirds of the Shona household use gasoline or diesel for cooking. It is less common to rely on charcoal, wood, or other sources of energy for cooking.

Figure 42: Source of energy and equipment used for cooking in the Shona community in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

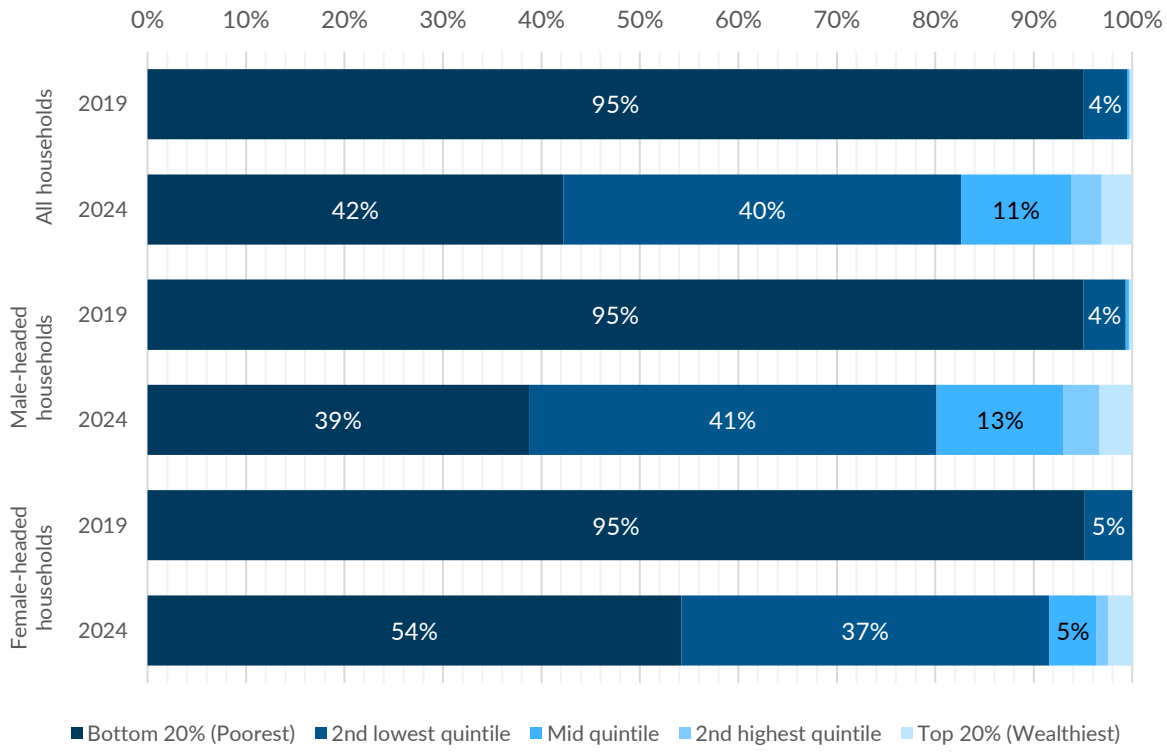
7.4 Asset Ownership

Improvements in asset ownership since 2019 indicate that wealth has significantly increased in the Shona community since citizenship. classifies the Shona community into quantiles of a wealth index of asset ownership.[6] Based on the graph breaking down the wealth of the Shona by year and head of the household, one can see that most Shona in 2019 fell into the bottom 20 percent (the poorest) in terms of asset ownership with no female-headed households being in the wealthier quantiles. In 2024, asset ownership and wealth has improved for a large proportion of the population. While female-headed households still belong to the poorest amongst the Shona, they have also made significant improvements.

The most owned assets in the Shona community are cell phones (97.4 percent), furniture (94 percent), and stoves for cooking (88.3 percent). Compared to 2019, the ownership of cook stoves and TVs has risen. Figure 44 displays the 10 most owned assets in 2024 and contrasts this to an estimate of the proportion of households owning the asset in 2019.

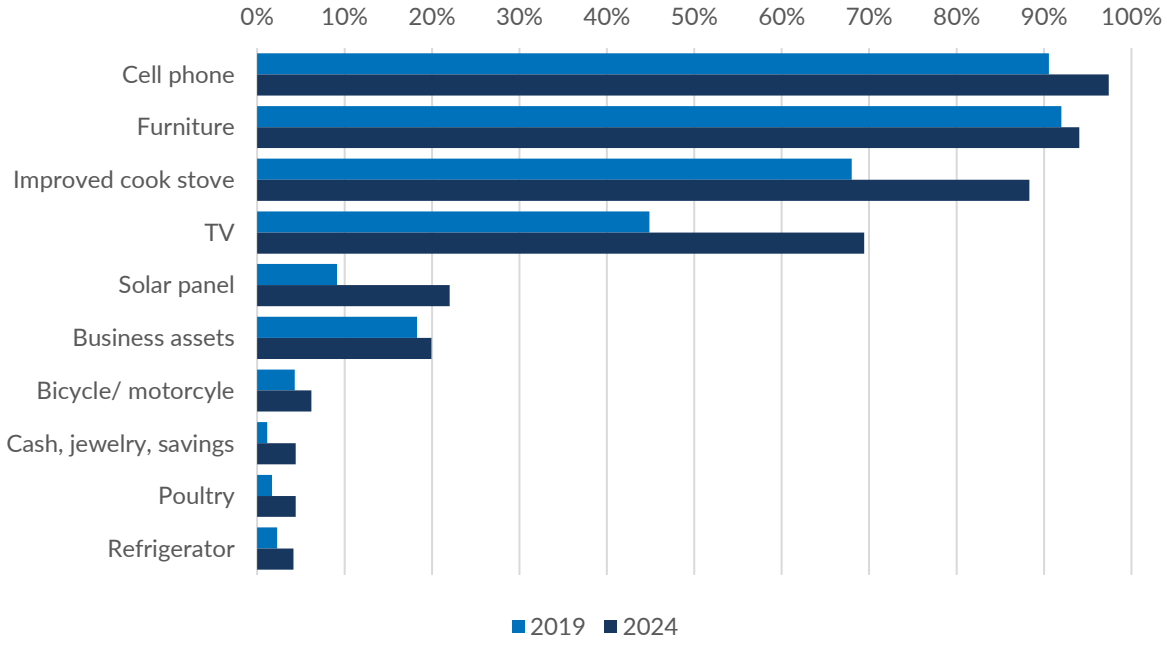
[6] The 2024 survey collects information on ownership of more than 20 household assets in 2024 and in 2019 (retrospectively) for the Shona households. We construct a wealth index by normalizing the reported value of a household asset in KES and creating a weighted asset score based on owning and reporting the value of an asset for each household in 2019 and in 2024. We then apply principal component analysis and use the first component as an index of household wealth.

Figure 43: Quintiles of wealth index for the whole population, female and male-headed households.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Figure 44: The ten most owned assets in 2024 compared to 2019.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

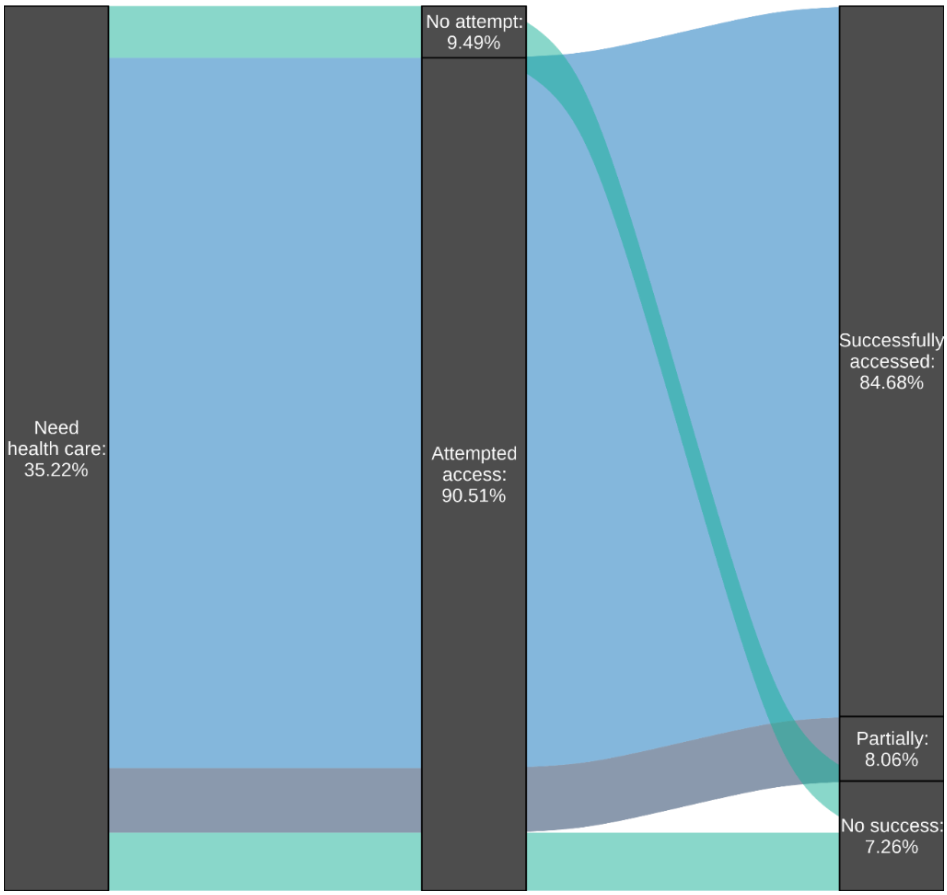
8 Health and Disability

8.1 Access to Health Services

Demands for health services is high amongst the Shona as more than 10 percent of Shona household members face chronic disease and over 35.2 percent needed to see a health professional to address acute illnesses, check in or follow up on health care issues. Asthma, diabetes, and hypertension as the most common chronic conditions that require regular treatment and cannot be fully cured in the Shona community. For Shona households reporting that they needed a health professional in the past 30 days, 73 percent needed this health service to address an illness. Flu, pneumonia and stomach pains are the dominant reasons why Shona needed a health service. After illness, pre- and post- natal checkups are the second most common reason why the Shona needed a health service (9.49 percent).

Although the overall access to health services is good in the Shona community, the main reason households do not seek medical attention when needed are prohibitive costs. Of the 35.22 percent of Shona households needing health care in the past 30 days, 9 in 10 attempt to access these services (90.51 percent). Only 7.26 percent of the Shona that attempt to access health care have no success in doing so while 84.68 percent successfully access health services. Those that report no success overwhelmingly report they cannot afford the costs (96.2 percent).

Figure 45: Need for health services, attempted access and success in accessing health services for the Shona in 2024.

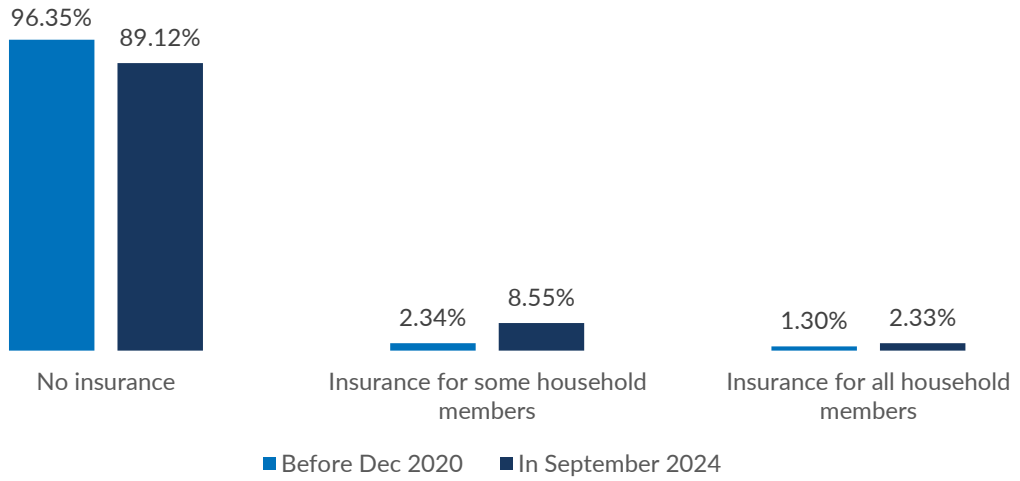


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

The Shona community heavily relies on self-payment and out-of-pocket payments to ensure their sustained access to health care but access to insurance is on the rise. 96 percent Shona households report that they did not have health insurance for anyone in the household before receiving citizenship, but this has now dropped to 89 percent. Insurance for some or all household members (10.88 percent) is lower than comparable households in Kenya. Around 26 percent of all Kenyans, and about 40 percent of Kenyans in urban areas had some form of health insurance in 2022. The insurance rate is around 46 percent in Nairobi City and 41 percent in Kiambu, the two administrative units in which the Shona reside[7].

Nevertheless, progress is evident in the Shona community. Health insurance coverage has more than doubled from 3.65 percent of households with full or partial health insurance before 2020 to 10.88 percent. Although the current coverage rates remain low, this growth indicates increased access to and awareness for healthcare services since the acquisition of citizenship.

Figure 46: Health insurance coverage in the Shona community in 2020 and 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

The main reason Shona households do not access health insurance are that they cannot afford health insurance (67.4 percent), they are still in the process of applying (9.55 percent), or they do not consider it necessary for everyone in the household (9.55 percent). The prospect that around 10 percent of the Shona are actively applying for health insurances is a promising outlook for more sustained health insurance coverage going forward.

Due to the relatively low insurance rate, a high proportion of households must pay medical bills or medicine out of pocket. A total of 27.5 percent of Shona households had some out-of-pocket payments for medical bills or medicine in the past 30 days.

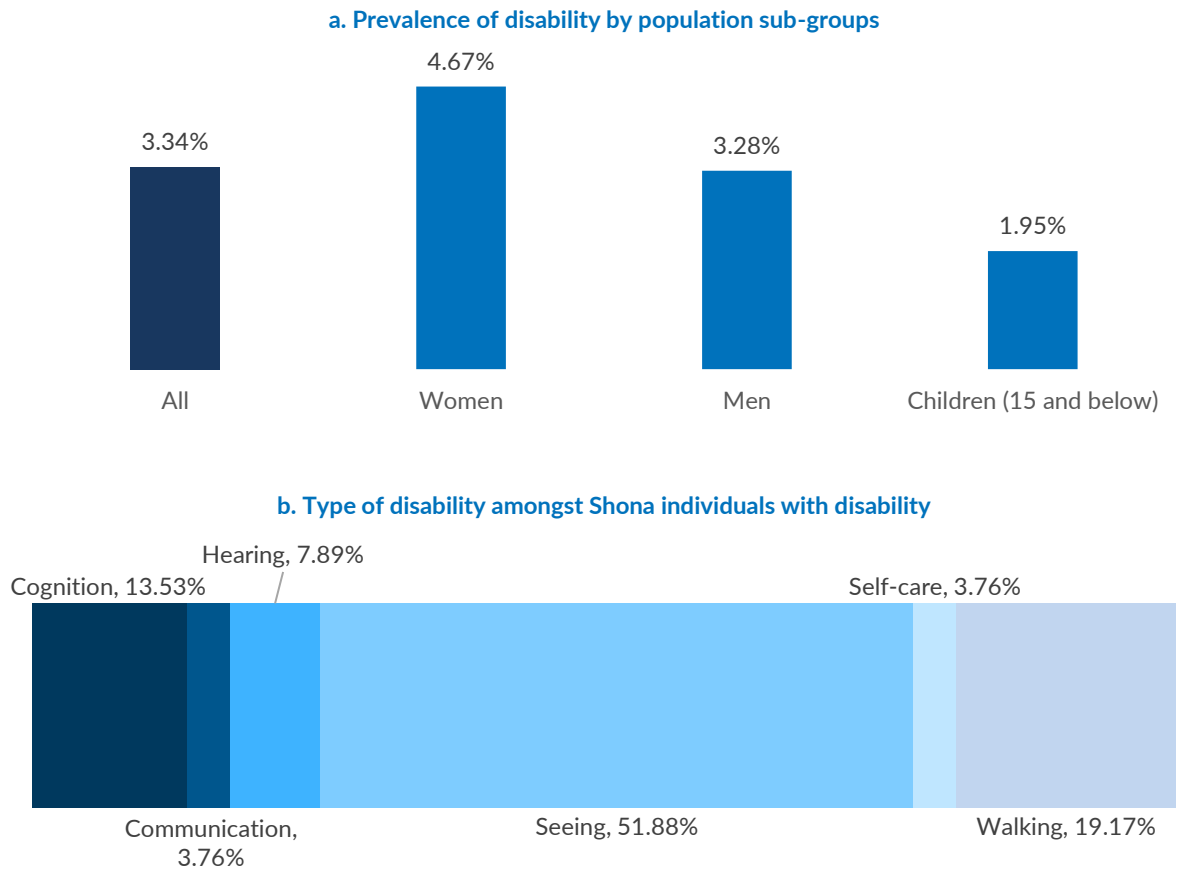
8.2 Disability

Disability is low in the Shona population compared to Kenyan nationals. On average 3.34 percent of the household members in the Shona community experience some form of disability.

[7] KNBS and ICF. 2023. *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Volume 1*. Nairobi, Kenya, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: KNBS and ICF.

According to the Washington Group on Disability Statistics indicators, around 4.67 percent women above 5 and 3.28 percent men above 5 in the Shona population either have a lot of difficulties or are not able to either see, hear, walk, communicate, care for themselves, or have issues concentrating and remembering. When compared with the overall population in Kenya, this number is low as 7 percent of women in Kenya and 5 percent of men in Kenya do not function at all or with a lot of difficulty in these six domains.[7] Around 1.95 percent of Shona children (15 or younger) have a disability. As Figure 47 shows, the small proportion of Shona that do report some impairments, mostly report difficulties seeing (51.9 percent of all individuals reporting some or severe impairment) and difficulties in walking or climbing steps (19.2 percent).

Figure 47: Prevalence of disability among Shona household members.



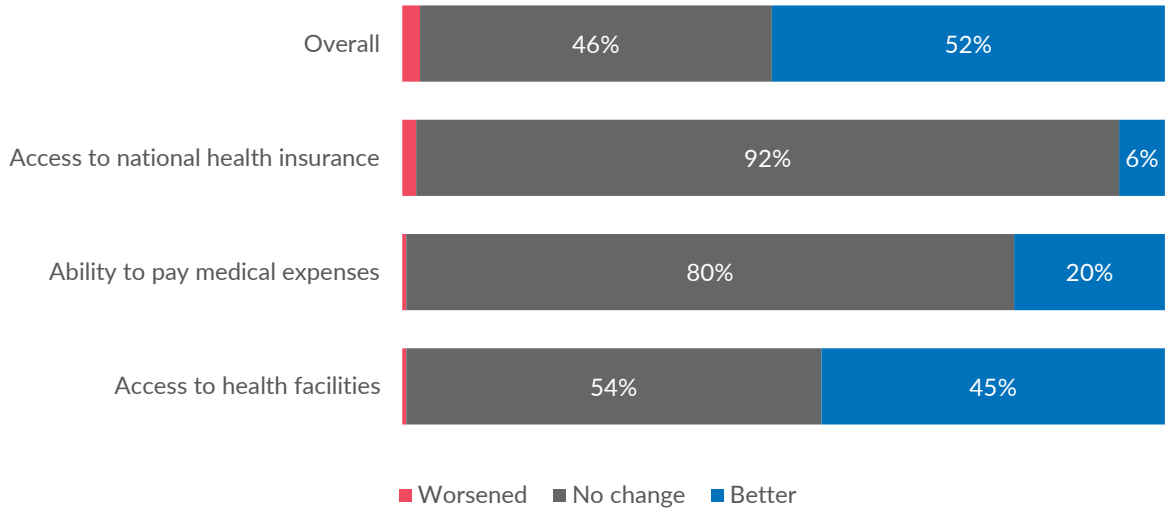
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

8.3 Impact of citizenship on healthcare access

1 in 2 Shona households reports that their access to healthcare services has improved since December 2020. Around 52 percent of Shona households say that their access to healthcare has improved while the other half of the population reports that there has not been a big change in health care services (see Figure 48). For those individuals that report improvements or deteriorations, they specify what has improved or worsened since 2020. 45 percent of all Shona households report that access to health facilities has improved since 2020 and 20 percent report that their ability to pay medical bills has improved. A small overall percentage of Shona

say that their health care access has worsened but the main reason mentioned is the ability to pay bills.

Figure 48: Reported changes in healthcare services since 2020 for the Shona community.



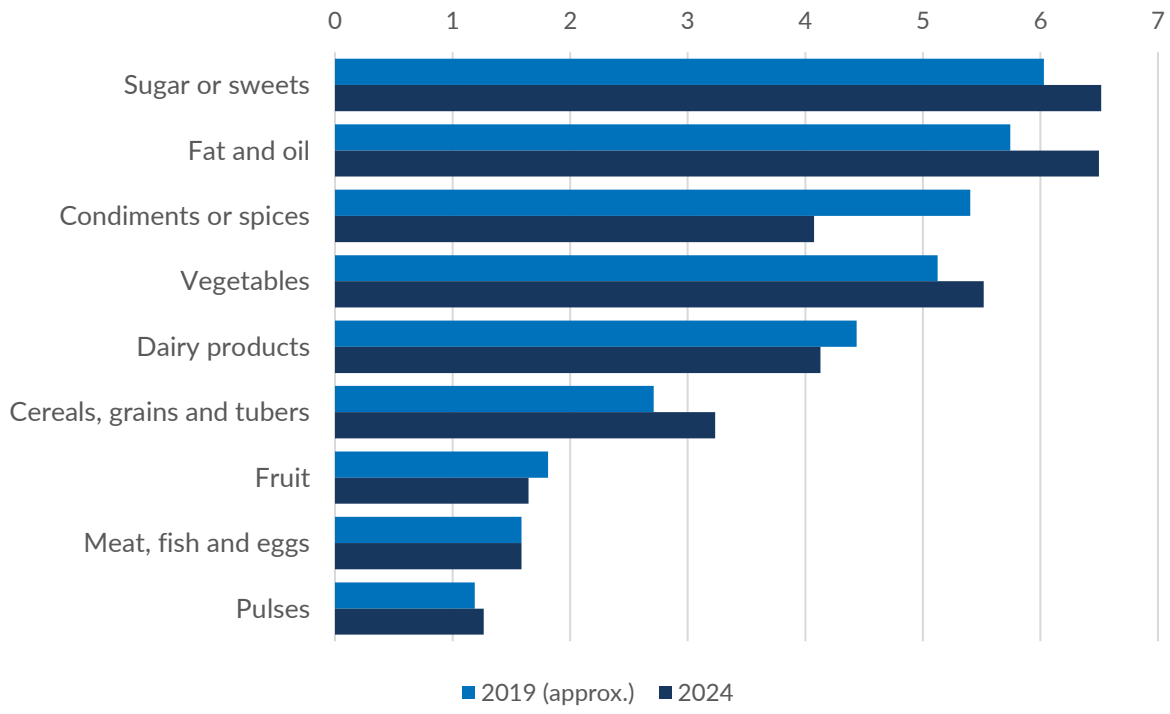
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

9 Food security and vulnerability

9.1 Food consumption

Food consumption for the Shona has recovered after the Covid-19 pandemic and while most households have acceptable levels, consumption has overall not improved since the acquisition of citizenship. The average Food Consumption Score for the Shona population was 45.9 in 2019.[8] In 2024, the Food Consumption Score was 46.79 but this increase is in total small in size and the difference between the two years is not statistically significant. Figure 49 shows that the frequency by which different food groups are consumed has also not dramatically shifted. While sugar and sweets, fat and oil, and grains might be consumed more in 2024, the usage of condiments and dairy products might have declined over time. Figure 50 classifies the Shona population in 2024 into food consumption groups using a threshold of 21 out of 35 points. The majority of Shona have an acceptable and stable food consumption with 21.85 percent having a borderline food consumption and 9.51 percent having poor access to food.

Figure 49: Frequency of food group consumed weekly for 2024 and an approximation for 2019.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

[8] The 2019 Shona survey does not include the exact same methodology to estimate the Food Consumption Score as in the 2024 Shona survey. The 2019 survey does not ask about the number of days consuming certain food groups but rather the number of consumption days for specific foods. The authors classify these food items (e.g. wheat flour) into the respective food category (e.g. grains) from the Food Consumption Score. For each food category, we determine the modal value of consumption days in the household across all classified items. This constitutes the building block for estimating mean days of consumption and the overall Food Consumption Score for 2019.

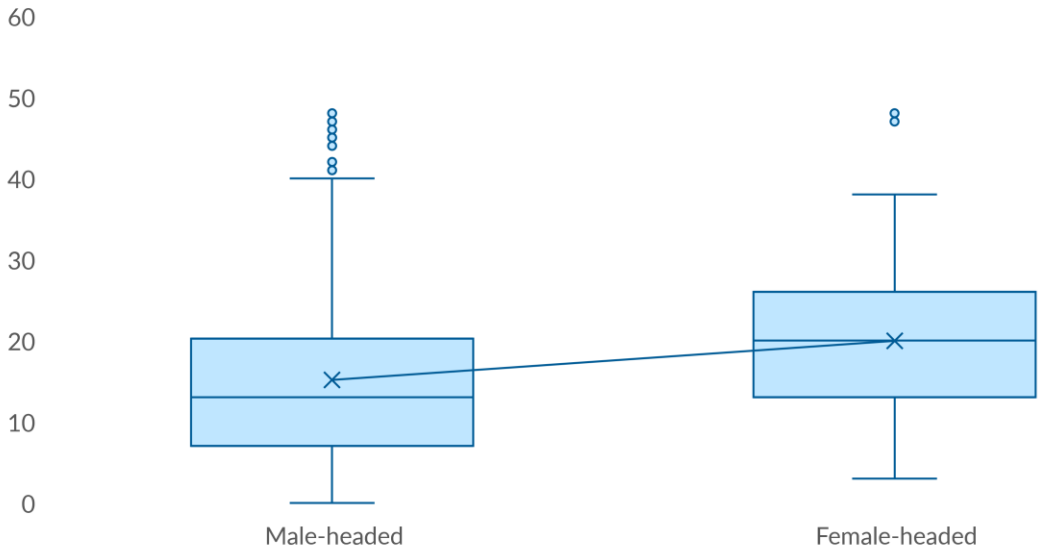
Figure 50: Classification of Shona community into acceptable, borderline, and poor food consumption groups.

Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

9.2 Immediate coping strategy

Short-term food insecurity is overall low in the Shona community, but female-headed households struggle more. To understand whether Shona households experience not enough food or money to purchase food, this report focuses on the experience-based Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI). Across all Shona households in 2024, the average rCSI score is 16.16 (the maximum possible score is 56). This suggests that food insecurity in Shona households is low to moderate. The distribution of the rCSI is displayed in Figure 51 for female- and male-headed households. For households lead by a women, the rCSI is almost 5 points higher (mean: 19.95) than for male-lead households (mean: 15.14), confirming that female-headed households struggle more with food insecurity ($p<0.001$).

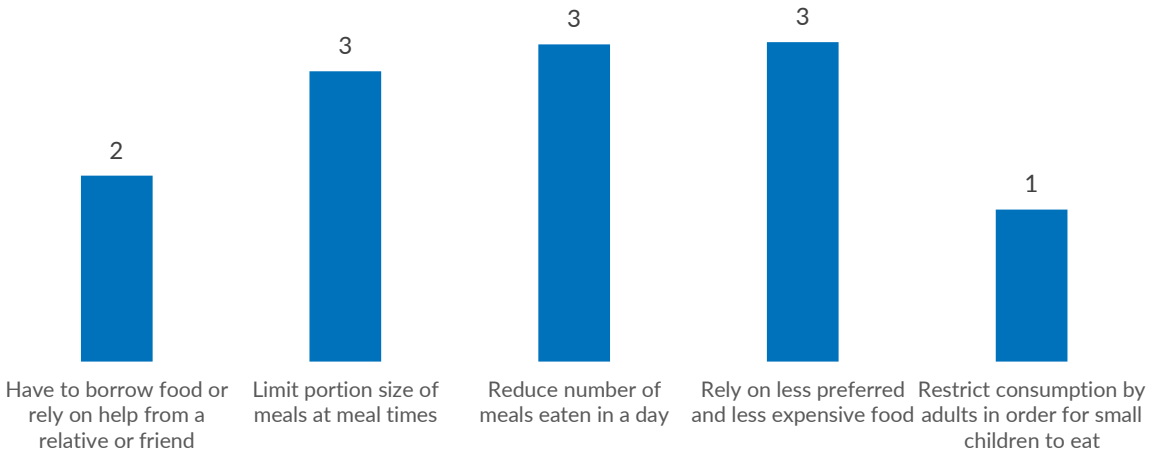
Figure 51: Reduced Coping Strategies Index for female- and male-headed Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

The most common ways in which Shona cope with food insecurity is by reducing the number of meals eaten in a day or relying on less preferred and less expensive food. During the last 7 days, Shona households report in 2024 that they reduced meals or used less expensive food for almost 3 days on average. Less commonly do the Shona rely on friends or family to borrow food or restrict the consumption of adults to allow children to have sufficient meals.

Figure 52: Type of coping strategies used in the past 7 days in average number of days.

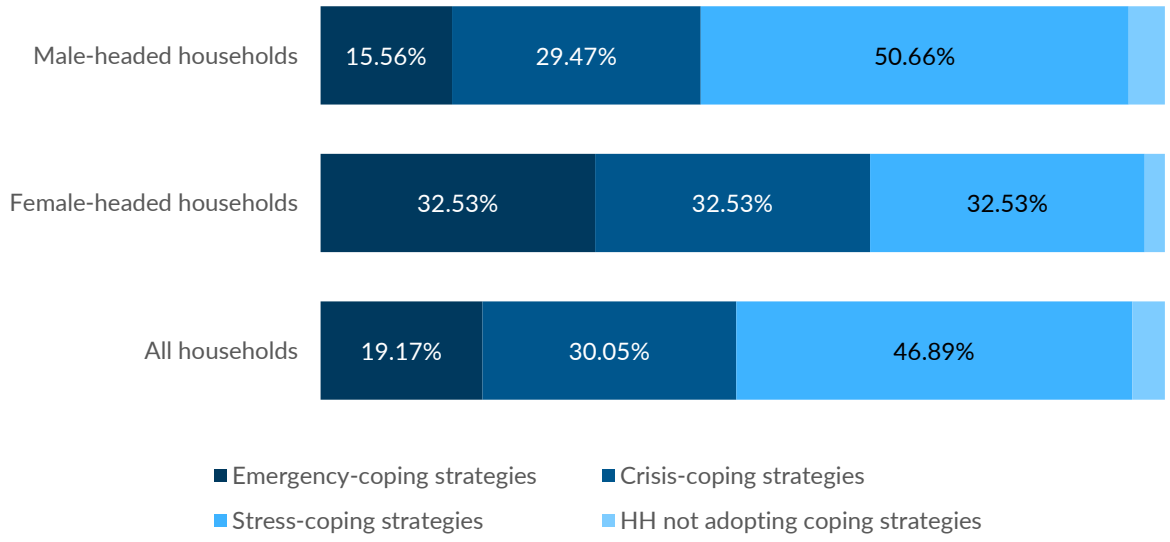


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

9.3 Long term coping strategy

A large proportion of the Shona community has to rely on crisis and stress coping mechanisms to deal with lacking food or money to buy food in the long-term. To understand the Shona community's medium and longer-term coping capacity in response to lacking food or money to buy food, this report focuses on the Livelihood Coping Strategy index. The vast majority of Shona relies on coping mechanisms to deal with a lack of food or money to buy food; this is particularly true for female-headed Shona households. The most common strategies by far are borrowing money, buying food on credit and spending savings.

Figure 53: Livelihood coping strategy index for Shona community.



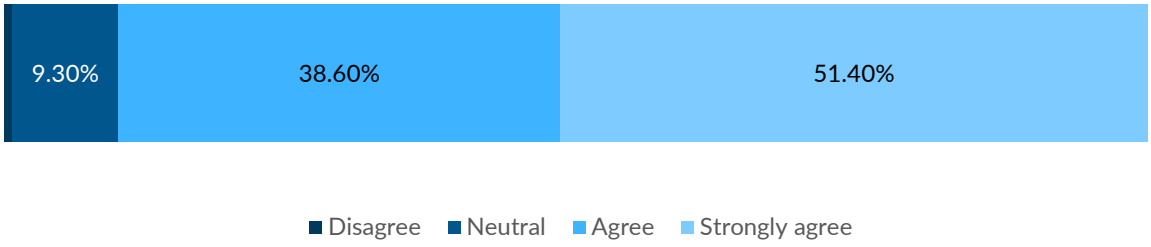
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

10 Wellbeing and Social Cohesion

10.1 National identity and trust in other communities

The Shona community remains a tight-knit community with trust and a shared sense of belonging. One in every two Shona households feel an intense sense of belonging to their community. About 90 percent individuals agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of community and belonging. This hints towards a strong attachment towards the community.

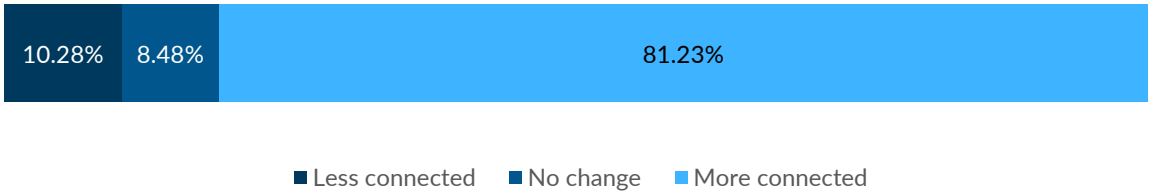
Figure 54: Feeling of a sense of belonging to their community in Shona households in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

National identification of the Shona is also very strong. Over 80 percent of the Shona community members say that they feel more connected to the country now than before receiving citizenship. Only a small percentage of the Shona population report feeling less connected or feeling no change in their national identification with Kenya.

Figure 55: Connectedness of the Shona community to the country now compared to before receiving citizenship.

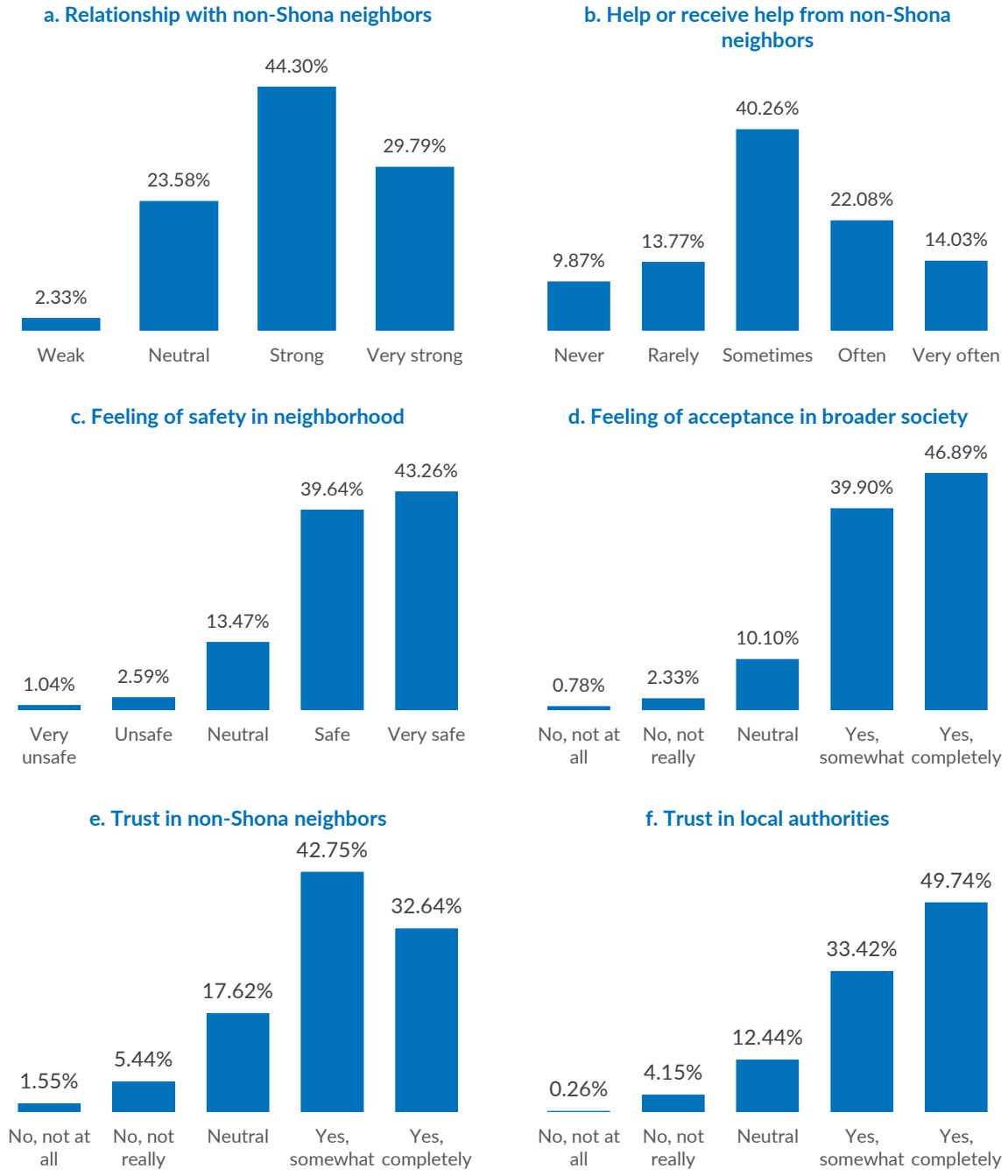


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Relationships to non-Shona households are overall good with the Shona reporting high trust, good relationships, reciprocal help, and broader feelings of safety and acceptance in the community. Figure 56 visualizes the responses of Shona households to the questions whether relationships are good to non-Shona households, whether they receive or provide help to non-Shona household, whether they feel save in their neighborhood and whether they feel accepted in the broader society. Most Shona community members report that none of these issues causes major problems. Around 75 percent of Shona say they have strong or very strong relationships with their non-Shona neighbors in the community. 36.3 percent report that they often or very often receive or provide help to neighbors who are not from the Shona community, suggesting active exchanges. In addition, over 80 percent of the Shona report feeling safe or very safe in their neighborhood. The local feeling of trust, good relationships and

reciprocal help also translates into a broader feeling of being accepted in society amongst the Shona. Almost half of the Shona report feeling accepted outside of the Shona community in the broader society.

Figure 56: Social cohesion indicators for the Shona community in 2024.

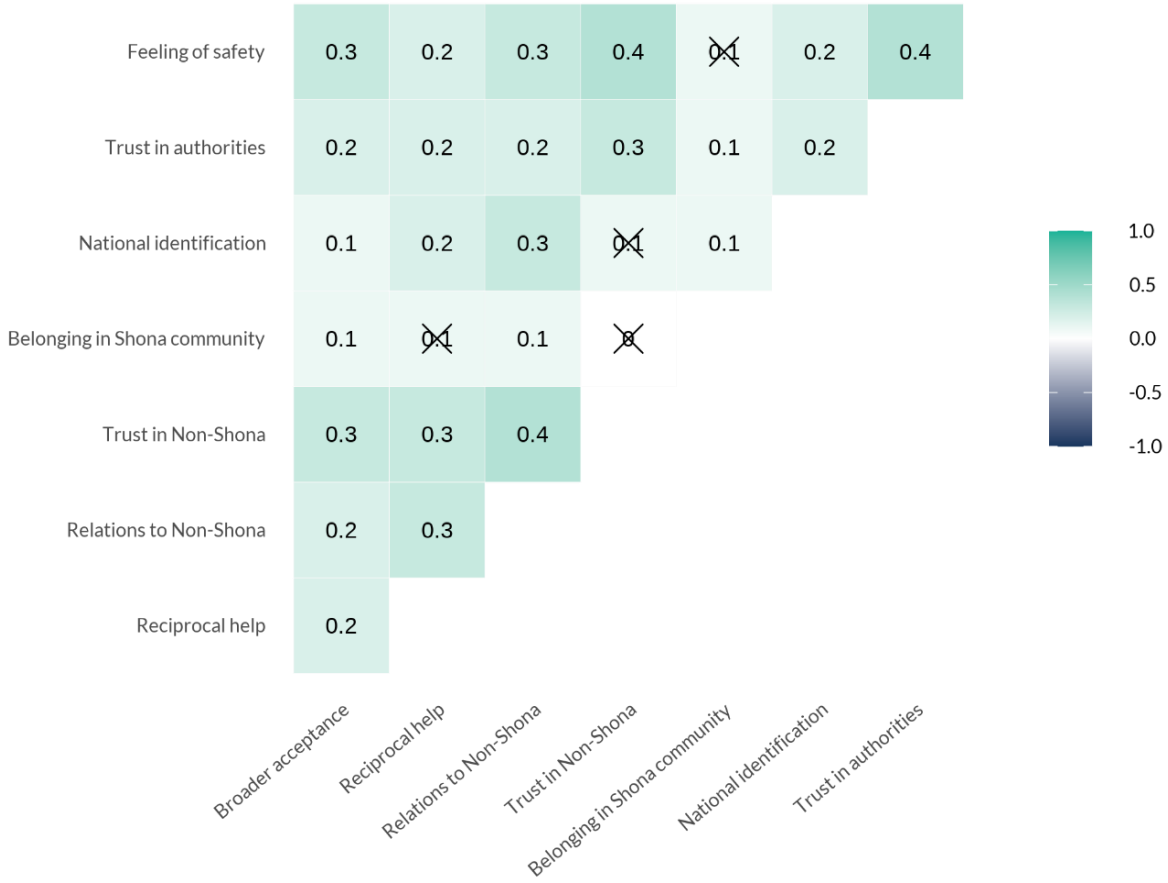


Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Feelings of belonging to the Shona and feelings of national and broader acceptance do not contradict but reinforce each other in the Shona community. The extent to which the Shona households identify and feel a strong bond within their community largely does not affect their

trust in non-Shona or their national identification. Figure 57 displays a correlation matrix.[9] The different social cohesion indicators are coded as whether the Shona strongly or somewhat strongly confirm a specific indicator (1) or not (0). All indicators discussed above are then correlated with each other. As the line on "Belonging in Shona community" shows, agreeing or strongly agreeing to a common sense of belonging to the Shona has largely no substantial correlation but also no negative correlation with feelings of national identity or positive attitudes towards non-Shona. Most notably, trust in non-Shona weakly correlates with having better relationships with the non-Shona and feeling safer in the community. Overall, feelings of national identification, a sense of community within the Shona and good relations to others seem to correlate and reinforce each other rather than exclude each other in the Shona community.

Figure 57: Correlations between social cohesion indicators in the Shona household survey.



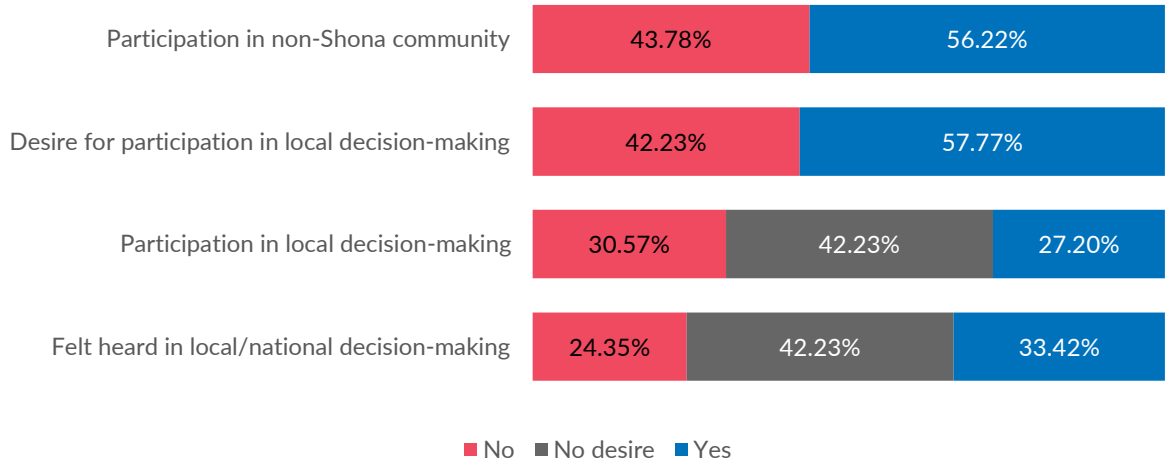
Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

[9] All indicators are coded as binary with the two most confirming answer categories coded as 1 and the rest as 0. For example, saying that you “often” or “very often” receive help from non-Shona households is coded as 1 while saying that this is “rarely”, “never” or only “sometimes” the case is coded as 0. The displayed numbers are simple Pearson correlations. Crossed out numbers suggest that the p value is high and the correlation is not statistically significant.

10.2 Community engagement

While half of the Shona would like to participate in local decision-making processes, only about half of them found way to participate in town hall meetings, local elections and other processes. Interest in local decision-making processes outside of the Shona is relatively high with 57.57 percent of the Shona expressing desire to participate. This number is similar to the number of Shona that already take part in community events with other non-Shonas, such as joint social activities.

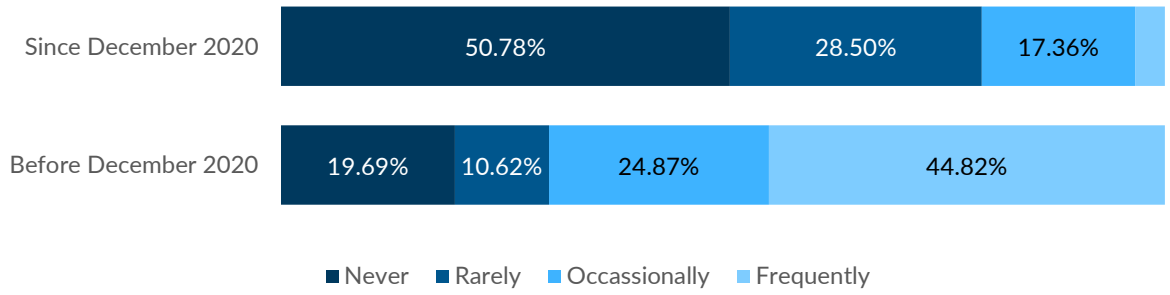
Figure 58: Desire for and actual participation in social and political processes outside of the Shona community in 2024.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

The Shona report a clear and sharp decline in experiences of discrimination since December 2020. Almost 70 percent of the Shona confirm that they felt frequently or occasionally discriminated against before December 2020 (Figure 59). This number has greatly declined with only about 20 percent reporting discriminating experiences after the acquisition of citizenship. Across the population, there is a general shift from experiencing discrimination frequently as the most common answer for the period before December 2020 to never experiencing discrimination as the most frequent answer in the post-citizenship period. This is a major indication that the Shona overall feel much more protected and integrated since becoming Kenyan citizens.

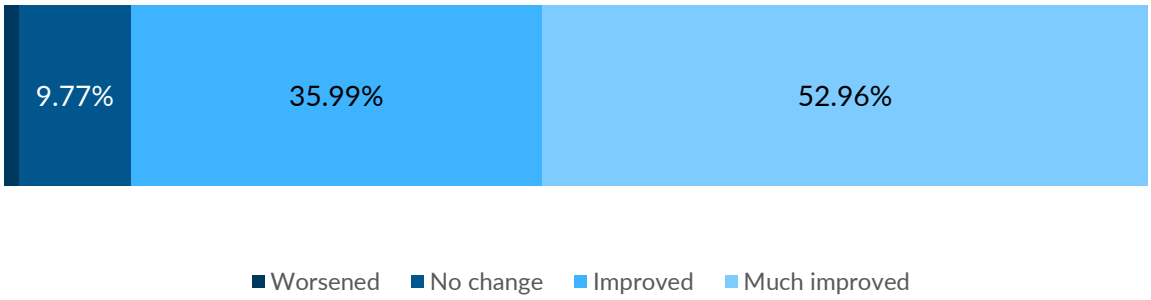
Figure 59: Perceived frequency of discrimination in the Shona community before and after December 2020



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

Reduced experiences of discrimination, access to services and a feeling of connection to the nation translate into a real and perceived improvement of the quality of life for the Shona community. 1 in 2 Shona say that their lives have much improved. 69.9 percent of the Shona community also reports feeling very hopeful for the future of themselves and their community, 22.6 percent report they are feeling somewhat hopeful and only less than 10 percent do not share this positive outlook.

Figure 60: Perceived change in quality of life since receiving citizenship.



Source: Shona Socioeconomic Survey 2024.

"Getting a national ID has really helped me. I can now move freely without fear of getting arrested. I have access to better job opportunities too because of the access the ID has been able to give me," says Azariah. "My kids can now pursue their education comfortably because I know I can support them with access to more work opportunities." © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo.

11 Final thoughts

11.1 Conclusions

Acquiring Kenyan citizenship has improved the socioeconomic conditions of the Shona community, enabling them to access essential services, economic opportunities, and social benefits. Before gaining citizenship in 2020, the Shona faced numerous barriers due to their stateless status, which excluded them from formal employment, financial services, and government programs, including secondary school and university. Following the acquisition of nationality, the Shona now enjoy increased access to legal identity documents, health insurance, and financial services. These positive changes align with findings in the academic literature, which highlight the importance of citizenship and documentation in reducing poverty and enhancing human capital by allowing individuals to leverage government services, engage in formal employment, and contribute more productively to society.

Citizenship has also enhanced the Shona community's labor market potential, though employment rates are still recovering from the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and transition to the formal labor market is gradual. Legal identity has granted many Shona individuals the ability to seek formal employment, tap into financial services such mobile wallets and gradually broaden their economic activities beyond informal self-employment. This has enabled the community to rebuild their livelihoods post-pandemic. Nevertheless, employment levels remain below pre-pandemic rates, especially for women, reflecting challenges in labor market reintegration. The employment rate for women dropped from 72 percent in 2019 to 61 percent in 2024, suggesting a slower recovery in sectors traditionally dominated by women. Overall, the Shona community's gradual employment recovery indicates the value of citizenship in building economic resilience, while highlighting the need for continued support to ensure continued integration into the formal labor market, increase incomes and address remaining barriers to financial inclusion, including those around documentation.

Shona community members recognize the benefits of citizenship through subjective measures. Nearly all respondents report that their quality of life has improved or improved dramatically since receiving citizenship. Relationships to non-Shona households are generally positive, with the Shona reporting high levels of trust, good relationships, reciprocal help, and broader feelings of safety and acceptance in the community. Over 80 percent say that they feel more connected to the country now than before receiving citizenship, while also reporting a clear and sharp decline in experiences of discrimination since December 2020. In terms of services, 52 percent report that their access to health services have improved since receiving citizenship in 2020 (46 percent report no change, and only 2 percent believe access has gotten worse).

The Shona experience provides valuable lessons for addressing statelessness and promoting inclusive development for other stateless communities globally. Gaining citizenship has been transformative for the Shona, granting them access to a range of socioeconomic benefits and reducing their vulnerability to poverty and exclusion. This case underscores the importance of citizenship to stateless populations and its potential to unlock economic and social opportunities that drive sustainable development. As more countries around the world seek to

address statelessness through legislative changes and the expansion of citizenship rights, the Kenyan experience with the Shona can serve as a model. By providing legal identity and addressing structural barriers, policymakers can empower stateless communities to participate more fully in their economies and societies, leading to improved livelihoods, social cohesion, and economic growth. These findings have broader implications for the many stateless individuals in the East, Horn, and Great Lakes of Africa region, as well as the millions of stateless people globally, demonstrating that resolving statelessness is not only a matter of human rights but also of inclusive economic development.

Comparable data on stateless populations and nationals are necessary to inform policy planning and programming to reduce the negative impacts of statelessness. Surveys such as this one, carried out for the Shona community in Kenya, can contribute to filling socioeconomic data gaps while supporting the objectives of global efforts to end statelessness, including the #IBelong campaign and Global Alliance to End Statelessness. The Shona socioeconomic surveys are a result of continued efforts to resolve statelessness in Kenya and build the nascent body of work on the development implications of statelessness. This survey provides the first comparisons of stateless and formerly stateless populations in Kenya, enhancing the evidence base for the efficient design of programmatic and policy interventions. Future data collection efforts can help to understand the longer-term implications of citizenship for the Shona community and beyond, as current Shona who are students complete their secondary and tertiary schooling and adults enter the formal labor market.

11.2 Recommendations

Develop holistic, long-term policy frameworks that address the socioeconomic and human rights dimensions of statelessness. National governments and international stakeholders should adopt inclusive development policies that go beyond legal recognition to ensure the full social and economic integration of stateless and formerly stateless populations. This entails ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and social protection services for newly recognized citizens, and resolving remaining gaps around access to official documentation. Governments should be encouraged to introduce targeted social safety nets and employment support programs to reduce poverty and promote resilience among stateless and formerly stateless groups. UNHCR and other partners, in partnership with national governments and NGOs, can provide technical assistance in designing and implementing these frameworks, fostering environments that allow all individuals to contribute to and benefit from national development.

Support economic integration and empowerment of the Shona community through financial inclusion programs and skills development initiatives. The Government of Kenya, in collaboration with development partners and the private sector, is encouraged to implement tailored financial inclusion strategies to help the newly recognized Shona citizens access credit, savings, and insurance products that are crucial for business growth and household resilience. Establishing entrepreneurship training programs, mentorship networks, and providing access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises would empower the Shona community to leverage their skills in wood carving, basket weaving, and other economic activities. Additionally, promoting employment opportunities in the formal sector for Shona individuals

through job placement services and partnerships with the private sector will ensure that the community's transition to full citizenship is accompanied by tangible improvements in income and welfare.

Reaffirm and expand Kenya's commitment to eradicating statelessness by adopting a comprehensive national strategy. Building on the success of granting citizenship to the Makonde, Shona, and Pemba communities, a National Action Plan to identify and resolve remaining cases of statelessness, including the estimated 9,800 individuals who remain stateless, offers many benefits. This strategy should include amending the relevant Sections of the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Act to remove the time-limitation for registration of stateless persons and align the definition of a stateless person with the definition in the 1954 Convention; acceding to the two UN statelessness conventions and ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa; enhancing birth registration systems to prevent future statelessness; simplifying procedures for nationality application and documentation; and implementing community outreach programs to raise awareness about the rights and entitlements of citizenship. The Kenyan government is also encouraged to continue its leadership on this issue by advocating for regional and international cooperation to address statelessness, including sharing best practices and lessons learned from its national experience.

Promote international collaboration and investment to support stateless populations in gaining nationality and legal identity and accessing essential services. Governments, international organizations, and development agencies should work together to ensure stateless individuals receive the support needed to obtain nationality and legal documentation. This includes nationality law and policy changes enabling stateless people to acquire nationality, investing in robust and inclusive civil registration systems, conducting community-based identification campaigns, and facilitating cross-border collaboration to address statelessness among migrant populations. Providing technical and financial assistance to countries with high numbers of stateless individuals would further enable the implementation of comprehensive registration and citizenship programs. The new Global Alliance to End Statelessness provides a multi-stakeholder platform to strengthen these joint efforts.

Expand efforts to generate evidence on the impacts of statelessness and post-citizenship integration globally, with a focus on Kenya. Stakeholders should invest in continued, longitudinal studies to track the Shona community's socioeconomic progress over time and take advantage of the pre- and post-citizenship data that is already available, enabling a better understanding of post-citizenship outcomes. Additionally, research could be expanded to include the Makonde, Pemba, Rundi and other communities alongside the national population, providing comparative insights on the long-term effects of citizenship on diverse (formerly) stateless groups. Enhanced data collection and analysis will support evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions for stateless populations.