

SASSA MEDIA STATEMENT

To: All Media

25 May 2020

Level 3 Lockdown Announcement Enables Faster Payment Of Covid-19 Grants

Sunday's announcement by His Excellency President Matamela Ramaphosa in response to the Corona virus epidemic brings much needed hope to the country. It also enables SASSA to accelerate the pace of paying out the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant. In terms of the move to level 3 of the lockdown, government services will commence full reopening from 01 June 2020. At the moment SASSA is operating with a third of its staff during level 4 and a move to level 3 will increase human resource capacity drastically so that payments are made quicker than it is the case currently.

Much progress has been made in preparing for the payment of large numbers of the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grants. SASSA started using WhatsApp for applications but had to move to other platforms like the srd.sassa.gov.za website and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD). This was after the WhatsApp system was flooded with unprecedented numbers of applications per hour, which it struggled to cope with. The situation was also further challenged by the fact that applicants tried to upload supporting documents through the various platforms, despite this not being necessary. All these application channels have been stabilised and the application process is now significantly smoother.

After increasing capacity of the application channels, SASSA moved swiftly to testing the payment side of its system. A sample of 10 beneficiaries was used to test the efficacy of the payment mechanism and 9 were successfully paid. One applicant had captured his banking details incorrectly. This has since been corrected. This payment test should be seen for what it is. Just under 5 million applications have been received and this figure includes duplications, incomplete and invalid applications. Some applicants were sent messages to provide banking details and they are requested to respond as quickly so that they can be paid before month end.

Unbanked applicants will be paid through money send using an ATM of their choice. SASSA will finalise contracting for this facility with the banks today so that such payments can be made this week. Beneficiaries can also open accounts at their nearest post office.

It was important for SASSA to only start paying out this grant after tight systems have been established and tested to avoid wasteful expenditure and fraud. It has not been as easy as it has been made out to be in media circles due to the dependencies along the value chain

The mammoth task of ensuring that the correct and deserving individuals are paid has started in earnest. This process involved intense negotiations with institutions in the value chain and this unfortunately accounted for the delays that were encountered. These delays proved to be worth it, given the number of applicants that could be

excluded during the process as they are either in receipt of social grants or UIF – two factors which expressly disqualify applicants from receiving this grant.

SASSA CEO Totsie Memela however extended an unreserved apology to those inconvenienced by the slower than expected process. “We received just under 5 million applications for this new grant and we had to compare information provided by applicants with other government and private databases to ensure that people with an income and recipients of other social grants are not included in these applications. In addition, we had to remove duplicated and incomplete applications which account for nearly 50% of all applications received. Up to now, we have eliminated a number of undeserving applicants and this has saved the Fiscus close to R14 million which could have sky-rocketed to over R81 million by October. As soon as the vetting of applications is completed, the payments will start rolling in at an even faster pace”.

Citizens are reminded that no applications for the special COVID-19 relief grant will be taken at SASSA offices because only electronic applications are accepted. In order to comply with the restrictions on services during level 4 of the lockdown, SASSA local offices have specific dates on which they attend to selected grants. On Mondays and Tuesdays local offices strictly attend to applications for Old Age Grants. On Wednesdays and Thursdays local offices strictly attend to applications for Child Support Grants and foster child grants. Fridays are reserved for admin purposes as well as to deal with referred cases from previous days.

Issued on behalf of SASSA

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