

**Press
Release**
For immediate release
9 February 2015



Media Contact: Mienke Steytler

Tel: 011-482-7221 ext. 2003

Email: mienke@sairr.org.za

Trade unions lose control of the workshop floor

Fewer than one in five South Africans who are economically active are choosing to join trade unions. Registered union membership declined by 26% between 1994 and 2014. This is according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in Johannesburg.

The *Survey* is the annual yearbook on all social, economic, and political aspects of South Africa that the IRR has been publishing since 1946.

Key trends included that:

- registered union membership as a proportion of total employment decreased by 20% between 1994 and 2014;
- the number of registered trade unions decreased by 14% between 1994 and 2014; and
- trade union membership declined in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail trade, as well as private households between 2000 and 2014.

IRR analyst Boitumelo Sethlatswe said that declining trade union membership indicated that unions were struggling to find relevance and attract membership among young workers. This, coupled with tensions in the largest trade union federation Cosatu, provides the best environment for much needed reforms in the industrial relations landscape.

“Dissolution of the tripartite alliance and breaking down the influence of Cosatu will allow for a more competitive labour environment, which will benefit not only workers but also the economy as a whole,” added Ms Sethlatswe.

Ends.