



Centre for Early Childhood Development

Putting young children first

Date: 15 April 2021

CENTRE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRESS RELEASE

The ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Funds are not being paid. What has happened to the ECD stimulus relief package?

Plea for the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, to urgently pay ECD workers from the President's ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund

An on-going crisis is taking place in the early childhood development (ECD) sector in South Africa. Following unreasonable ECD programme lockdown measures (requiring high court judgments against the department), and then an exclusionary application process for accessing the Presidency's ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund, the national Department of Social Development (DSD) has now missed the deadline for payments to over 100 000 ECD principals, managers, teachers, cooks and other staff.

In a new [open letter](#) to the Minister of Social Development, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) details the never-ending challenges experienced by ECD principals, owners and managers in a desperate attempt to access the stimulus relief funds for their staff who are struggling to put food on their tables, and to keep the doors to their ECD programmes open, to care for, educate and feed the young children in their care. We call on the Minister to instruct the provincial Social Development departments to urgently pay out the funds, which were expected to be paid by the end of the 2020/2021 financial year, 31 March 2021.

Against all odds and despite a highly problematic application process to access the Presidency's ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund ([launched by DSD on 05 February 2021](#)), the ECD sector came together with an incredible amount of energy and support, showing sheer resilience and determination, in a short three-week time frame to ensure that ECD workers across the country could access the ECD stimulus relief funds. The ECD community heeded DSD's call to "stand together to 'Leave no ECD Behind'". As a result, on 12 March, DSD announced that after removing duplications they recorded 25 571 applications on the system which translates to 116 102 staff members who have been successfully registered on the system and will be part of the verification process.

On 26 March 2021, CECD developed a [survey](#) on the ECD stimulus application asking for feedback from ECD principals and managers on the ground who tried to apply for the relief fund. As at 30 March 2021, four days after the survey went live, CECD received responses from 1085 ECD principals/managers across all nine provinces. A total of 77% of the survey respondents said they were able to complete the process, many stating that they were only able to successfully apply due to support they received from the ECD community. A full [survey report](#) is available online.

The ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund of R496 million is a part of the R1.3 billion allocated towards the ECD sector originally announced by the President in October 2020, of which R803 million has now disappeared. The ECD stimulus fund was expected to be paid to ECD workers by 31 March 2021 – two weeks ago. The sector has been informed that the money has been distributed to some of the provinces, but DSD has not made any announcement in this regard. It is unclear how far DSD is with processing payments. The sector is deeply concerned that DSD will not pay ECD workers at this time, when relief is so greatly needed. A fear is that government and public officials' corruption will deny ECD staff what was allocated.

Through this process, DSD gave principals, teachers and the rest of the ECD community a glimpse of hope only to leave them with despair. According to our survey, 53% of the 1085 survey respondents stated that receiving the ECD relief funds meant that they would now be able to “afford to buy food and basics” as they have not been paid during the Covid-19 pandemic; and 36% stated that receiving the ECD relief funds meant they could “supplement the small income” they received from their employment at an ECD centre/ECD programme.

Moreover, in response to whether ECD principals/managers spent money applying for the stimulus package, of the 1085 respondents, 51% stated that they spent money on calls to get support with the application, 38% spent money on transport to get support with the application and travel to the bank and 29% spent money on opening a bank account. Only 18% of the survey respondents did not spend money in applying for the ECD stimulus. Many in the ECD sector have spent money to get financial support from the ECD stimulus relief fund, yet DSD missed its deadline to pay ECD workers by 31 March 2021.

The ECD workforce, by applying for the ECD stimulus relief fund, is expecting this money, and is in desperate need of payment. DSD cannot be such an uncaring government department to be silent on the matter, and allow this situation to continue indefinitely. This is unacceptable. Government must be responsive to the people they govern. As a nation, we have to do better for South Africa's children.

We are therefore calling on the Minister and DSD to urgently:

1. Confirm whether there has been a successful rollover of funds from the 2020/2021 financial year, in all nine provinces so that DSD is able to make payments after its financial year-end deadline;
2. Provide clarity on which ECD services will be prioritised, given that the number of applications has exceeded the targeted 108 833 ECD workers; and
3. **Most importantly, pay ECD workers the currently overdue ECD employment stimulus relief funds. It is two weeks late.**

Signed: Yusrah Ehrenreich

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yusrah Ehrenreich', written in a cursive style.

For and on behalf of the Centre for Early Childhood Development

Website: www.cecd.org.za

For more information and media interviews, please contact:

Professor Eric Atmore

Phone: 082 568 0200

Email: eric@cecd.org.za