



Save Our ECD Workforce: We Are Running Out Of Time

Media release by the ECD & Basic Education Working Group of the C-19 People Coalition [3rd February 2021]

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) community is outraged that it has not received any support from the Department of Social Development (DSD), despite R1.3 billion being set aside for an ECD stimulus package. On [15 October 2020](#), President Ramaphosa promised to support over 100 000 ECD workers. To date, there has been little information related to these relief measures. DSD is missing in action. The ECD sector is distressed about the lack of transparency around a matter that could offer relief for many ECD practitioners whose jobs are at risk due to ECD sites either permanently closing or not being able to re-open due to a lack of funds, which in turn impacts a larger public workforce whose jobs depend on the service provision of the ECD sector.

In August last year, the *#SaveOurECDWorkforce Campaign*, under the banner of the C-19 People's Coalition, launched [a week-long protest](#) and gathered around 15 000 signatures for a petition against the announcement made by Minister Lindiwe Zulu in [July 2020](#) that part of R1.3 billion would be allocated towards the short-term employment of 36 000 youth compliance monitors to verify COVID compliance at ECD sites. We argued that this was an illogical allocation of funds given that the ECD sector experiences dire financial constraints, job losses, income cuts and permanent closure because of the pandemic and national lockdown. The request was that this money be redirected to save the ECD workforce by ensuring that the 180 000 existing ECD workforce gets the much-needed support to ensure the continuity of the sector. Without immediate financial assistance, the existing ECD workforce will further collapse.

In response to this public pressure, the employment of youth compliance officers did not materialize, and it was believed that this money would be used to save the existing ECD workforce. On [19 October 2020](#), President Ramaphosa assured South Africans that “support will be provided to early childhood development practitioners, mainly self-employed women”. “Where is our money?” asks, Save Our ECD Workforce Campaign's member,

Mmatsetshuweu Ruby Motaung. “It is now February and the ECD sector has received no support. Many ECD centres have not been able to open because of the economic consequences of COVID. We are very worried about the job losses of teachers, cleaners, cooks, and many people who work hard to look after South Africa’s young children. We are angry that government has not informed us when the grant is coming.”

On [11 December 2020](#), in a media briefing and subsequent statement, Minister Zulu said her Department was working with the sector through the Intersectoral Forum to address the allocation of unemployment risk support to 108 833 ECD workers.

An implementation process, eligibility criteria, application requirements, payment methods and timeframes, including the payment date of 18 January – 15 March 2021, was suggested. Then, there was absolute silence from National DSD and all relevant stakeholders in the Forum.

“We have a lot of questions now. The Presidency and the Department of Social Development need to explain these things at grassroots level to the workforce,” says Motaung. “We are concerned that the lack of information is because the relief package will not be rolled out in this financial year, resulting in the funds disappearing and causing more job losses and closure of ECD sites.”

With 31 March 2021 fast approaching and the ECD community suffering, we are running out of time. **The ECD workforce demands that the Presidency and DSD do three things:**

1. Be transparent about what has happened to the balance of the R1.3 billion initially allocated for youth compliance monitors (about R813 million). Where is this money?
2. Provide the ECD sector with clear communication on where the allocated R486 million is and when it will be paid to already distraught ECD workers in both registered and unregistered ECD programmes.
3. Urgently pay 108 833 ECD workers the allocated amount of R486 million.

We believe that it is time for the Minister to address the ECD sector with honest and clear answers, as it has been far too long that she has not considered the social and economic impact that will result should the ECD sector collapse, due to the lack of intervention from her Department.

Signed: Colleen Horswell-Daniels



For and on behalf of the C-19 People's Coalition's ECD & Basic Education
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