



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 13 MAY 2021

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT USES PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS AS A SCAPEGOAT FOR THE DEPARTMENT MISSING ITS DEADLINE TO PAY OVER 80 000 OUTSTANDING ECD WORKERS FROM THE ECD EMPLOYMENT STIMULUS RELIEF FUND BY 31 MARCH 2021

In a media statement issued yesterday, the National Department of Social Development (DSD) shockingly shifts blame to preschool teachers and principals for DSD missing its deadline to pay over 80 000 outstanding ECD principals, managers, teachers, cooks and other staff by 31 March 2021:

“It must be emphatically stated that unfortunately, the Department cannot process any applications for payments if the applications have incorrect information that has not been updated by the ECD services.”

As detailed in our [open letters](#) sent to DSD, “*applications have incorrect information*” for two clear reasons: the application platforms were faulty and DSD did not provide timeous communication on how to fill out the information correctly from a technical perspective.

DSD further sets out the initiatives that were introduced to support the ECD sector. We directly address a few of these initiatives below despite finding issue with others:

“[T]he Provincial Departments of Social Development, working with the DG Murray Trust dispersed a number of organisations to assist ECD services.” **Our response:** The Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) was contracted to assist ECD workers with these applications. We can therefore confirm that throughout the application process, there was poor and delayed communication on the ECD stimulus relief fund that adversely affected applications made by ECD workers, even with the help of organisations contracted to assist.

“A number of step by step guidelines were made available...” **Our response:** The guidelines did not explain how to complete the most critical section, being the “bank” tab on the Central Supplier Database (CSD), given all bank details had to be verified for ECD workers to receive the ECD stimulus funding. There was no clear, upfront communication informing the ECD sector on how precisely the bank details needed to be completed. This resulted in most ECD centres failing the bank account verification process.

“The application form and communication material on the ESRF was translated into a number of different languages to improve accessibility.” **Our response:** Two days before the application deadline, the online application platform was made available in English, Afrikaans and Tswana (three languages that are not the mother-tongue languages of the majority of South Africans or of the ECD

workforce). What's worse is that the CSD registration process (which had to be used for bank verification purposes) was only made available in English and uses terminology that is unfamiliar and difficult to understand for the vast majority of South Africans.

"A toll-free call centre and dedicated email address was set up to address enquires." **Our response:** No-one actually assisted with the CSD process (the most technical part of the entire application process) via the prescribed call centre or email address.

Then, DSD said the following regarding outstanding payments:

"[T]he Department would like to reiterate that when the financial year ended on the 31 March 2021, no further payments could be made. However, all ECD services that have applied and meet the criteria for the ECD ESRF prior to the closing date will start to receive their payments within the next few weeks... All Provinces have now engaged their Provincial Treasury's for roll-overs and this process is currently underway."

"[T]he Department ... [is] now making partial payments for employees who have passed the ID verification process some ECD services would receive funds for some of their employees whilst the ECD service was expected to update and correct the identity numbers for the remaining staff."

According to DSD's figures, they have paid 28.7% of the 116 578 ECD workers expecting the money. Payments that have been made thus far have been inconsistent and many ECD principals that have been paid report that they have received less than 50% of the amount owed.

This is not good enough. DSD failed to deliver on its promise and continues to delay payment of stimulus relief funds to over 80 000 struggling ECD workers. It is now a month and a half late. This is the fault of DSD's application and payment process. Preschool teachers and principals cannot be blamed for the delay in payments.

The current crisis comes down to a missed deadline, which is seemingly caused by DSD's own impossible timelines. Following the Fund's announcement by President Ramaphosa in October 2020, the ECD sector demanded that DSD release the funds. The application window was only announced on 5 February 2021 and (after more pressure from the ECD sector) applicants were only given a three-week window to apply. The ECD sector came together, and despite the significant challenges, over 116 000 ECD workers successfully applied for the relief funds. Now DSD states that their financial year end has caused delays. But the question is, why was this relief fund not launched sooner? Why were these issues not considered and dealt with sooner? If this relief fund had been rolled-out at an appropriate time, with an appropriate time-frame and effective communication by DSD, ECD workers would not be protesting for relief funding; they would be at their ECD centres caring for, and educating our youngest citizens.

The ECD sector continues to call on DSD to make urgent payment in full to all successful applicants. CECD is spearheading a countrywide protest this week to place pressure on DSD to pay ECD workers.

Media contacts:

Professor Eric Atmore
Yusrah Ehrenreich

Office Hours:

nmukadam@cecd.org.za

(021) 6832420