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# RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT

REPORT | NUMBER 1

**More than a space for interracial contact:  
Exploring the importance of the workplace  
for social cohesion and reconciliation in  
South Africa**





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Elnari Potgieter and Mikhail Moosa

## About the Reconciliation and Development series

The Reconciliation and Development Series is a multidisciplinary publication focused on the themes of peacebuilding and development. Peacebuilding research includes the study of the causes of armed violence and war, the processes of conflict, the preconditions for peaceful resolution and peacebuilding, and the processes and nature of social cohesion and reconciliation. Development research, in turn, is concerned with poverty, structural inequalities, the reasons for underdevelopment, issues of socio-economic justice, and the nature of inclusive development. This publication serves to build up a knowledge base of research topics in the fields of peacebuilding and development, and the nexus between them, by studying the relationship between conflict and poverty, and exclusion and inequality, as well as between peace and development, in positive terms.

Research in the publication follows a problem-driven methodology in which the scientific research problem decides the methodological approach. Geographically, the publication has a particular focus on post-conflict societies on the African continent.

## About this Report

This report was developed by IJR's Research and Policy team with the support of Brot für die Welt (BfdW). It was compiled by Elnari Potgieter, Senior Project Leader for the South African Reconciliation Barometer project, and Mikhail Moosa, Intern to the IJR's Research and Policy team.

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>BEE</b>	Black Economic Empowerment
<b>B-BBEE</b>	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
<b>CEE</b>	Commission of Employment Equity
<b>EEA</b>	Employment Equity Act
<b>NP</b>	National Party
<b>SARB</b>	South African Reconciliation Barometer

## Introduction

The workplace is an important site of social exchange in post-apartheid South Africa for several reasons. Firstly, since the 1990s, the workplace has undergone significant restructuring and personnel change. Secondly, the impact of several employment-related policies that ushered in these changes in the workforce has produced different attitudes and phenomena in society. Thirdly, because people are likely to spend a significant proportion of their lives at work, interacting with their colleagues almost as much – if not more – than with their close family and friends, the workplace is an ideal social site for analysis of how South Africans interact with one another outside of closed familial bonds and, more specifically, of the salience of race in everyday interactions.

Acknowledging that interactions between South Africans from various backgrounds extend beyond contact, but also take place within a historical and contemporary context, this report consists of several parts. Firstly, it explores the changing nature of the South African workplace since 1994, providing a brief introduction to the country's racialised inequalities in education and the workforce, as well as post-1994 legislative changes to address these racial imbalances. Secondly, it explores the lingering inequalities in the South African labour force. Thirdly, using repeated cross-sectional data from the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB), this report explores South Africans' attitude towards transformation and creating a racially representative workforce. Fourthly, it offers some theoretical reflections on reconciliation, in particular relation to the pivotal role a workforce can play in nurturing reconciliation. Fifthly, it explores levels of distrust between colleagues and offers some explanations for varying degrees of trust. Finally, this report concludes by exploring the workplace as a site of expanding trust, integral to social cohesion and reconciliation processes in South Africa.

# The changing nature of the South African workplace

## Discrimination in South African labour

South Africa has a long history of discrimination in almost every social sphere, including its labour force. Prior to the National Party's (NP) election in 1948, which ushered in the ideology of racial discrimination known as apartheid, most people in South Africa had been dispossessed of their resources under colonialism and systemically underdeveloped into a position of subservience to White people.<sup>1</sup> For example, the 1913 Land Act prohibited 'native' people 'from buying or hiring land in 93% of South Africa';<sup>2</sup> although 'native' people made up the overwhelming majority of the populace, they were confined to just 7 per cent of all land in the country.

*Most people in South Africa had been dispossessed of their resources under colonialism and systemically underdeveloped into a position of subservience to White people.*

From 1948 onwards, many existing practices were formalised under apartheid law: influx control ensured that only a small minority of Black<sup>3</sup> South Africans were able to move freely or seek employment, especially in urban areas; immense disparities in education spending between White and Black sought to 'underdevelop'<sup>4</sup> the intellectual capacity and capabilities of Black South Africans, particularly Black Africans, providing only enough literacy to create 'hewers of wood and drawers of water';<sup>5</sup> and discriminatory employment practices created a small, prosperous class of skilled, White workers and a large, poor underclass of unskilled, Black workers. If Black South Africans managed to complete their formal education, they were treated differently from their White classmates: Black doctors were not allowed to work with White patients; Black lawyers worked exclusively with Black clients; and Black teachers were forced to teach sub-standard education to a new generation of underdeveloped Black South Africans.

The institutionalised economic inequality of South Africa is exemplified in the era from the Union of South Africa (1910–1948), through apartheid's rapid economic growth, to the early 1970s. As an example, in 1932, the price of gold, one of South Africa's primary exports, increased by 45 per cent. The repressive labour policies towards Black African workers, especially in the mining industry, originated in the Union and continued under the NP. By some accounts, the period from 1934, after the 'take-off' phase in South African mining, until 1973 was an era of 'unprecedented economic growth', with the national economy growing by 4.5 per cent annually.<sup>6</sup> Racial inequality in terms of wealth is epitomised in this period of growth: for example, between 1910 and 1970, Black African mine workers' real wages 'did not increase' while White mine workers' real wages 'approximately doubled'.<sup>7</sup>

By 1994, then, Black Africans had, for generations, lived in a state of skills shortages and economic passivity, entrenched through Bantu<sup>8</sup> education and a severe lack of basic services and resources. In contrast, White South Africans were supported through immense state spending on education and subsidies, coupled with the near-exclusive opportunity to work as skilled labourers in an economy geared towards their exclusive benefit.



## Policy changes since 1994

In 1994, South Africans of all races participated in the country's first democratic elections, and elected the African National Congress (ANC), the foremost liberation movement, with an overwhelming majority. Among the myriad challenges facing South Africa's first Black-majority government, the ANC needed to address the imbalances between Black South Africans and their White counterparts. The post-apartheid state introduced several measures to ensure that Black South Africans – Black African women or differently abled individuals in particular – were supported and given preferential access to educational, employment and business opportunities, as a means of redressing the racial and patriarchal laws of apartheid.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, specifically the equality clause, Section 9(2), outlines the state's responsibility to ensure and progressively realise equality:

*Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designated to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.<sup>9</sup>*

This constitutional clause provided the basis for several legislative policies relating to employment equity and affirmative action, namely: the Employment Equity Act (EEA), No. 55 of 1998; the Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998; and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act, No. 53 of 2003. Moreover, a statutory body established by the EEA, the Commission of Employment Equity (CEE), is tasked with monitoring and evaluating the progress of employment equity in South Africa. The CEE produces annual reports on the state of employment equity, reports to the Ministry of Labour on matters relating to the EEA, and makes recommendations relating to policy and implementation relating to the objectives of the EEA.

The new employment legislation is focused on achieving two distinct yet interrelated goals: i) formal equality, through 'the elimination of unfair discrimination', and ii) substantive equality, through 'the implementation of affirmative action and measures to enable equitable representation of employees from different race, gender and disability groups in the workplace'.<sup>10</sup> Conceptually, the former is associated with 'the removal of laws that result in discrimination and segregation', while the latter 'necessitates the acknowledgement and eradication of the actual social and economic conditions that generate inequality'.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically, the South African state has characterised its policy of affirmative action as 'a strategy for the achievement of employment equity through redressing imbalances' and 'as a means to enable the disadvantaged to compete competitively with the advantaged of society'.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, affirmative action aims to 'speed up the creation of a representative and equitable Public Service',<sup>13</sup> 'enhance the capacity

of the historically disadvantaged',<sup>14</sup> 'speed up the achievement and progressive improvement of the numeric targets'<sup>15</sup> and 'ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce'.<sup>16</sup>

## The South African workplace and socio-economic context today

A combination of both post-apartheid labour policies with an emphasis on affirmative action and the general democratisation of society has resulted in significant changes in the South African workplace. Changes in the South African labour force have been so substantial that much academic and popular commentary has focused on an emerging 'Black middle class' and economic elite.<sup>17</sup> In addition, focusing on the public sector, research analysing South Africa's representative bureaucracy indicates that transformative labour policies, particularly the emphasis on racial representation, are correlated with improved efficiency.<sup>18</sup> However, the latest report from the CEE cautions against pre-emptive championing of affirmative action policies. In 2017, the Chairperson of the CEE, Tabea Kabinde, concludes her foreword in the report with the following remarks:

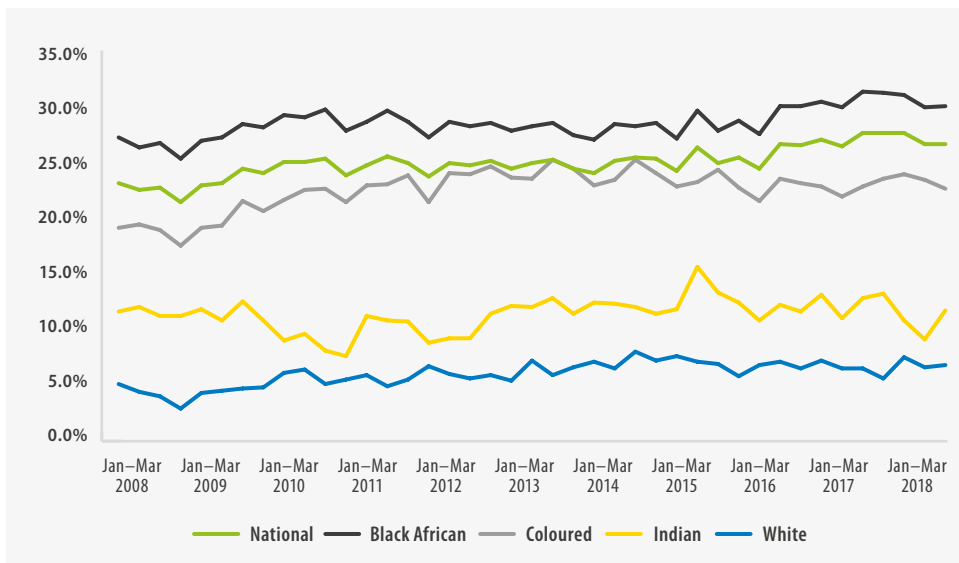
*The report again demonstrates a very slow pace of transformation in the South African workplace. Black people, Women and Persons with Disabilities remain under-represented at Top and Senior Management levels. It is not an exaggeration to say that not much has changed.*<sup>19</sup> [Emphasis added]

***A combination of both post-apartheid labour policies with an emphasis on affirmative action and the general democratisation of society has resulted in significant changes in the South African workplace.***

The CEE finds that transformation at senior level has been slow, and that the private sector has not undergone much substantive change at senior management level. In 2018, the report finds that in the public sector, 72.2 per cent of 'employees at the Top Management Level' are Black African. In contrast, the report claims that 72 per cent of 'employees at the Top Management Level' in the private sector are White.<sup>20</sup>

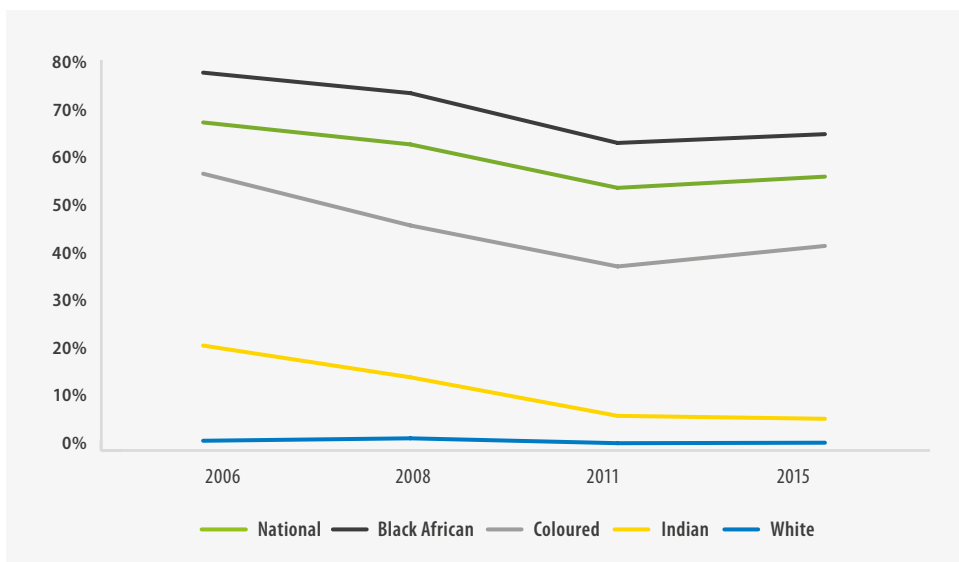
South Africa's economic legacy of domination and underdevelopment has yet to be sufficiently disrupted. Despite the equality clause in the Constitution and the many legislative mechanisms in place, there are still significant obstacles to creating a representative and equitable labour force. Moreover, the challenges that face the state's project of transformation are reflected in economic data on unemployment and poverty, where race remains a salient factor. Figure 1 reveals the racialised differences in levels of unemployment.

Figure 1: South African unemployment rate, by race, 2008–2017<sup>21</sup>



According to long-term trends in employment from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) across all population groups, White South Africans are least likely to be unemployed, while Black Africans are the most likely to be unemployed. Coloured South Africans are slightly less likely to be unemployed than the national average, while Indian South Africans fare much better. This pattern is repeated in levels of poverty (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Poverty rates of population groups living below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL)<sup>22</sup>



The redistributive strategies of the post-apartheid state, combined with legislation geared towards promoting employment among Black South Africans, has not substantively improved levels of poverty and inequality. The latest available data indicates that more than half (53 per cent) of all South Africans live below the upper-bound poverty level (UBPL), and poverty levels among Black Africans are even higher (64.2 per cent). By contrast, using the same metric, the levels of poverty among White South Africans is minuscule (1 per cent). Post-apartheid South Africa

remains a highly unequal society, and race is central to understanding inequality and its manifestations.<sup>23</sup>

## The greatest division in South African society: Inequality

Inequality, or even the perception of inequality, is central to understanding the dynamics of post-apartheid social cohesion. People find it difficult to relate, trust or consider themselves equals with one another when there are vast disparities in access to any number of social sectors and services. In a workplace, inequalities between colleagues are not always obvious, as colleagues share the same working space and earn a similar level of income. However, colleagues from different social spheres commute to work differently, have to support varying numbers of dependants, and possess different levels of 'social capital'<sup>24</sup> in a professional environment. The urgency to explore inequalities and their roots within a localised space, such as a workplace, is evidence by the continued salience of 'inequality' in the SARB surveys.

Since the inception of the SARB in 2003, inequality (phrased as the gap between rich and poor) has consistently been identified by South Africans as the greatest source of social division in the country.<sup>25</sup> The 2017 SARB survey shows that despite 75.3 per cent of South Africans indicating that a united South Africa is desirable and 68 per cent indicating it would be possible, only 56.1 per cent claim the country has made progress in terms of reconciliation. Importantly, 63.4 per cent of South Africans agree that 'reconciliation is impossible while those who were disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor'.

When considering perceived change since 1994, three in four South Africans (77.1 per cent) reported that inequality has either stayed the same or worsened, while 71.7 per cent believe their economic circumstances have either stayed the same or deteriorated since 1994. Unsurprisingly, given the current levels of employment in the national economy (Figure 1), employment opportunities are also reported to have stagnated or deteriorated since 1994.<sup>26</sup> Inequality is thus perceived as being both divisive and pervasive in South African society.

### *Inequality and perceptions of inequalities also hold implications for interracial interaction.*

Further investigation shows that those who regard themselves as 'worse off' than the rest of South Africa (i.e. their relative financial situation) are more likely to indicate that inequality is the main source of division in South Africa than those who regard themselves as 'better off' or in the 'same' position compared to the rest of the country.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, perceived inequality holds significant implications for social cohesiveness.<sup>28</sup>

Inequality and perceptions of inequalities also hold implications for interracial interaction. Quantitative analysis of SARB indicators shows a strong correlation between individuals' perception of inequality and their levels of interracial interaction. Individuals who perceive the gap between rich and poor as becoming greater are less likely to participate in interracial socialisations, while those who perceive the gap as getting smaller are more likely to participate in interracial socialisation.<sup>29</sup> This hypothesis is supported with findings that less interracial interaction is reported by people from lower Living Standards Measure (LSM) groups, while more interaction is reported by those in higher LSM groups.<sup>30</sup>

It is within this context that workplaces – as spaces where historically segregated groups meet – become important for both transformation as well as social cohesion and reconciliation processes. The next section will explore public opinion on post-apartheid transformation policies measured through the SARB surveys, and how attitudes towards transformation might present a site of disagreement within the workplace.

## Attitudes towards transformation in the workplace

The affirmative action legislation introduced in the 1990s to further South Africa's transformation project has inadvertently produced new inequalities and power dynamics in the workplace. Of particular interest in this chapter are the attitudes towards transformation processes and outcomes, where race becomes central to the idea of transformation.

### Attitudes towards racial transformation

The legislation enacted by the first post-apartheid government set out the terms of what the workplace might look like in a 'new South Africa'. In an effort to redress the imbalances of the past, the state prioritised a policy of 'positive discrimination', where those who were neglected under apartheid would receive favourable advantages in various sectors.<sup>31</sup> Beneficiaries of representative affirmative action policies are identified as 'persons with disabilities, women and Black people in relation to public service composition, and the poor with regard to public service provisioning'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, 'progress in achieving employment equity and economic empowerment has also been measured in terms of apartheid race categories'.<sup>33</sup> Essentially, in order to measure and conceptualise progress in 'representation' and 'transformation', post-apartheid South Africa has utilised the very same racial categories as apartheid South Africa.

*This continuation of apartheid-era racial categories has fostered an antipathy towards continued racial categorisation along with a convergent yet growing appreciation for the need for representation.*

This continuation of apartheid-era racial categories has fostered an antipathy towards continued racial categorisation along with a convergent yet growing appreciation for the need for representation. Scholarly debate on the continued use of apartheid-era racial categories has been contested for several years. For example, Neville Alexander has argued that 'we should rethink the ways in which we are trying to bring about what we refer to as historical redress such that we do not unintentionally perpetuate racial identities',<sup>34</sup> while Zimitri Erasmus argues for a 'critical-race-standpoint' in order 'to name racialised inequalities that continue to live behind the apartheid race categories', 'understand what lives behind racialised identifications', and 'eventually undermine the idea of race'.<sup>35</sup> While both theorists present different arguments against and in favour of the continued use of apartheid-era race classification, these two standpoints essentially provide different answers to the same question: 'How does one recognise race and its continued effects on people's everyday lives, in an attempt to work against racial inequality, while at the same time working against practices that perpetuate race thinking?'<sup>36</sup>

The South African government's policy on affirmative action has had to grapple with the same conundrum, and the continued use of apartheid-era race categories

has produced a disjuncture between the desire for a representative workplace and the continuation of race as indicator of redress. Evidence from the SARB suggests ‘high levels of support for the prioritisation of making the workforce representative of race, class and physical ability’.<sup>37</sup> Figure 3 illustrates this level of support with repeated cross-sectional evidence.

**Figure 3:** Agreement on representative workforce in terms of race, gender and (dis)ability, and retention of race categories to measure progress, SARB 2007–2017<sup>38</sup>

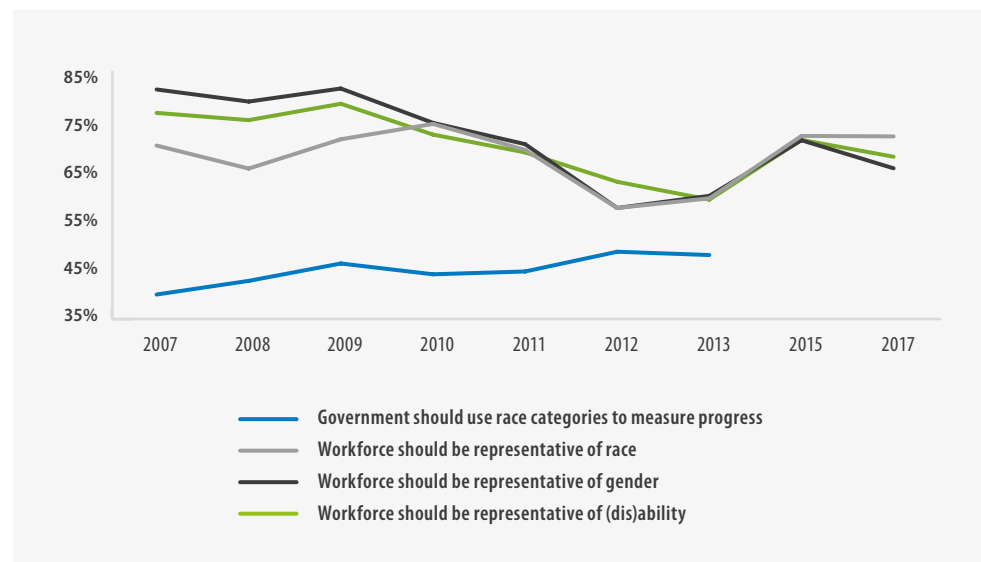


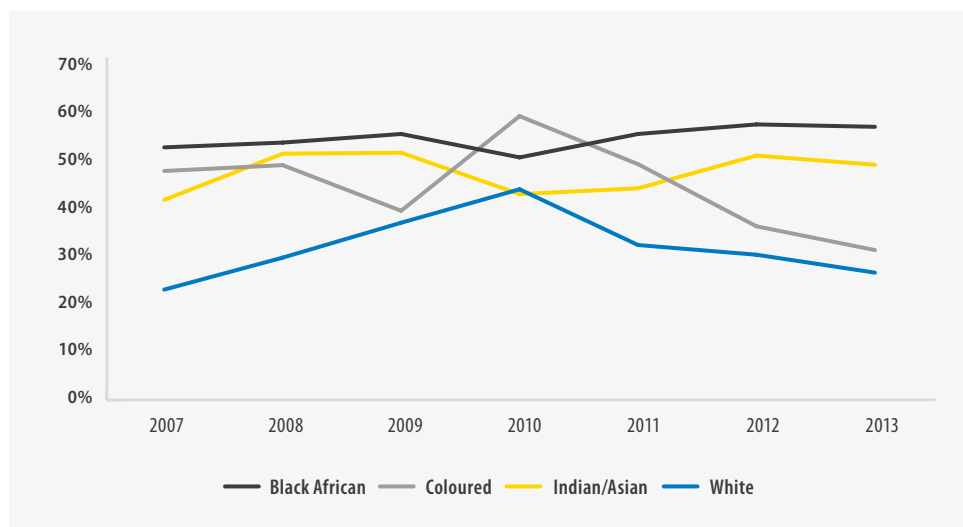
Figure 3 reveals relatively consistent levels of support for a representative workforce. Over time, however, there has been greater agreement about racial representation, especially since 2010, and a decline in agreement about gender and ability representation. The latest data from SARB 2017 reveals that, of all indicators of ‘representation’ in the workforce, South Africans believe racial representation is the most important by a small margin.

However, as Figure 3 shows, despite the increasing consensus on racial representation in the workforce, when respondents are asked about the continued use of racial categories as a measure of affirmative action, the response is significantly less unanimous. SARB data reveals a gradual improvement in levels of agreement with the continued use of racial categories, from 40.1 per cent in 2007 to 48.5 per cent in 2013.<sup>39</sup> Despite the slow increase in agreement on this issue, SARB data has never indicated that a majority of South Africans are in favour of the continued use of race as a measure of transformation.

Thus, a disjuncture in opinion is apparent: Figure 3 demonstrated South Africans’ increasing and overwhelming agreement on the necessity for a racially representative workforce, but it also reveals that South Africans are still divided on the continued use of race categories to measure transformation. In other words, while South Africans see the general need for a racially representative workforce, they are still against the idea of measuring transformation using race categories.

What might account for the disjuncture between the increasing agreement on making the workforce more racially representative and disagreement over the continued use of racial categories as a measure of transformation? When the data is disaggregated by race, support for the retention of race categories to track transformation 'remains highest among those whom equity law and policy aims to target – Black South Africans and those with the lowest living standards – while opposition is highest among White South Africans and those with the highest living standards'.<sup>40</sup> Figure 4 illustrates the degree of agreement with the continued use of race categories by each race group.

**Figure 4:** Percentage agreement on the use of race categories, by historically defined race group, SARB 2007–2013<sup>41</sup>



*In short, there is disagreement among the workforce about the use of racial categories in measuring the impact of government programmes on previously disadvantaged communities, especially between race groups. However, less disagreement between race groups shows in terms of agreement that the workforce should be representative in terms of race.*

Black African South Africans consistently exhibit the greatest agreement with the continuation of race categories as a means of redress, except in 2010, which produced unexpected results across all race groups. Moreover, White South Africans exhibit the lowest levels of agreement with the continuation of race categories, possibly because this group is not intended to benefit from affirmative action policies. Overall, Figure 4 reveals that those who stand to benefit from affirmative action policies (Black Africans) are most likely to agree with the continued use of race categories as a measure of transformation.

In short, there is disagreement among the workforce about the use of racial categories in measuring the impact of government programmes on previously disadvantaged communities, especially between race groups. However, less disagreement between race groups shows in terms of agreement that the workforce should be representative in terms of race. This perhaps shows that there is more agreement with formal equality and transformation outcomes, while there is more disagreement on the way in which to achieve transformation in the workplace.

The workplace thus becomes important for transformation and attitudes towards transformation, as well as for reconciliation and social cohesion. It is a space where interracial interaction, disagreement and agreement on transformation measures,

social capital and social mobility, as well as (dis)trust dynamics and realities may play out. These more-relational experiences are explored in the following section.

## The workplace and its importance for reconciliation and social cohesion

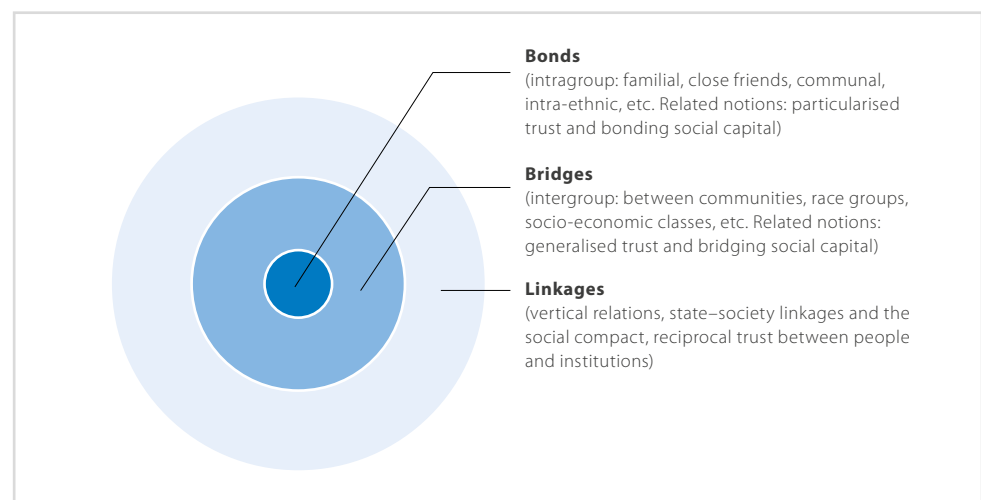
### Interpersonal trust and why it is important for reconciliation and social cohesion processes

*Trust serves as important indicator of the glue that binds a society together, acting as the foundation of the relationships needed to overcome tensions and create an environment favourable to sustainable ties within a society.*

Trust holds implications for social cohesion processes. In general, two approaches are found in literature on social cohesion. Firstly, social cohesion is seen as integral to the reduction of inequalities, disparities and social exclusion. Secondly, social cohesion is understood as the strengthening of society and ties.<sup>42</sup> The latter approach relates closely to 'social capital' theory and places greater emphasis on the beliefs, behaviours and linkages that individuals and societal groupings have in relation to one another. The focus of this approach is to identify the binding relations that hold a society together, which could range from shared identities, norms and values, as well as civic participation and the fostering of networks and relationships. From this perspective, a cohesive society is one that creates communities or networks of shared understanding and has high levels of generalised mutual trust.<sup>43</sup> Trust serves as important indicator of the glue that binds a society together, acting as the foundation of the relationships needed to overcome tensions and create an environment favourable to sustainable ties within a society.<sup>44</sup>

Differentiation can be made between three types of relationships/connections that impact a society's overall cohesiveness (Figure 5): relationships of individuals within the same group (referred to as **bonds**), relationships of individuals across groups (**bridges**), and the relationship of a society (and its respective groups) with the state (**linkages**).

Figure 5: Levels of social cohesion<sup>45</sup>





Both the relationships within a society and the relationship between the state and society contribute towards social cohesion. In South Africa, a divided, post-conflict society continuing to grapple with the legacies of a divisive colonial and apartheid past, inter-group cohesion and the role of a legitimate state in facilitating cohesion are especially important. Using a 'social cohesion triangle',<sup>46</sup> which considers three aspects – trust, identity and inequality – as equally relevant to social cohesion, the SARB's data shows that the dimensions most pertinent to South Africa are (perceived) inequalities and trust – in particular, interpersonal or bridging trust and decreasing institutional trust or linking trust.<sup>47</sup>

The most recent round of the SARB, conducted in 2017, considered interpersonal trust between people belonging to different social groups or affiliations, as shown by Figure 6.

Figure 6: Interpersonal trust, SARB 2017<sup>48</sup>

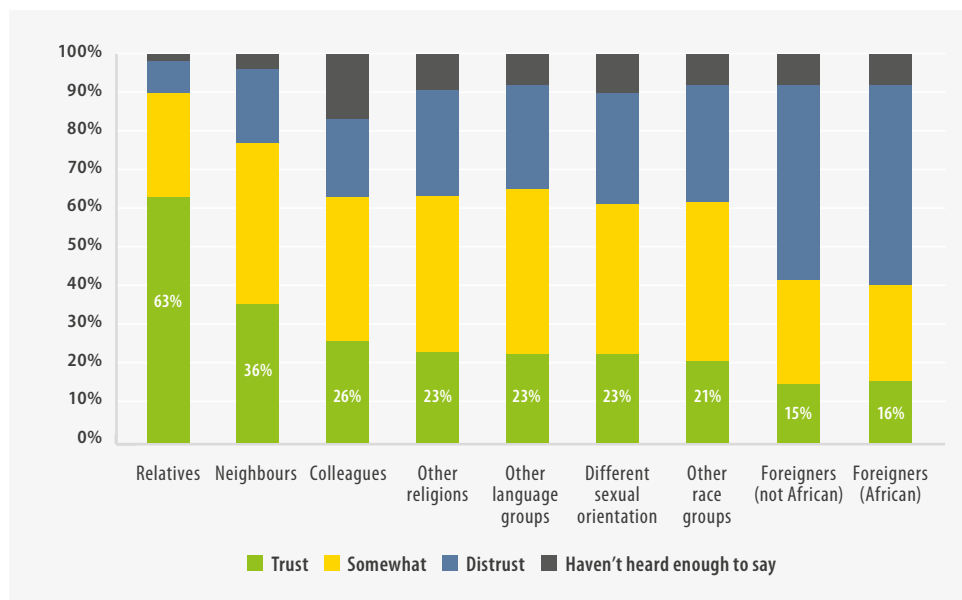


Figure 6 reveals South Africans' strong bonding-level trust and weak bridging-level trust.<sup>49</sup> The former is evidenced by the strong intra-group trusts, with 'relatives' deemed (by far) the most trustworthy group (63.3 per cent) and neighbours a distant second-most trusted group (35.6 per cent). Once South Africans step out of their homes and neighbourhoods, they are significantly less trusting of people. According to levels of 'distrust', respondents indicated their distrust of individuals of other religions (27.4 per cent), language groups (26.6 per cent), sexual orientations (28.9 per cent), and race groups (30.4 per cent). Therefore, the latest SARB findings demonstrate significantly low levels of bridging-level trust across South African society.

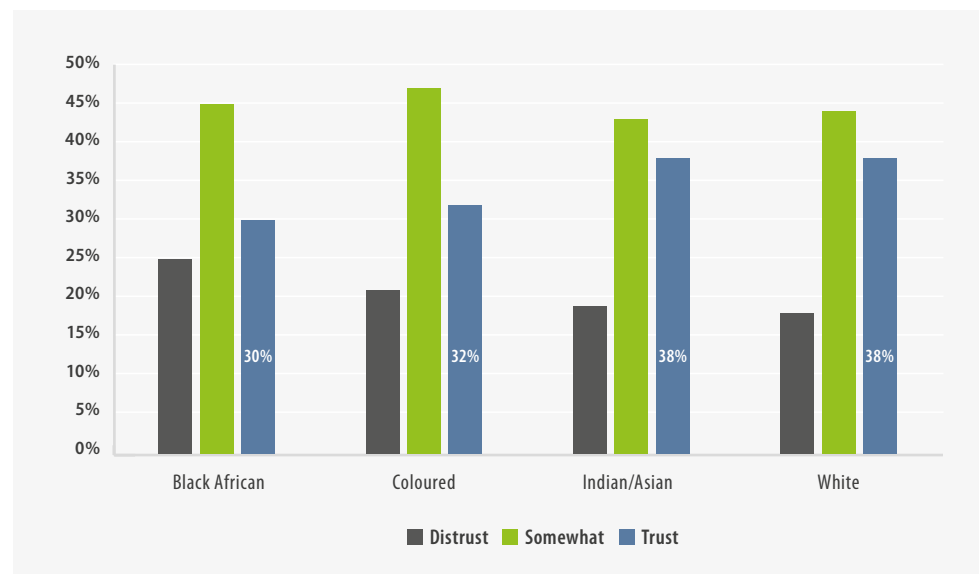
*The latest SARB findings demonstrate significantly low levels of bridging-level trust across South African society.*

Worryingly, bridging-level trust, the trust between groups, and linking-level trust, the trust between society and institutions, are weak in South Africa. High levels of trust at the bonding level is not in itself worrying, but a combination of strong bonding-level trust coupled with weaker bridging-level and linking-level trust can foster insular communities and reproduce distrust across generations.

For the purposes of this report, interpersonal trust between colleagues is of interest. The importance of interpersonal trust in workplaces has primarily been explored and investigated from an organisational theory, human resources or organisational development perspective. The focus of research in this regard is often on how interpersonal trust in the workplace relates to productivity and efficiency.<sup>50</sup> The importance of interpersonal trust in the workplace, however, has not often been explored in terms of its importance for reconciliation and social cohesion processes.

Given the historical segregation of work and study spaces, coupled with current efforts for transformation in the workforce, the workplace is a space where bridging-level cohesion can happen between race groups. Figure 7 demonstrates South Africans' low levels of inter-collegial trust by race.

**Figure 7: Trust in colleagues, by race, SARB 2017<sup>51</sup>**



*Although workplaces are spaces where values and experiences might produce spaces for contestation, they are also possible spaces for bridging-level cohesion and inter-group contact.*

Figure 7 shows that White respondents exhibit the lowest levels of distrust and highest levels of trust towards colleagues, while the lowest levels of trust and highest levels of distrust are exhibited by Black African respondents. Considering that workplaces, especially in professional environments, have typically been the exclusive preserve of White workers, Black colleagues may feel isolated from their colleagues or the institutional framework of the office.<sup>52</sup> This may hold implications for organisational objectives, such as productivity, well-being and efficiency, but also for interracial interaction in the workplace.<sup>53</sup>

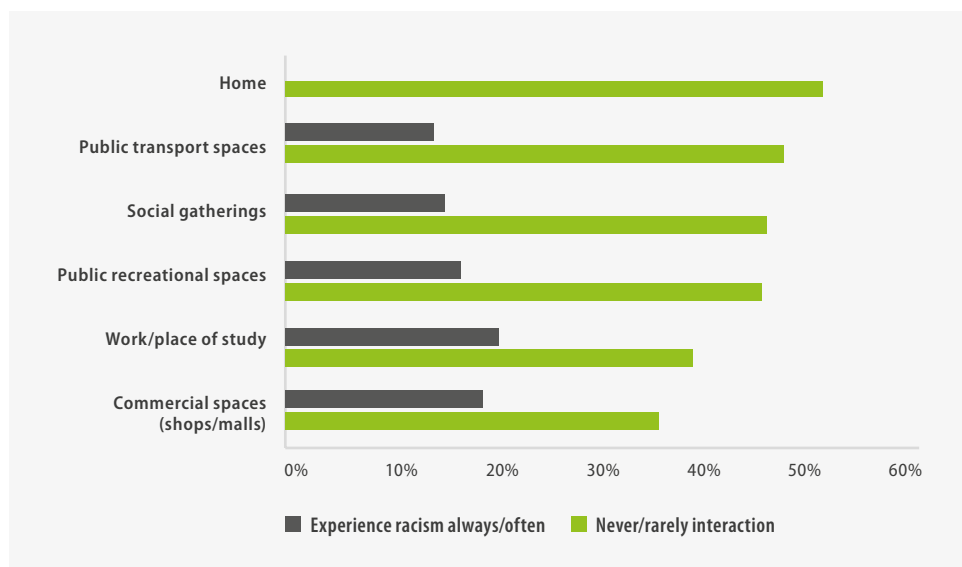
## Interracial interaction and the workplace

Although workplaces are spaces where values and experiences might produce spaces for contestation, they are also possible spaces for bridging-level cohesion and inter-group contact. Workplaces therefore become important to both social cohesion and reconciliation processes. The SARB avers that progress towards reconciliation in South Africa cannot take place without opportunities for, and willingness to engage in, meaningful connection and interaction between different race groups. Contact between different racial groups has been measured by the

SARB since its inception. The measure is informed by social psychology theory related to the contact hypothesis attributed to Gordon W. Allport.<sup>54</sup> Allport posits that the most effective way to reduce prejudice between groups is through interpersonal contact under the correct conditions, namely: i) equal status; ii) intergroup cooperation; iii) common goals; and iv) support provided by social and institutional authorities. Evidence has shown positive outcomes (such as peace and accord) from intergroup contact – which may apply to both minority and majority groups. In some instances, prejudice was reduced even without the four conditions framed by Allport. There is, however, also a growing awareness of a possible ‘paradoxical’ effect of inter-group contact – that is, increased contact may also reinforce previously held stereotypes and prejudices and thus increase, rather than decrease, ingroup–outgroup distinctions and enmity.

SARB data reveals that interracial contact differs significantly in private versus public spaces. As Figure 8 shows, the highest degree of interracial interaction occurs in commercial spaces, such as malls or shops, and work and study places, with only 36.1 per cent of South Africans reporting that they rarely or never interact with people from other race groups in commercial spaces and 39.4 per cent reporting the same for work and study places.

**Figure 8:** Frequency of interracial interaction and experiences of racism in various spaces, SARB 2017<sup>55,56</sup>

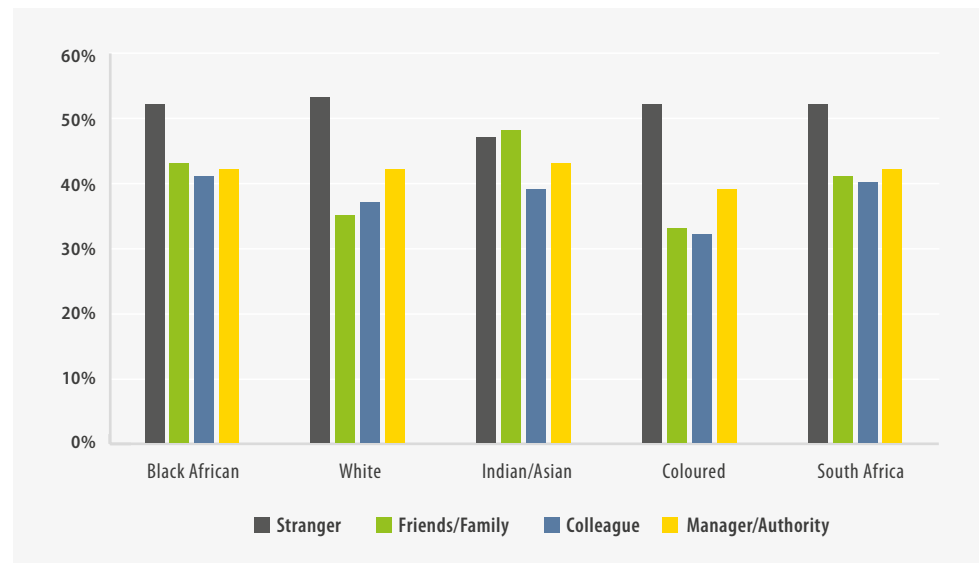


However, these two spaces are also where South Africans report experiencing racism the most often. The 2017 SARB survey asks respondents how frequently they experience racism in their daily lives, specifically making reference to various spaces where interracial contact may occur. Two in every ten (20.7 per cent of) South Africans reported that racism affects their daily lives ‘always’ or ‘often’ in the workplace or place of study. This is also the space where Black African, White and Indian respondents reported experiencing the most racism.

Respondents to the 2017 SARB were asked whether they agree about the difficulty of confronting specific people when they act in a racist manner (Figure 9). The

majority of respondents (52.1 per cent) found it more difficult to confront strangers who behaved in a racist manner than acquaintances. Respondents found it least difficult to confront racist behaviour and talk from a colleague, with 39.6 per cent agreeing that it is difficult to confront such behaviour in a colleague. However, more South Africans (41.8 per cent) would find it difficult to confront such behaviour from a person in authority, or a superior, at work. When disaggregating the latter finding, there is not much difference between race groups.

**Figure 9: Percentage agreement that it is difficult to confront racist behaviour or talk, SARB 2017<sup>57</sup>**



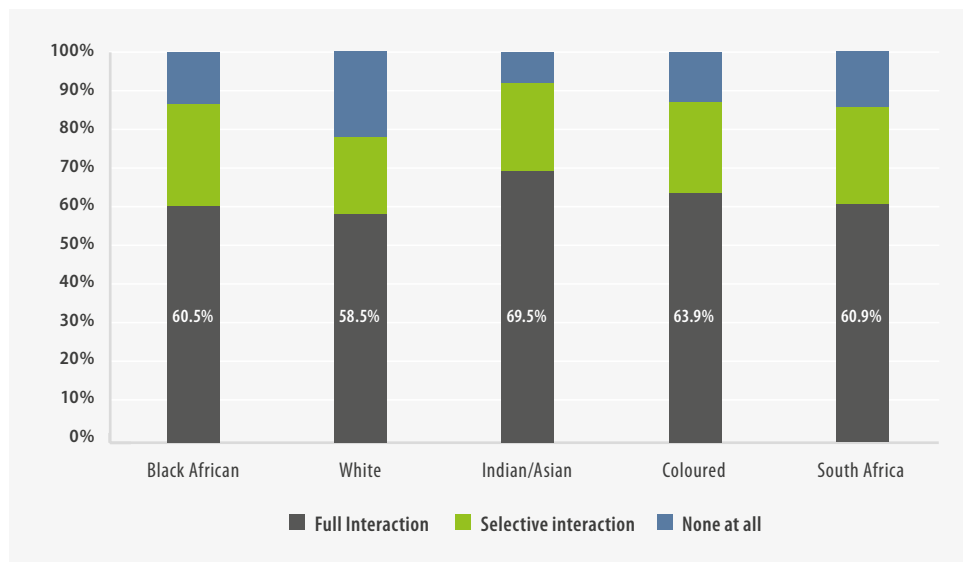
*If prejudices are to be overcome and trust built in the spaces where interracial interaction happens, it is imperative that contact in workplaces helps to overcome and address prejudices, rather than creates more distrust and enmity.*

This shows the importance of having sufficient human resources processes in place in workplaces to ensure that channels for communicating and addressing such behaviour – both by peers and those in positions of authority – can be accessed and utilised. Studies have shown that when certain groups feel isolated by other groups, they respond by succumbing to strong intra-group bonds, minimising the opportunity for inter-group trust.<sup>58</sup> Resolving such tensions in a constructive manner benefits not only the organisation itself, but also society at large. If prejudices are to be overcome and trust built in the spaces where interracial interaction happens, it is imperative that contact in workplaces helps to overcome and address prejudices, rather than creates more distrust and enmity.

The importance of managing relationships between managers and employees requires specific mention. Not only did respondents indicate that it is more difficult to address racist behaviour by a person in authority, but that prejudices in terms of taking instructions from people from other race groups add further complexity to the workplace. When asked whether respondents approve of integration between race groups in various ways, 55 per cent of South Africans indicated approval for having to work for, and taking instructions from, a person from a different race group. In this regard, disaggregation shows that White respondents are much less approving than other groups, with only 48.4 per cent approving, in comparison with 55 per cent for Black African respondents, 59.6 per cent for Coloured respondents and 66.3 per cent for Indian respondents.<sup>59</sup>

Despite experiences of racism, the complexities of overcoming prejudices and relatively low levels of trust, the majority of South Africans remain open to interaction with people from ‘other race groups’ (Figure 10), with 60.9 per cent of South Africans open to interaction in all spaces. The majority of South Africans – across historically defined race groups – are open to more interaction.

**Figure 10:** Percentage South Africans open to more interaction with people from ‘other race groups’, by race, SARB 2017<sup>60</sup>



*The latest SARB findings demonstrate significantly low levels of bridging-level trust across South African society.*

When asked what prevents respondents from interacting with people from ‘other race groups’, three in ten (30.3 per cent of) South Africans attest that nothing prevents them from having more interaction with people from other race groups (Table 1). For 16.9 per cent of respondents, language barriers represent the greatest obstacle, followed by confidence (15.3 per cent). Only 7.4 per cent of South Africans cite negative prior experiences, and only 6.4 per cent cite their unwillingness to talk and engage, as the primary reason for not interacting with people from other race groups. Confidence manifests as a barrier to interracial interaction, as well as a key consideration in terms of social mobility (as explored in the following section).

Table 1: Barriers to interaction with other race groups, SARB 2017 <sup>61</sup>					
	Black African %	White %	Indian/Asian %	Coloured %	South African %
Nothing prevents me	27.2	47.5	44.0	33.7	30.3
Language barriers	15.6	14.8	21.5	28.1	16.9
Your confidence	17.5	7.6	6.7	7.3	15.3
Fear/anxiety	8.8	4.7	7.0	5.1	8.0
No common ground	7.9	7.3	5.9	8.8	7.9
Opportunities to engage	8.0	7.9	2.1	7.6	7.8
Negative prior experiences	8.1	4.9	7.8	4.0	7.4
Your willingness to talk/engage	6.8	5.3	4.9	5.4	6.4

The workplace thus becomes a space of both challenges and opportunities in terms of interracial interaction and inter-group trust building. Its importance for social cohesiveness lies at the level of inter-group interaction, or the bridging level of social cohesiveness, as referred to earlier. This level is closely associated with bridging social capital – of importance for social cohesion, but also for social mobility, as we see in the following section.

## Bridging social capital and social mobility

*The workplace thus becomes a space of both challenges and opportunities in terms of interracial interaction and inter-group trust building. Its importance for social cohesiveness lies at the level of inter-group interaction, or the bridging level of social cohesiveness, as referred to earlier.*

The bridging level of social cohesion is closely related to the notion of social capital. Initially, empirical and theoretical analysis using social capital focused mostly on interactions in families and communities. However, considering the importance of social capital to subjective well-being, research in this field soon branched out to consider the importance of social capital in the workplace as well. Social capital in workplaces may also have a role to play in South African society broadly, given its importance as a factor for social mobility.

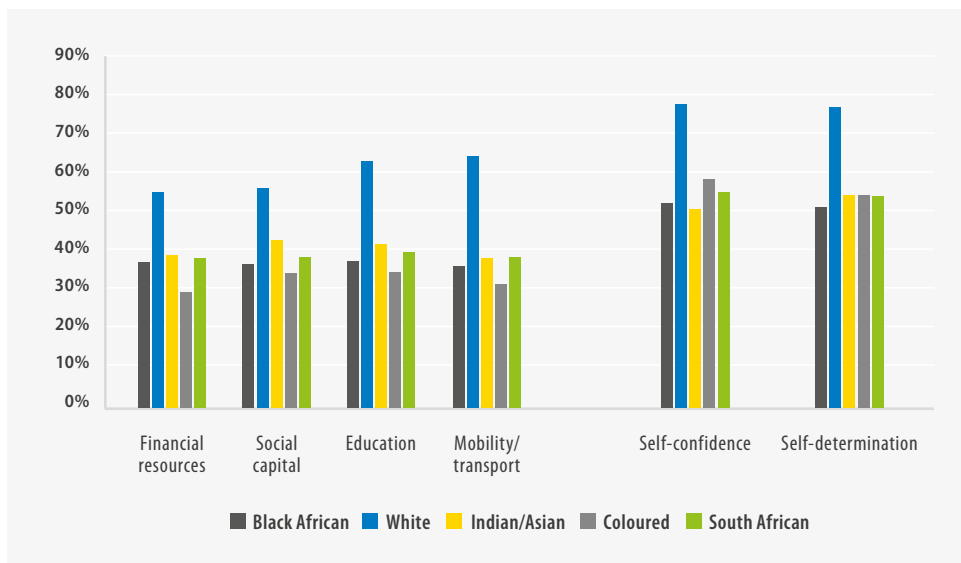
Social capital is one of the key resources considered as part of social mobility. Social mobility (often also seen as equality of opportunity) can be defined as the capacity of an individual to achieve a better economic and/or social position for himself or herself (and his or her family) through hard work.<sup>62</sup> Starting points matter in the pursuit of equal outcomes; hence, access to resources, services and opportunities is an important determinant of the extent to which people can fulfil their own potential.<sup>63</sup> Social mobility resources that are often considered as part of social mobility include education, social capital and financial capital. Access to resources is of particular relevance to the South African context. These not only hold implications for political and social cohesion, but also allow for a better understanding of the psychological state of individuals.<sup>64</sup> Of particular relevance to the South African context are perceptions of mobility (and inequalities), which contain implications for political and social cohesion, and allow for understanding of the psychological state of individuals with regard to social mobility (and not only their objective conditions, from which the former can be dissociated).

Understanding socio-economic realities as marked by multiple layers of access and advantage, and understanding barriers and aids to social mobility as experienced by individuals, offer vital perspectives that can inform efforts to address inequalities in South Africa's changing economic and political environment. This requires understanding perceived access to external and internal resources. To this end, the 2015 and 2017 SARB surveys considered the goals that respondents have in their own lives, and whether they feel that they have access to i) the financial resources; ii) the groups of people; iii) the education; and iv) the mobility to achieve their goals. The 2017 SARB considered whether South Africans feel that they have access to the more tangible resources that they need to reach their goals, as well as the psychological resources. In this regard, Rotter's conceptualisation of the locus of control of reinforcement (hereafter just referred to as locus of control) is applied.<sup>65</sup> This concept is applied in the SARB to understand whether South Africans believe they have the internal reinforcements to reach their goals. In this regard,

respondents were asked whether they feel they have the self-confidence and the self-determination they need to achieve their goals.

Figure 11 shows that four in ten South Africans believe that they have access to the financial resources (38.6 per cent), social capital (38.8 per cent), education (40.0 per cent), and transport (38.8 per cent) they need in order to achieve their personal goals. More than half of the population believe they have the self-confidence (55.5 per cent) and self-determination (54.5 per cent) that is needed to achieve their personal goals. More South Africans thus report having access to the internal resources than to the external resources required to reach their own goals. Clear differences are evident in terms of the proportion of White respondents, indicating that they have access to the external and internal resources required to reach their own goals in comparison with Black African, Indian and Coloured respondents. Most notably, although more than half of the respondents from all groups report having the internal resources to reach their own goals, this proportion is much higher for White respondents, with more than three in four from this group reporting that they have the internal resources required. Much work thus lies ahead in finding ways to improve access to the external resources South Africans need to reach their own goals, but also in the realm of psychology to enable and support social mobility.

**Figure 11:** Percentage agreement to having access to social mobility resources, by race, SARB 2017<sup>66</sup>



*Much work thus lies ahead in finding ways to improve access to the external resources South Africans need to reach their own goals, but also in the realm of psychology to enable and support social mobility.*

## Conclusion: The workplace, reconciliation and social cohesion

The findings presented as part of this report pose both challenges and opportunities for social cohesion processes. Almost three decades since the advent of democracy in South Africa, the need for transformation and the need to address inequality is still evident. Several policies have been put in place, but the achievement of transformation appears to be slow. In addition, high inequality and poverty levels continue to plague society and affect reconciliation and social cohesion processes.

Amid such realities, work (and study) places pose both challenges and opportunities to social cohesion and reconciliation processes. Workplaces are where South Africans report having the most interaction with people from 'other' race groups, although this is also where they experience the most racism. More South Africans may address racist behaviour as exhibited by a colleague, rather than someone in a more authoritative position (such as a manager).

This is coupled with findings that some South Africans do not approve of taking instructions from a person from a race group that they find difficult to associate with, as well as relatively low levels of interpersonal trust – both in terms of trust in colleagues and people from 'other race groups'. In addition, differences in terms of agreement with the use of racial categories to track or measure transformation is evident – with White respondents (who are not set to benefit from affirmative action measures, for example) agreeing with such measurement the least.

At the same time, the majority of South Africans agree with the importance of transformational outcomes in that most agree that the workforce should be representative in terms of race, gender and disability – showing that there is widespread support for formal equality (not necessary substantive equality). The majority of South Africans also remain open to interaction with people from other race groups and all spaces (public and private), citing confidence and language as the main barriers to interaction.

As mentioned, inter-group interaction and contact in the workplace take place at the bridging level of social cohesiveness. This is also closely associated with bridging-level social capital – presenting opportunities for social mobility as part of social cohesion processes, as social capital is regarded as a social mobility resource. Inequality, both objectively measured and perceived, has an impact on social cohesion and inter-group interaction. Social mobility – or equality of opportunities – is one aspect of inequality that helps us understand the multiple layers of access and non-access experienced by South Africans. However, it is not only external resources such as transport, finance, education and social capital that are of importance in this regard, but also internal resources – such as self-confidence and self-determination. In addition, it is important that social capital exists not only on the bonding level, but also as bridging-level social capital, between groups, showing the importance of the workplace as a place where people from various groups meet and interact, as well as potentially building such capital.



## Endnotes

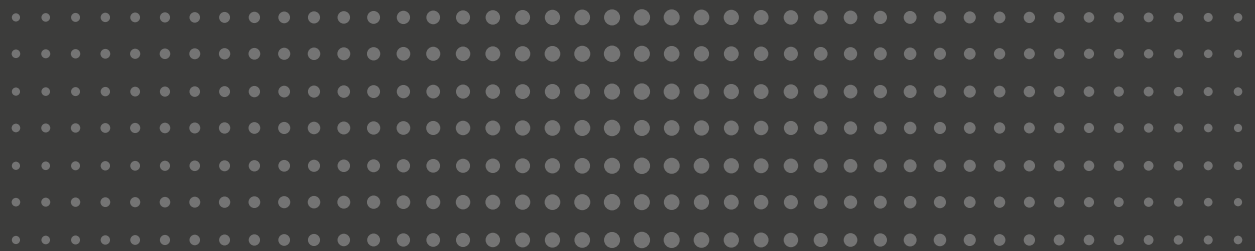
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- 39 Note: This question was not asked in surveys subsequent to 2013.
- 40 Lefko-Everett, 2012: 80.
- 41 Author's analysis of SARB data for the years indicated. Question asked: 'The use of racial categories must be retained to measure the impact of government programmes for previously disadvantaged communities'. Responses categories included: 'Strongly agree' and "Agree" – combined to form 'Agree' in Figure 4; 'Neutral'/'Uncertain'; 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree'. 'Don't know' was not read out as a response category. 'Don't know' responses were included in the aggregated were longitudinal analysis to capture national sentiment. 'Don't know' responses were, however, excluded from all disaggregated analyses on the same questions to focus on the attitudes of those who had a response to the question.
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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000 by officials who worked in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy are taken into account and utilised in advancing the interests of national reconciliation across Africa. The IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. The IJR is based in Cape Town, South Africa. For more information, visit <http://www.ijr.org.za>, and for comments or enquiries contact [info@ijr.org.za](mailto:info@ijr.org.za).



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