

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MS LINDIWE ZULU, MP ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEDIA BRIEFING SESSION FOR ECD STIMULUS PACKAGE, EXTENSION OF SPECIAL COVID-19 SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS GRANT, TEMPORARY DISABILITY GRANTS, CARA FUNDING AND FOOD RELIEF MEASURES, 120 PLEIN STREET, CAPE TOWN

08h30 FRIDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2021

Programme Director;

Acting Director-General, Mr Linton Mchunu;

CEO of SASSA, Ms Totsie Memela Khambule;

CEO of NDA, Ms Thamo Mzobe;

Senior managers from the DSD Portfolio in attendance both physically and those on our virtual platforms;

Ladies and gentlemen of the media;

Good morning and thank you for joining us at this media briefing session through which we will provide an update on the DSD Portfolio's interventions during COVID-19.

This media briefing is unfolding shortly after the announcement of the Grade 12 results by Minister Angie Motshega, the Minister of Basic Education. We have learnt that under very difficult circumstances, the Grade 12 learners worked hard to achieve a 76.2 percent national pass rate and this makes us proud as this occurred under very difficult time as brought upon by the global pandemic.

Let us also encourage learners who did not succeed by providing necessary support and guidance to them. Although the pass rate may have decreased, we cannot put the blame on anyone, as the whole country was operating under the "new normal" caused by COVID-19 and we would like to indicate that as the Department of Social Development, we are available to provide support to learners who may have not succeeded this time round.

In this regard, we want to encourage Parents, Caregivers and Learners, to make use of the 24-hour GBV Command Centre for support and counselling, as we are aware that some of our children may not easily accept the outcomes of their Grade 12 examinations. The GBV Command Centre can be reached on the toll-free number which is 0800 428 428.

To the learners who made it through we congratulate you all but I must send a special congratulations to the hundreds of thousands Grade 12 learners who are social grant recipients and wrote matric examinations last year.

ON THE ECD SIMULUS PACKAGE

As you are aware, the Department of Social Development, on 5 February 2021, launched the Early Childhood Development Employment Stimulus Relief Grant, which is supported by the Presidential Employment Stimulus initiative and is part of the DSD's intervention to assist ECD services by

cushioning them against the impact of the pandemic. The Department has received R496 million to assist the sector which is amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic. An initial indication of R1.3 billion for this was subsequently revised based on the outcome of the assessment of the bid process through the National Treasury.

The Department has been working with a number of partners to ensure the successful implementation of the ECD-relief fund. These include; all Provincial Departments – who will be making the actual payments, SASSA, the NDA, DG Murray Trust, GOVchat, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Ilifa Labantwana, Impande SA, UNICEF and most importantly, the ECD Inter-Sectoral Forum. Some of them are represented here this morning. We want to thank you all for your hard work thus far - there is still a long road ahead but I am certain that as we continue to work as a collective, we will successfully implement this programme. I am encouraged by the strong partnerships that we have built which clearly demonstrates how government and civil society can work collaboratively to achieve a common goal.

We have now received over 27 000 applications from ECD programmes with over 117 000 employees recorded. This is a significant achievement and also demonstrates how technology can assist in creating access to government services. It is for the first time in the history of the ECD sector that we are able to have such accurate information on ECD programmes and the size of the workforce. Indeed, COVID-19 has brought many challenges but at the same time this shows the opportunities that it has brought to government and the ECD sector. This data will help us moving forward with planning and strengthening of our processes and systems to enable us to have informed and targeted interventions that speak to the felt needs of this important sector. Like any initiative, this had its challenges. At this point, I would like to advise on the following:

1. All processes that has been developed to implement this ECD- relief fund has been done in consultation with the National Inter-sectoral ECD Forum (ISF)
2. The Department created an online application platform in partnership with Govchat to enable us to process this support in an effective and speedy manner.
3. Due consideration has been made in terms of ensuring that ECD programmes are supported through this process and therefore with one of our partners DG Murray Trust, we made available the following support mechanisms;
 - a. We developed a web-based application form in two additional languages to English to accommodate larger organisations that would apply on behalf of ECD services;
 - b. We deployed NGO's and the Harambee Youth Support Service across all Districts to offer support to any ECD programme that required it;
 - c. A Call Centre with a toll-free number was established as a customer interface mechanism to support ECD programmes throughout the application process; and
 - d. A dedicated email address was set up for anyone to request assistance on the ECD-relief fund application at ecdstimulus@dgmt.co.za and a number of NGO's were accordingly allocated to complete this task.
4. The Nelson Mandela Foundation, Impande SA and UNICEF held multiple orientation and training sessions with the sector to empower them on how to complete the applications. A number of guidelines were developed to provide further guidance in this regard;

5. The National DSD mobilised all districts and local offices across the country to assist ECD programmes to apply and all our Provincial Departments have worked tirelessly in this regard;

6. We made a solidarity call to all stakeholders and organisations working in the ECD sector to assist their constituents through this process and we want to appreciate all those who have risen to the call and assisted others in the spirit of leaving no-one behind;

For all ECD programmes that have already applied we would encourage you to use your reference number in the new web-form to review your application and make sure all the details are correct. We also encourage all ECD services that are currently unfunded, and not receiving a subsidy from any Provincial Departments of Social Development, and that had to register on the Central Supplier database (CSD) to please ensure that their bank verification has been successful. This is because we will only be able to process applications of applicants who have had successful bank verifications

We are planning to have payments being processed from the first week of March 2021 already and all applicants will be informed accordingly should this change.

With regards to the Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced during the recent State of the Nation Address the extension of the COVID-19 SRD grant for a further 3 months. The application channels for the website and WhatsApp were reopened on the 13th of February. Since then a total of 65 795 new applications have been received. The 9.7 million that have already applied will continue to be reassessed monthly, and qualifying applicants will continue to be paid.

About six million beneficiaries receive this grant on a monthly basis. The Department has spent over R17 billion thus far on this grant, benefiting those in need of direct income. We anticipate that by the end of the extended period, we would have spent over R22 billion to support this group of beneficiaries.

It is also encouraging to note that 42 329 clients have voluntarily cancelled their grants, as their situation has improved to the extent that they no longer rely on this grant.

Payment through a bank account is still the easiest way to access your money, and I want to strongly urge everyone who is struggling with their payment to either provide SASSA with a mobile number which is RICA'd in their name or with their bank account.

Overcrowding at the Post Office remains a challenge. This payment method, which was meant to be a temporary method, has now become the de-facto payment channel. Seventy percent, which is around 4.2 million beneficiaries are paid through this channel which has created serious pressures for the post office.

In order to manage this challenge, we have been working closely with SAPO to alleviate the challenge of long queues and congestion at Post Office branches. Among the measures explored and implemented include:

- The deployment of volunteers to manage queues/ social distancing and assist beneficiaries in the queues
- Scheduling appointments for beneficiaries to present themselves
- Using alternative public facilities such as Municipal Halls for payments

- SAPO has also introduced a system for staggering of payment dates based on the last 3 digits of the ID

Temporary disability grants

SASSA administers disability grants as one of the seven grant types as legislated in the Social Assistance Act. The total number of disability grants on the system as at March 2021 is 1,1 million. Of these, 86% are permanent disability grants, with only 14% being temporary.

Disability grants remain the grant which is most vulnerable to fraud. In this last week, a total of 11 people were arrested in Limpopo for disability related fraud.

I would like to remind everyone that a temporary disability grant is given for a specific period which is medically informed. Therefore, there is genuine expectation that the person who received the grant will not necessarily continue to qualify for this grant. Those who still require the grant need to re-apply and the decision will be made, based on an updated medical assessment and confirmation that the applicant still meets the qualifying criteria as set in legislation.

As at 23 February 2021, a total of 118 581 clients have been booked for assessments, while 79 924 have already completed the assessment process. From these 61 955 applications have already been completed.

Clients whose application were declined can lodge an appeal against this decision and they can contact SASSA offices for assistance.

It is encouraging to see the numbers of disability grants in payment increasing month on month. In January, the number of disability grants for payment was just over 1 million, while this has increased to 1,1 million for March. This is an indication that progress is being made in this area.

With regards to the NDA Volunteer Programme

To date, the NDA has spent over R21.2 million towards the funding of the Volunteer programme which positively impacts targeted communities – we have paid stipends to about 2 000 people who otherwise were not working so we created employment opportunities and training for our volunteers and the majority of which are young people and we think that this is significant especially in light of the recent unemployment rates as per the quarterly labour force survey announced by the Statistician General earlier this week

I recently undertook an oversight visit to the SASSA Bellville and Paarl offices in Cape Town which demonstrated the impact of the NDA Volunteer Programme and witnessed the important role they play. There was a sense of gratitude from SASSA staff who, on average, attend to just over 500 people per day. The Volunteers provided much needed relief for the staff by dealing with crowd control by ensuring adherence to COVID-19 protocols at the pay points. This programme has assisted with ensuring the safety at SASSA offices but also working experience and stipends for participating volunteers.

With regards to the Minister of Finances budget vote speech,

We have noted the adjustments made to social grants by the Minister of Finance. While we would have preferred a full inflation linked increase, we understand the fiscal constraints he has to deal with. We are pleased that during this very difficult time, the national budget remains pro-poor and developmental. The social services which includes health and educations continues to have the bulk

of the budget allocation at around 60% of the total budget, and the social development budget together with the social security funds is about a one third of that allocation.

We further note the increased taxes on alcohol and cigarettes, and how that this will reduce excessive alcohol consumption, which is linked to violence and Gender Based violence. We cannot ignore the rise in the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide; and remain concerned about this pandemic that continues to ravage our country. We therefore call upon civil society to work with other structures in the community to empower the young and the old, boys and girls, men and women on social behavioral change. We believe that we can only beat this monster if we change this culture at all stages of life.

The Department of Social Development successfully implemented the CARA Programme in partnership with the NDA with the aim of fighting the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide across the Republic. Participating NGO's ensure that GBV survivors have improved access to care, support, prevention services and quick access to the justice system. A total amount of R95 million was transferred by DSD to the NDA for the implementation of the CARA project over a two-year period.

We are excited about the roll out of vaccine by the department of health in our country as it will also benefit those who are vulnerable in the social development sector, particularly the elderly and we stand ready to work with the Department of Health in this regard.

Lastly, I want to send out a special appreciation to our frontline workers for the sacrifices they have made in putting others before themselves and risking their lives in this regard. To our social workers, SASSA frontline staff, NDA volunteers, health care workers, community and field workers, as well as all our staff in the DSD Portfolio who work tirelessly to ensure that the services of the DSD Portfolio are effectively and efficiently delivered to the millions of people we serve, to all our partners in the private sector, civil society including NGO's and academia, as well our Provincial Departments of Social Development, and other government department at all three spheres of government, we want to thank you for your commitment and partnership in ensuring that we are able to work together in creating a better life for all our people – together we can do more.

I thank you