

# DATA BRIEF

## Ghana Gulf of Guinea Northern Regions Social Cohesion (SOCO) Project

This brief discusses the development gap between the northern and southern parts of Ghana according to poverty rate indicators; access to social services and infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, and education; and human capital, such as literacy rates, employment, and digital inclusion. Because exclusion and vulnerability underpin most of the fragility and conflict experienced by residents of northern Ghana, the brief also discusses inequality, food insecurity, and dominant types of employment and livelihood.

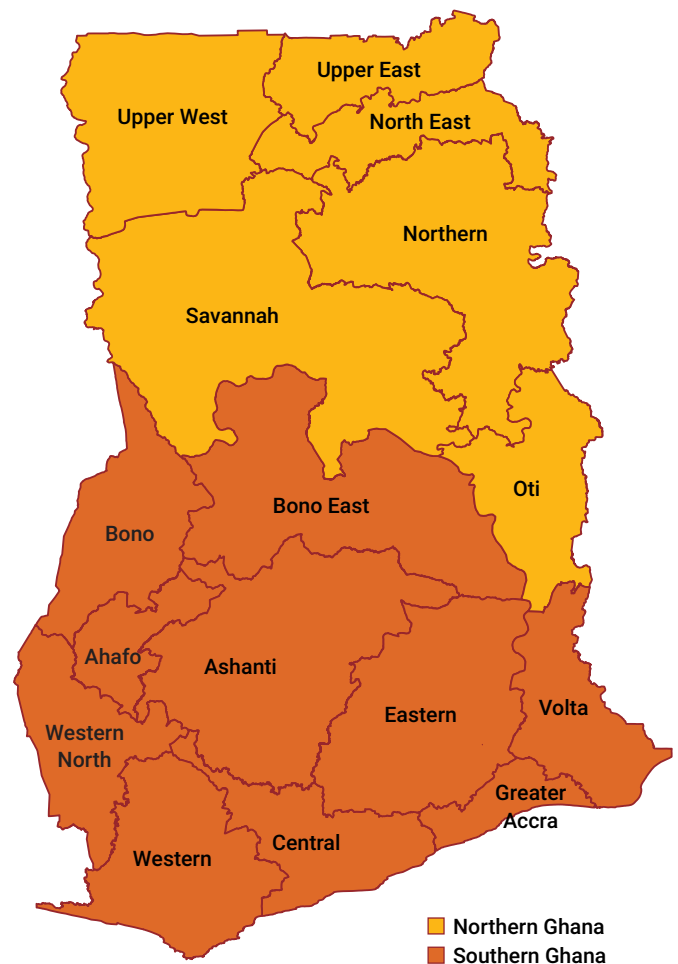
### Northern Ghana and the SOCO Project

The Northern Ghana Social Cohesion (SOCO) project operates in the six northern regions of Ghana: Upper East, Upper West, Savannah, Northern, North East, and Oti. The area experiences vulnerabilities around poverty, exclusion, conflict, unemployment, and infrastructure deficits. The 2020 report, *Multidimensional Poverty*, by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) shows that the northern regions are lagging the national average on electricity coverage, housing, assets, cooking fuel, drinking water, toilet facilities, school attendance and attainment, insurance, and nutrition.

The environment in northern Ghana is arid, putting it at increased risk for climate change impacts, including drought, high temperatures, and flooding. According to the Ghana Meteorological Agency, the 30-year average rainfall in northern Ghana is 1,973 millimeters (mm) in Western Region; 1,721 mm in Central Region; 948 mm in Upper East Region; and 1,002 mm in Upper West Region. Annual average temperatures range from 26.1°C in places near the coast to 28.9°C in the extreme north. Daytime temperatures may rise above 40°C in the far north. Erratic rainfall and poor soil

While southern Ghana has a bimodal rainfall system, with two rainy seasons per year—March to July and September to October—northern Ghana has a unimodal rainfall system, with only one rainy season from May to October.

Map 1. Regional Map of Ghana



quality, in addition to a lack of socioeconomic infrastructure, has resulted in unstable economic productivity in northern Ghana. Because many Ghanaians depend on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods, the severe impacts of climate change will negatively affect most Ghanaians in the northern savannah ecological zone.

**Because less than 1 percent of the national crop area is irrigated, yields of staple crops such as maize, millet, and cassava will continue to rely on increasingly volatile and erratic rain patterns.**

Vulnerability to climate change is related to limited access to public services, such as water, sanitation, and health care. Climate change is already threatening infrastructure. One study found that in 2007 alone, 1,016 km of roads were destroyed, 13 bridges collapsed, and 442 sewers damaged in the northern region of Ghana due to extreme weather events. Some parts of northern Ghana are vulnerable to conflict, particularly areas bordering Burkina Faso and Togo, which frequently experience the crossing of people and arms, raising insecurity levels and political instability. Being far from the capital city of Accra and its surrounding economic and political opportunities, along with perceptions of exclusion in communities and local governments in the north, exacerbate their vulnerability to external threats, particularly potential spillover of fragility, conflict, and violence from the Sahel subregion.

## Development Indicators

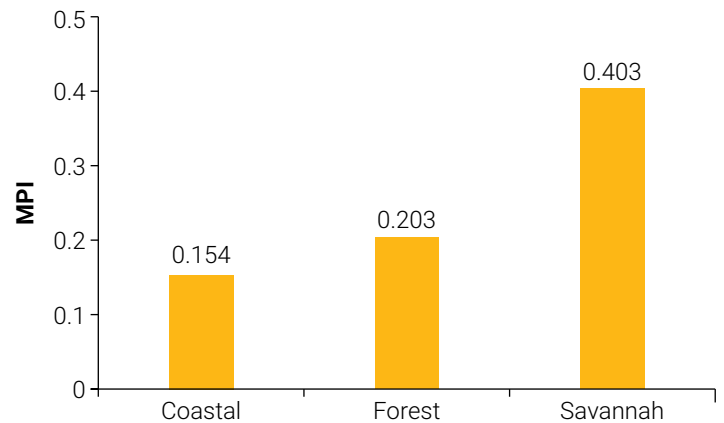
The following development indicators compare living conditions in the northern versus southern parts of Ghana in terms of poverty rates, access to basic services, human capital development, employment types, food security, and inequality.

### 1. Poverty Rates

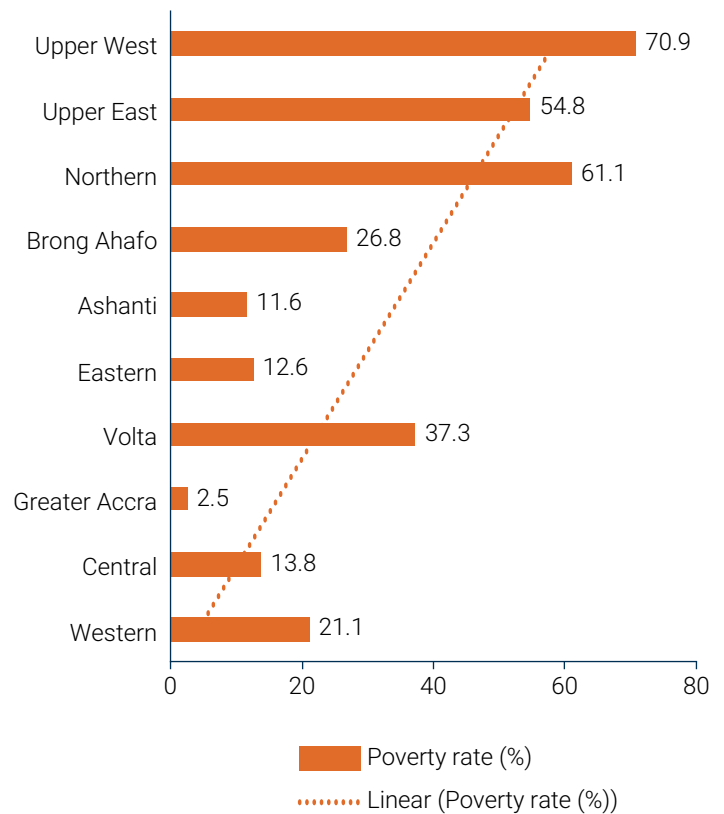
Poverty rates are determined by the share of the population that is multidimensionally poor. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) considers multiple overlapping deprivations that people living in poverty often experience, including lack of access to education, health insurance, safe water, electricity, sanitation, and assets, as well as poor health and nutrition and ramshackle and overcrowded housing. The MPI rates poverty levels from 0 (no poverty) to 1 (maximum poverty).

Figure 1 illustrates MPI by ecological zone, with the savannah zone experiencing the highest poverty rate. Figure 2 shows poverty rates by region based on 2016 data, clearly illustrating that the northern regions of Ghana experience significantly higher rates of poverty than the southern regions. In terms of size of population living in poverty, in 2013, Northern Region had the largest at 1.3 million, and Greater Accra Region had the smallest at 241,166.

**Figure 1. Multidimensional Poverty by Ecological Zone, 2017**



**Figure 2. Poverty Rate in Ghana by Region, 2016**



The National MPI, which represents the incidence and intensity of poverty, is 0.236, indicating that multi-dimensionally poor people in Ghana experience about 24 percent of the weighted deprivations of the total possible deprivations that can be experienced.

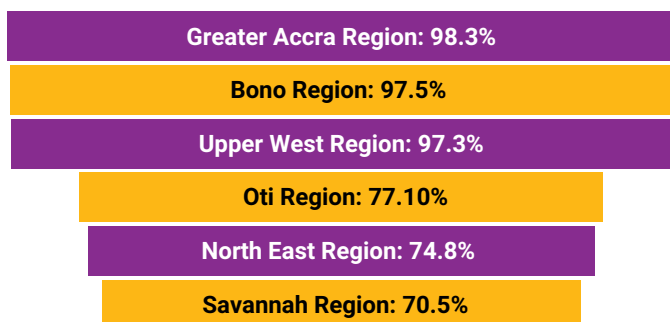
## 2. Access to Basic Services

**Water.** According to the GSS 2020 Population and Housing Census, at least 90 percent of households in nine regions have access to improved sources of drinking water, regionally depicted in figure 3. Greater Accra, Bono, and Upper West regions have the highest rates of access for this indicator at 98.3, 97.5, and 97.3 percent, respectively; and Oti, North East, and Savannah regions, have the lowest at 77.1, 74.8, and 70.5 percent, respectively.

Four in five households in Ghana (79.9 percent) that use unimproved sources of drinking water rely on surface water (rivers, streams, dugouts, ponds, dams, and canals). Oti Region had the highest rate of such use at 98.1 percent. In Greater Accra Region, the dominant source of drinking water among those without access to an improved water source is a tanker service (78.8 percent). In the Upper East Region, unprotected wells and springs dominate (54.9 percent).

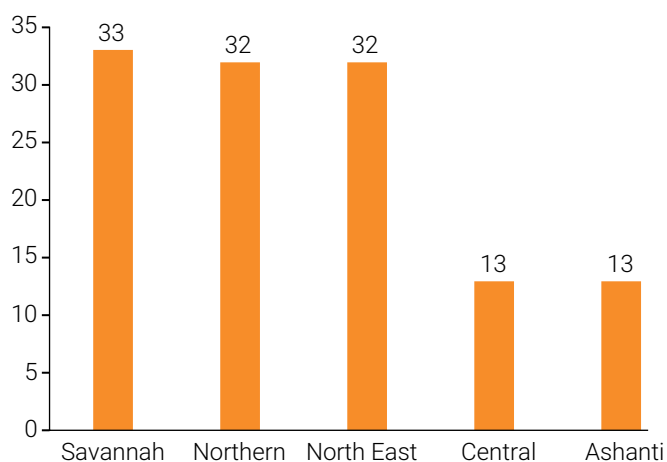
The average time that households without access to water on their premises spend to access any source of drinking water is 19 minutes. Average times are longer in rural areas than in urban areas—22 versus 13 minutes. The Savannah Region records the longest average time spent accessing drinking water at 33 minutes, followed by Northern and North East regions at 32 minutes each. The regions with the shortest average time spent accessing water are Central and Ashanti, each at 13 minutes (see figure 4).

**Figure 3. Percentage of Population with Access to Improved Source of Drinking Water by Region**

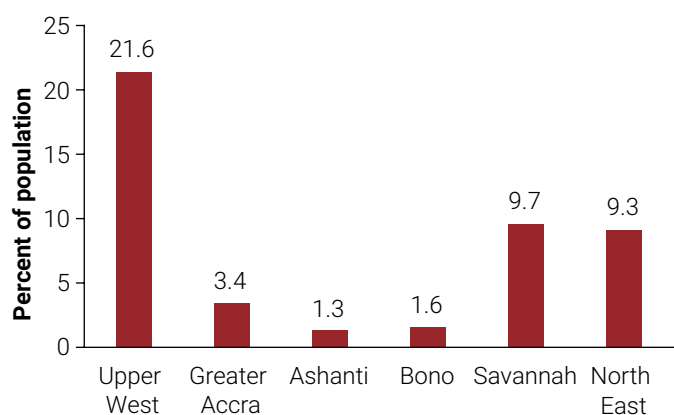


Source: World Bank Ghana Poverty Assessment Calculations (2020) based on GLSS 3-7, 2020.

**Figure 4. Time (Minutes) Spent to Access Water**



**Figure 5. Use of Unimproved Toilet Facilities**



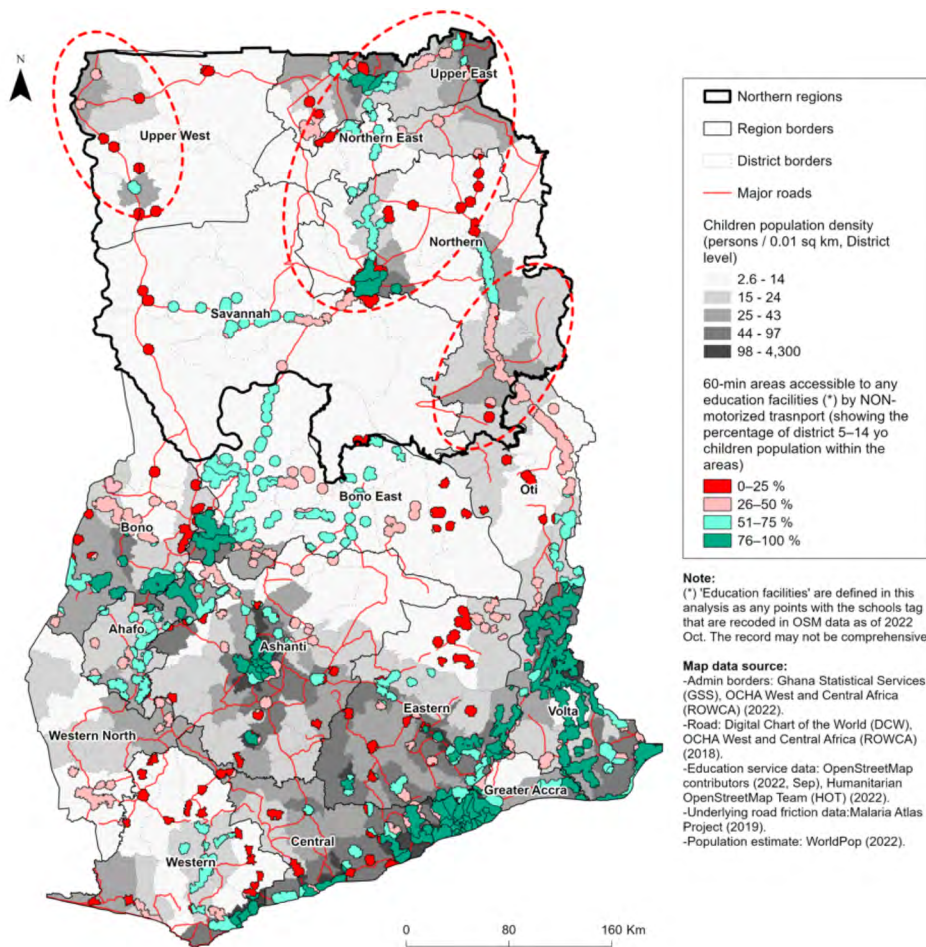
Source: GSS 2021 (Population and Housing Census).

**Sanitation.** Rural households in Ghana use unimproved toilet facilities at much higher rates than urban households—5.1 versus 1.1 percent. Regional disparities are wide, ranging from Upper West Region at 21.9 percent to Greater Accra Region at 3.4 percent (see figure 5).

Among those without access to a toilet facility, rates of defecating in the bush/open field or gutter vary by region. In Greater Accra, Central, and Western regions, the rates are 85.2, 71.7, and 71.5 percent, respectively. In the northern regions of Upper East, North East, and Savannah, rates are 99.3, 99.2, and 99.1 percent, respectively.

**Education.** Map 2 illustrates access to education levels by distance to nearest school. In highly populated urban areas in northern Ghana, such as Tamale in Northern Region, 76–100 percent of children live within a 60-minute walk to a school. Children without such access mainly live in rural areas.

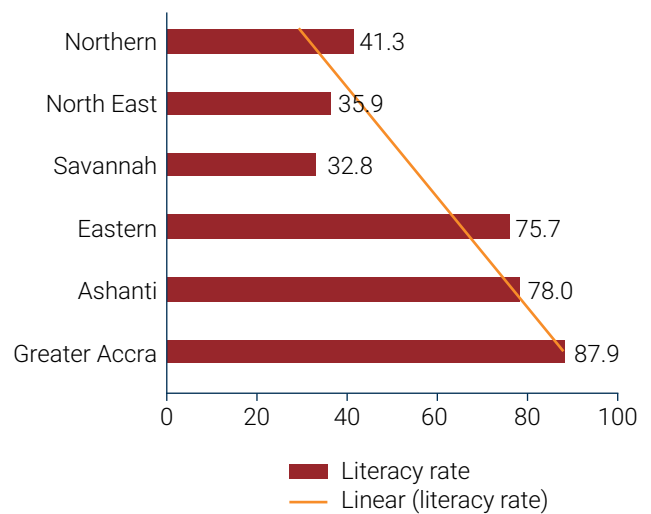
**Map 2. Access to School by Distance**



### 3. Human Capital Development

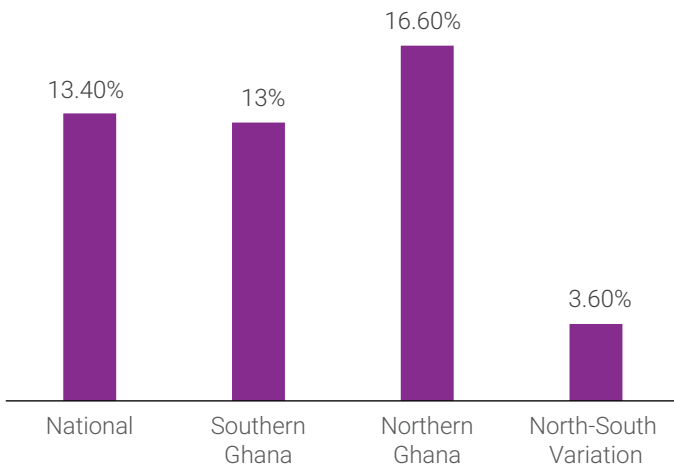
**Literacy rate.** Literacy rates are determined by the percentage of people aged 15 and older who can read a short simple statement about everyday life or who have a secondary or higher education. Figure 6 displays literacy rates in Ghana by select regions. Greater Accra Region has the highest literacy rate at 87.9 percent, followed by Ashanti and Eastern regions at 78.0 and 75.7 percent, respectively. The lowest literacy rates are in Savannah Region at 32.8 percent, followed by North East Region at 35.9 percent and Northern Region at 41.3 percent. The largest literacy gender gap in SOCO project areas is in Oti Region, according to the Ghana Statistical Service. Seven of 10 of the nonproject area regions have literacy rates above the national average, while all six project area regions have rates below the national average, highlighting the literacy disparity between northern and southern Ghana.

**Figure 6. Highest and Lowest Literacy Rates by Region**



Source: GSS 2021 (Population and Housing Census).

**Figure 7. Unemployment Rates in Northern Versus Southern Ghana, 2022**



Source: GSS 2022, computed based on GSS 2021 (Population and Housing Census).

**Access to digital devices.** The proportion of the population aged 12 and older who do not own any functional information and communication technology device in Ghana ranges from 6.4 percent in Greater Accra Region to 42.1 percent in Savannah Region. The national average is 16.1, Ashanti Region is 11.1 percent, and Eastern Region is 14.2 percent. By comparison, Northern and North East regions rates are only 32.3 and 40.3 percent, respectively, indicating that residents of northern Ghana lag the rest of country in terms of access to devices that would allow them to take advantage of digital innovations to improve their quality of life.

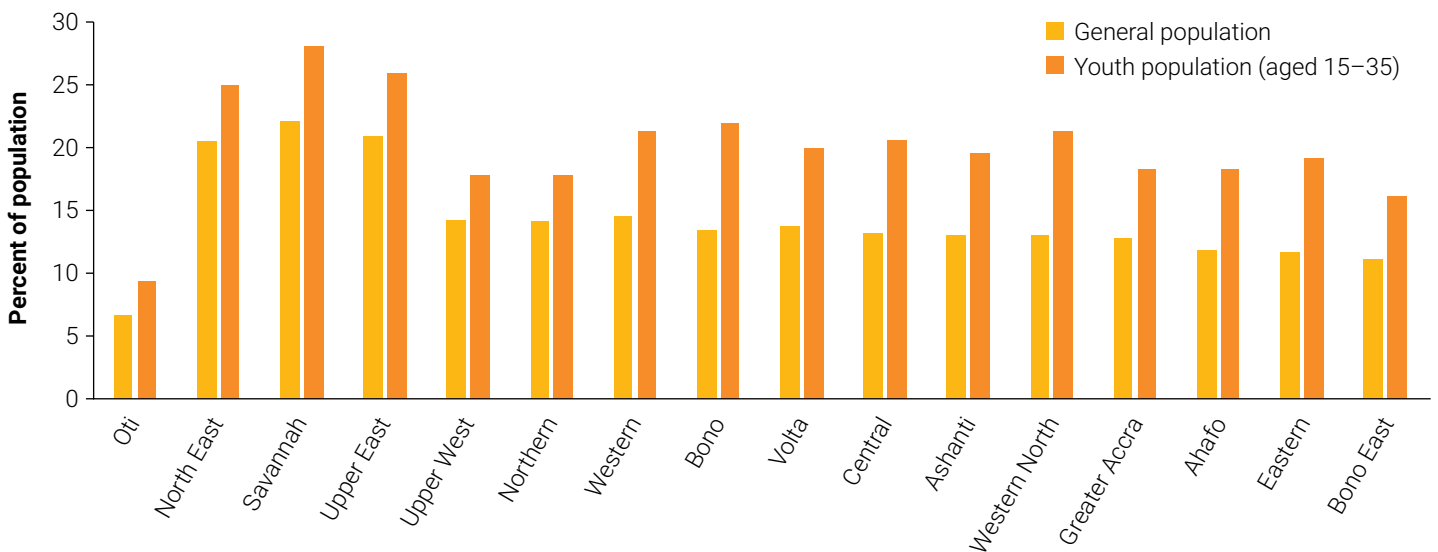
**Unemployment rate.** A person is considered unemployed if he or she is aged 15 years or older and if in the seven days prior to Census Night he or she did not work or did not have work to go to but was available to work. Figures from the 2021 Population and Housing Census indicate that unemployment rates are higher in northern Ghana than they are in either southern Ghana or the national average. The variation between northern and southern Ghana is 3.60 percent (see figure 7). Figure 8 illustrates the unemployment rates in Ghana by age cohort and region, clearly illustrating the higher rates of unemployment among youth (aged 15–35) compared to the general population.

#### 4. Employment Types

The types of employment undertaken by residents of northern and southern Ghana affects poverty levels and quality of life. Regions that have experienced a recent significant reduction in poverty have also experienced employment shifts from traditional sectors to wage employment and nonagricultural self-employment. In Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Central regions, for example, many workers moved into nonagricultural self-employment and wage employment in the private sector. However, in poorer regions, especially in northern Ghana, most people are still engaged in agricultural production.

Households headed by agriculture sector workers have higher multidimensional poverty than households headed by workers in the other sectors. About 6 in 10 households headed by an agricultural worker are poor compared with about 3 of 10 households headed by an industry or service worker.

**Figure 8. Unemployment Rates in Ghana by Age Cohort and Region**



Source: GSS 2022, computed based on GSS 2021 (Population and Housing Census).

**Figure 9. Food Insecurity Experience Scale**

<b>Uncertainty around ability to obtain food</b>	<i>Food security to mild food insecurity</i>
<b>Compromising on food quality and variety</b>	<i>Moderate food insecurity.</i> This population has insufficient money or resources for a healthy diet. There is uncertainty around their ability to obtain food. They probably skip meals occasionally or run out of food from time to time.
<b>Reducing food quantity and skipping meals</b>	
<b>No food for a day or more</b>	<i>Severe food insecurity.</i> They do not eat for an entire day at some times of the year

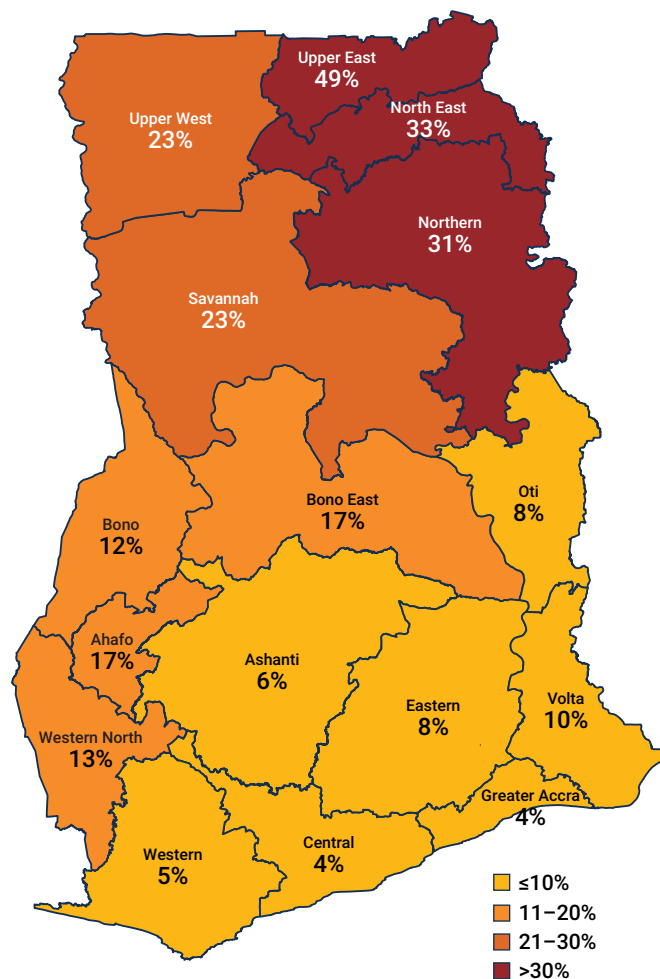
Source: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana Statistical Service, United Nations World Food Programme, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2020. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) Ghana.

## 5. Food Security

A person is considered food insecure if he or she lacks regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. Food insecurity can occur because food is unavailable or because one lacks the financial resources to obtain it. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations measures the severity level of food insecurity using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, as shown in figure 9.<sup>1</sup>

Food insecurity disparities between northern and southern Ghana are pervasive. The highest prevalence of severe and moderate food insecurity is in the Upper East Region at 49 percent, followed by North East Region at 33 percent, Northern Region at 31 percent, and Upper West and Savannah regions at 23 percent each.<sup>2</sup> The lowest rates of food insecurity are found in the Greater Accra Region at 4 percent, Central Region at 4 percent, and Western Region at 5 percent (see map 3).

**Map 3. Food Insecurity in Ghana by Region**



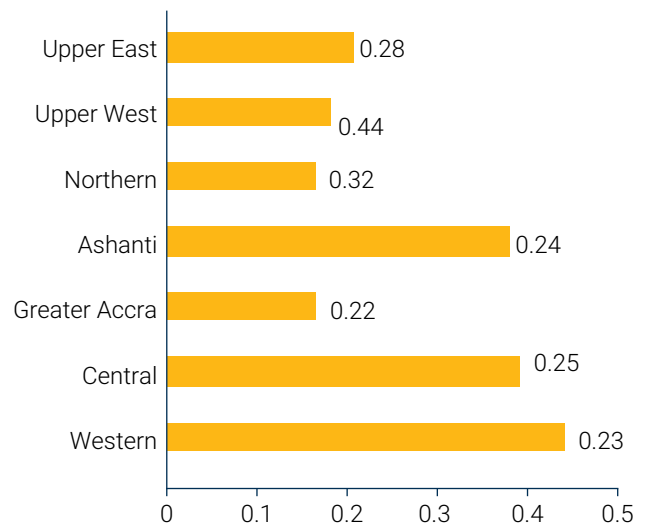
## 6. Inequality

Inequality is measured using the Gini coefficient, which is calculated using the distribution of income or wealth among a population. Scores range from 0 (absolute equality) to 1 (absolute inequality). In other words, if every person in a particular country earned the same amount of money, its Gini score would be 0 (0 percent), but if one person earned all the income in that country, with everyone else earning nothing, then the country's Gini coefficient would be 1 (100 percent)<sup>3</sup>

The roots of inequality in Ghana are in its geography. Northern Ghana experiences less rainfall, and much of the north is more remote and inaccessible than the urban and resource-rich south. This has perpetuated the socioeconomic gap between the two.

According to the 2016 *Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report*,<sup>4</sup> inequality between the north and south of Ghana has increased since 2006. Northern Ghana continues to experience more inequality than southern Ghana. The highest levels of inequality in Ghana are now found within regions, especially in the north. Upper West Region has the highest Gini coefficient at 0.44, followed by Northern Region at 0.32 (see figure 10).

Figure 10. Regional Inequalities Using Gini Coefficient



Contributing 15.5 percent to the national inequality score in 2013 was differences in average living conditions among regions. The differential between the north and south of the country contributed an additional 10 percent to the score.

## Endnotes

- 1 "Hunger and Food Insecurity." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>.
- 2 Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana Statistical Service, United Nations World Food Programme, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2020. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) Ghana. [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000140756/download/?\\_ga=2.67216082.2127660005.1710678399-240906544.1710678399](chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000140756/download/?_ga=2.67216082.2127660005.1710678399-240906544.1710678399).
- 3 World Population Review. 2024."Gini Coefficient by Country 2024." <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country>.
- 4 Cooke, Edgar, Sarah Hague, and Andy McKay. 2016. Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report: Using the 6th Ghana Living Standards Survey. <https://www.unicef.org/ghana/media/531/file/The%20Ghana%20Poverty%20and%20Inequality%20Report.pdf>.



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