

## Racism tops SA human rights violations

Sarah Smit

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According to the report, complaints relating to healthcare, food, water and social security were second to complaints made on the grounds of equality rights violations. (Graphic: John McCann/M&G)

Racism and infringements of socio-economic rights were the most reported human rights violations in South Africa for the 2016/2017 year. This is according to a South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) report released on Monday.

The trend analysis report, which was released on Monday to coincide with International Human Rights Day, found that over the past five years there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints received by the SAHRC regarding healthcare, food, water and social security and equality.

The report provides an overview of complaints trends for the financial year April 1 2016 to March 31 2017. It also indicates changes over that last five years.

“The 2016/17 figures illustrate a complete shift in the hierarchy of complaints,” the report says — explaining that though the top five rights violations remained the same over the past five years, there has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints regarding just administrative action, labour relations and arrests.

According to the report, complaints relating to healthcare, food, water and social security were second to complaints made on the grounds of equality rights violations.

“Lack of access to socio-economic rights provides the clearest reflection of the levels of systemic poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa and demonstrates the persistent recurrence of the cycle of poverty,” says the report.

Between 2014/15 and 2015/16, equality complaints jumped from 493 to 749, representing an increase of 34%.

The number dropped marginally in 2016/17 to 705, the report says.

The report shows that in the 2016/17 year, race, disability, and ethnic or social origin continue to be the highest grounds of equality related complaints reported to the SAHRC.

Almost all complaints related to equality rights violations — with the exception of disability-related complaints — have decreased in number, the report says.

The report indicates that disability-related complaints appear to be on an upward trajectory.

According to the report, race-based discrimination presents the greatest challenge to the SAHRC.

“The public exposure of many racist incidents can be attributed to the growing popularity and use of various social media platforms (particularly Facebook and Twitter). In addition, people use social media as a platform to express racism,” the report says, adding that the use of the “k” word is endemic.

The SAHRC has fielded a number of highly publicised complaints of racism in recent years.

The infamous [Vicki Momberg](#) saga saw the estate agent sentenced to three years in jail for crimen injuria. Momberg was caught on video verbally abusing a black policeman. She used the “k” word repeatedly during her tirade against men who were trying to assist.

More recently, [Adam Catzavelos](#) became the subject of an SAHRC investigation after a 20-second video clip of him made the rounds on social media in August. In the clip, he described an idyllic beach as “heaven on earth” because there was “not one k\*\*\*\*r in sight”.

In September, a video of former Durban councillor Kessie Nair calling President Cyril Ramaphosa the “k” word went viral on social media. The commission’s KwaZulu-Natal provincial office instituted an own initiative investigation into the matter.

Racism is “systemic and racist attitudes remain largely unchanged”, says the report. “For many poor black people, for example, farm and domestic workers, in South Africa, racism is a part of the daily fabric of their lives, and they remain vulnerable to racist treatment and name calling, and race-based attacks.”