



## **SOCIAL CLUSTER MEDIA BRIEFING STATEMENT OUTLINING THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE DISASTER EMANATING FROM THE FLOODS IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

28 APRIL 2022

Good afternoon and thank you for your time.

We meet under difficult circumstances in our country. We have all witnessed the disaster that has occurred in the KwaZulu-Natal province. It has affected lives and livelihoods in manner never seen before. Families have lost their loved ones and there is a lot of grief at the moment. It is for that reason that we would like to start by conveying our deepest condolences to all the affected persons and their families.

It is worth noting that sometimes services are disrupted in such disasters and we are forced to then activate alternative means to support recipients.

In the case of KZN only one SASSA Office has been partially damaged with services continuing.

The Ministers in the cluster have at various times this week visited different parts of the provinces in the affected areas to assess the damage caused and to seek ways of assisting those in need. We all sought to respond to provide relief to families in distress.

The Department of Social Development Portfolio has formed part of and participate in the Local, Provincial JOCs and National Joint Flood Coordinating Committee, since inception of the floods. The priority is placed on providing immediate support to women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Government working in collaboration with other stakeholders executed its role in the provision of humanitarian relief and as such has established 98 shelters where over 8 400 people are housed in community halls, religious facilities, and other temporary structures within communities. The majority of the people housed in shelters are women (4700) children under ten years (1700) older persons (1000) with 217 people with disabilities.

Working with the Province and Local Municipalities, where shelters are identified, the DSD teams have been providing cooked meals, blankets and dignity packs, (working with NPOs, Churches, Corporates and Committee Members) to displaced individuals Our Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs) have also been providing this support on a daily basis. Specific focus has been on children who have been displaced from schools and those who have lost family members or belongings.

The Department of Social Development cadres of Social Services Professionals comprising of Social Workers, Auxiliary Social Workers and Community Development Practitioners were at the centre of assisting all affected communities, individuals and households providing the needed services. A comprehensive assessment of each community, household and individuals were conducted and all affected were provided with much needed counselling, de-briefing, water, food, mattresses, blankets and some families were re-integrated. Those that lost their loved one were also provided funeral arrangements and continuous counselling. All individuals and families that were affected were reached for these services.

The teams have been providing much needed psychosocial support and debriefings with families and individuals in affected communities – this has been in community halls where some citizens are housed as well as in individual households. Social Workers have reached over 15 983 individuals in this regard, and these services are ongoing.

SASSA has provided Social Relief Distress (SRD) to more than 3 000 individuals to the tune of almost R 5 million, and purchased uniforms for learners to the value of R372 000 targeting flood victims in eThekweni and iLembe Districts.

The DSD National and Provincial Departments have been engaging with corporates and stakeholders to provide support in the form of urgent humanitarian relief for affected areas and has 2 dedicated storage facilities in Pietermaritzburg and Dube Trade Port in Durban; Many organisations, churches and community members have answered the call and provided support in a variety of forms including cash, food, clothes, sanitary towels to mention a few. Government also received donations and pledges from various countries through their embassies, which is welcomed with much appreciation.

Minister Lindiwe Zulu has on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April visited Ndwedwe (Ward 15 and 17) and Mandeni Local Municipalities in iLembe District to engage with communities and provide SRD and support. Similarly the Deputy Minister, Henrietta Bogopane-Zulu, visited Kwa-Nkosi Ngcobo and eMaqadini.

A total of 2 713 people have been affected in Eastern Cape in the OR Tambo and Alfred Nzo districts. Assistance in the form of social relief of distress is being provided to the affected families.

In Western Cape, SASSA continues to provide support to the more than 765 people affected by the fire in Langa as well as the 30 people affected in Gugulethu. Support in the form of hot meals, blankets, mattresses and dignity packs have been provided.

Although the focus of today's briefing is meant to be our government response to the disaster, we thought it important to also include some input on the much anticipated COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant of R350. Having reviewed some of the media comments over weekend, we felt that it is important to add it to this press briefing to clarify and address some of the concerns that have been expressed.

## Social Relief of Distress Grant

During his State of the Nation Address, the President announced that the R350 Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant will be extended for the period of a year, to March 2023. This is "to ensure that no person in this country has to endure the pain and indignity of hunger."

As a poverty alleviation measure, the grant has proven to be one of the key essential components of government's response to intervene against extreme poverty and hunger faced by poor and unemployed South Africans between the ages of 18 and 60 years.

The Department anticipated the end to the National State of Disaster and embarked on developing the regulatory framework for the payment of the COVID-19 SRD within the legal provisions of the Social Assistance legislative framework. In February this year, the Department published the regulations for public comments. We know that we reduced this period for public comments a bit to accommodate the shortened time period we had. We wish to thank all the contributors and participants for their fruitful inputs and helpful comments which went a long way to enhance the regulations.

Unfortunately, the process for developing regulations took longer than expected, but we have now finally come to the end of this process and proclaimed the regulations on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2022. The application portal on the SASSA website was opened at 12 am on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2022. We are a bit concerned that just under 7 million applications have been received as we were hoping to receive at least 12 million applications by the end of the month. We'd thus like to encourage everyone who needs the grant to apply within the remaining few days of the month. Our systems have been coping very well with the applications thus far, as we've been receiving about 1 million applications per day, which is about double the volumes we've seen in the previous iterations.

Prospective applications can apply using the SASSA website at <https://srd.sassa.gov.za>

### *Implementation matters*

With regards to implementation, we have made every attempt to ensure that SASSA is able to use the same infrastructure and processes that we had already established, to ensure that we can very quickly begin to provide the much needed grant, even as we made some adjustments in terms of the new regulations.

Firstly many people want to know whether or not they should reapply for the COVID SRD. Given that this form of COVID SRD will now be provided for within a new legislative

framework, and that additional qualifying and assessment criteria have been added, those in need of assistance will need to apply for the grant, or reapply if they were already receiving the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress provided for under the disaster management framework. Fortunately we will be retaining our digital platforms for the application process. The process is very simple and easily accessible and not dependent on access to a SASSA office or another human being. Hence millions of people can apply in very short space of time.

All applicants are reminded that they will be considered for the Grant from the month in which the application is lodged, meaning all applications lodged in April will be considered as from April. Hence it's important that applicants, do not delay in getting their April applications in.

It is also important to note that SRD is a short term intervention as it targets people who are within employable ages. While we know that our unemployment figures remain stubbornly high, we also know that job churn, especially in the lower income segments, is high. Thus it remains important to have regular engagement and assessments to ensure that the limited funds that were availed to us go to those most in need. To this extent we've also introduced 3 month reconfirmations where SASSA will engage directly, through their digital platforms, for clients to reconfirm that they still need the grant.

As with the previous iteration, data checks will be conducted every single month, to ensure that the applicant meets all the qualifying criteria for this grant.

We've introduced for the first time a proxy threshold for the main application of the COVID-19 SRD. Previously we've only tested incomes for those applicants who were rejected, and requested reconsideration of the decision not to award the grant, which was limited to about 1 million or so people. Now we will test everyone, which will most likely be more than 15 million people. We expect that this new mechanism will improve our targeting of the grant to the most vulnerable, and that it will also enable more people who previously were declined due to mismatched data from other institutions, to more readily access the grant.

Survey data suggest that there are more than 13 million people with no income and more than 18 million people below the food poverty line in this group. Hence if we set the threshold at "no income" we would already be over our budget which only caters for 10.5 million people

per month. However in practice we do believe the number is much lower, and that a zero income threshold would result in less than 10.5 million being able to access the SRD. However a food poverty line threshold is likely to result in much more than 10.5 million people qualifying for the grant. Hence we opted for the lower threshold of R350, which we will monitor and revise as needed based on the uptake and budget we have available.

With regard to the appeals process, we wish to first acknowledge the frustration of those applicants who lodged applications for reconsiderations for the period from August 2021 to March 2022, and are still awaiting the outcome. The long delay has been the result of some approvals that we needed to obtain in order to finalise our contracts with the banks. SASSA will still attend to these outstanding reconsiderations as soon as these approvals are obtained and the contracts with the banks are in place. We wish to assure everyone who has lodged a request for reconsideration that they will be advised of the outcome once these have been addressed.

With respect to this new iteration of the COVID-19 SRD, the Department will be dealing with the appeals directly through the Independent Tribunal for Social Assistance, in line with the new legislative provisions that will come into effect this year. Since the application process will still be electronic, the appeals process will also be electronic to enable a seamless transition from the old to the new system, and the Department is currently setting up a digital process to accommodate this.

I am appealing to all South Africans in need of the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress to embrace this opportunity and apply. There are still 3 days left to the end of the month, our applications channels are available 24 hours a day and can handle very high volumes. SASSA's call center will be opened to assist and process enquiries. They can be reached at 0800 60 10 11

## **WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Women, youth and persons with disabilities as particularly vulnerable groups will be most impacted by this shortage, in their homes and in their businesses.

The Department Women, youth and persons with disabilities is facilitating the role out of Women's Economic Assembly (WECONA) to provinces. KZN is a priority. WECONA

Executive is developing a programme of action in an effort to enlist assistance to women and children who are victims of the floods.

A donation of shipping containers has been secured from Transnet and we will work with Solidarity Fund and National Empowerment Fund on how best to allocate them to cater to women and children in need of shelter services.

Issues of school infrastructure also come to the fore with respect to water supply, sanitation and hygiene. This situation is exacerbated by the floods in terms of access to water, sanitation and pads.

We are also going to contribute sanitary pads to KZN to assist flood victims. Plans are advanced in terms of ensuring that the donation reaches displaced and deserving women and girls affected by the floods, working closely with the department of social development to ensure effective distribution in this regard.

A distribution mechanism will be put in place to ensure women in need to get access to these personal hygiene products.

As the department, through the Office of the Premier in KZN, we will be monitoring accessibility of services to women who have been displaced, and facilitate interventions where there are needs identified.

We will also monitor the safety of women and girls at shelters for displaced persons to ensure incidents of GBVF are prevented.

The floods have affected recreational facilities such as libraries, sport fields, arts and entertainment centres and most of all lives. The damage to the various structures is still being assessed. We wish to report that Nathi Majola a music producer from Pinetwon (Nazareth) lost his father and brother washed away by the floods and the mother later passed away in hospital. He is homeless and no belongings, there hasn't been any contact of Government. We convey our heartfelt condolences to him and his family. The Department of Sport, Arts and Culture will facilitate support for him and other in a similar situation.

Several artists reported to have homes and assets water and mud damaged. More information is being obtained in this regard.

## **HEALTH**

A total of 66 health facilities were affected by the heavy downpour resulting in mainly roof leaks and flooding. The breakdown of affected facilities per district is as follows: eThekweni 24, Ugu 15, uMgungundlovu, 9, iLembe 8 and King Cetshwayo 2. There has been minimal disruption to health care services in the most affected districts. The cost estimate for the repairs is in the region of R185 million. These assessments are subject to revisions.

Health care services continue to be rendered to displaced communities that are currently sheltered in community halls. This also include ensuring dispensing of chronic medication.

Water has been partially restored in some facilities but others are still supplied through water tankers. Water supply has been restored in Gamalakhe CHC, St Andrews CHC, Ekuhlengeni CHC and 10% in GJ Crookes Hospital.

Water is still being supplied to the following facilities with reservoirs: Wentworth Hospital, Prince Mhiyeni Memorial Hospital, Osindisweni Hospital and Park Rynie. There is a challenge at Prince Mshiyeni where the reservoirs cannot be filled due to incompatible coupling between tanker and reservoir. This is currently being addressed. The Ugu District is not exempt from load shedding, which is affecting water supply.

A total of 363 postmortems have been conducted. An additional 7 sessional pathologists were brought in to expedite the postmortems. All deaths because of the heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding are determined to be unnatural. As such, in terms of the law, there is a legal obligation as government to conduct these postmortems.

KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, together with the National Department of Health, continue to monitor the situation and are addressing the challenges accordingly.

## **BASIC EDUCATION**

Minister Motshekga together with KZN Education MEC Kwazi Mshengu accompanied by senior officials have visited the affected schools in the various districts.



The basic education sector has also been severely affected. More than 630 schools were affected, 101 inaccessible and 124 have suffered extensive damage.

We can confirm that 64 learners have been reported to be deceased while 5 are still missing. One educator and one food handler have also passed away.

Schooling is proceeding elsewhere in the province but in the affected areas attendance is uneven

Attendance is uneven but we remain hopeful that with all the support there will be a gradual increase to learners and teachers returning to school.

We will also monitor how youth and youth with disabilities will return to school and how this will impact on their education.

## **Conclusion**

It is in times like this that we need to collaborate, unite and focus on solutions that will provide relief to all those in need. We appreciate all the offers of assistance from partners in the private and public sectors. We extend our appreciation to our social partners who have initiated various interventions to assist in helping all those in distress. It will be a long road but together we can do so much more to minimise the impact of the devastating floods.

Thank you