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“The Department of Social Development has 28 working days left to pay all outstanding ECD staff applicants before the department loses over R300 million at the end of the 2021/2022 financial year on 31 March 2022.”

An open letter to the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu

18 February 2022

Dear Minister Zulu
Minister of Social Development
Private Bag X672, Pretoria, 0001

The Department of Social Development to pay over 70,000 ECD workers from the Presidency’s ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund immediately, before the financial year end

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has failed to deliver on its promise to pay out the Presidency’s Early Childhood Development (ECD) Employment Stimulus Relief Funds to over 108,833 ECD principals, teachers and other staff by the deadline DSD provided; the end of the 2020/2021 financial year - 31 March 2021.

This has resulted in hundreds of ECD centres buckling under the strain of Covid-19 and closing down as they cannot afford rent, electricity, nutrition for the children in their care, or staff salaries. Many staff members have had little to no income for almost two years, since the initial nation-wide lockdown in March 2020, and are struggling to put food on their tables and pay for basic needs – they truly require emergency relief funding.

The ECD sector was given three weeks to apply for the Stimulus Relief Fund (after fighting for an extra week). By the deadline, 116,578 ECD workers had applied for the funds, but DSD has only paid 36%¹ of the funds in the 11 months and 3 weeks since the deadline closed. Payments to over 70,000 ECD workers across South Africa from the ECD Stimulus Relief Fund are almost a full year late. This is a disgrace.

¹ On 26 November 2021, a presentation by the project management team at the time, Data Innovators, revealed that R178,903,581 out of R496 million (i.e. 36%) had been paid to ECD workers across South Africa thus far. There has been no further payment update.

DSD has just over a month (28 working days) left to pay all outstanding ECD staff applicants before DSD loses over R300 million at the end of the 2021/2022 financial year on 31 March 2022.

As the verification and payment processes have seemingly now been moved from national DSD to the provincial offices; it is important for you to lead your department to success in ensuring all ECD workers are paid in full, before losing the remaining R300 million in taxpayers' monies specifically designated for ECD workers.

Despite numerous attempts, through protests and direct communication sent to the national DSD, there has been no substantial communication to ECD applicants from DSD about outstanding payments. The majority of applicants do not even know their application status. On 15 February 2022, we asked ECD workers what they would say if they could speak to the Minister of Social Development about the non-payment of the Stimulus Relief Funds. Within 24 hours, we received 62 comments attached at the end of this letter (starting on page 3). These three unedited quotes show you what some ECD workers would like to say to you and your department:

"We are so disappointed in them, for not worrying or caring about our leaders of the future - it is absolutely heartbreaking. Our school is so in desperate need, we truly need this funding to make the difference in little one's life's."

"While we are bleeding someone is getting the interest in the bank."

"The worst part is believing that there's light at the end of the tunnel, just to be kept forever in the dark and struggling to educate, love and feed our beloved children. Children who hold the future of this country in their hands. It's a crime against humanity really."

Your department is failing the ECD community. We implore you to hear the voices of the principals, teachers and other staff serving South Africa's children. We call on your department to pay ECD workers the currently overdue ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Funds immediately, before it is too late.

Yours faithfully



Yusrah Ehrenreich
Advocacy and Social Justice Manager



Eric Atmore
Director



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**1998 Presidential Education
Award Winner: ECD Category**



“If you could speak to the Minister of the Department of Social Development, the ministry responsible for the role out of the ECD Stimulus Relief Fund, what would you want to say to her? How has not receiving funds affected you? Are you struggling to get any information? Tell us here!”

[Posted on Facebook](#) on 15 February 2022.

Voices from ECD workers on the ground (unedited):

1. When will funds be paid out for relief fund. I applied a year ago and still nothing. This is having a huge impact on my ECD centre and I do not get any help from Government at all. Thanks
2. Thank you. I have the same problem. Hope we get answers soon as my school will have to close. Waiting for long. Can't pay teachers anymore. They will loose their jobs and have families to feed. This is very sad that we need to beg for money to help us teach kids that need us.
3. Just do the ethical thing for the future of our children and pay the ECD workforce who have patiently waited over 2 years before we lose them.
4. We followed all instructions perfectly and timeously . My staff desperately need the funds. Each and every attempt to follow up has been blatantly ignored. Such a shame!
5. Certain rules now all of a sudden is needed before receiving any funds like for instance Certificate from dept of Health. That is a joke because nobody is available for almost 3 years to reissue certification from department of Health. Now the stimulus fund can not be paid over because of that. Only excuses to not pay monies. My staff needs every cent to try and catch up on bills accumulated over lockdown.
6. It's been a very difficult time, where we have completed the application, and had to verify the same staff members over and over again. When we look for assistance, there is none. Calls are Never answered, messages left go completely unnoticed!!!! Where can we get help! We requested our local DSD office to assist, they say go to district office..... We approached district office, they say go to local DSD office for help..... A real joke..... But reality for us..... Most frustrating experience ever.
7. Stop playing with our emotions
8. I do not understand why accountability is so difficult with regards to such issues... No one feels the need to display transparency and open communication on promises made, there is definitely trimendous lack of respect for the dignity of our ECD's and our children are one ones getting the short

end of the stick, how do we break cycles of poverty when the system sets our children up for failure even before they have a choice to decide their future

9. When are we getting our Stimulus Relief Fund? Because there is no communication between us and those who supposed to help to reach our funding.
10. Ek voel dit is so on aanvaarbaar dat social development arme mense in jul genade gelos het en net aan gaan as of dit niks is nie. Die stelsel was so moeilik om aansoek te doen hulle van jou vereis het maar ons het dit gedoen vir ons staff wat die lockdown oorleef het van Kos wat opstraat uit gedeel was Lang lyne staan Om n bakkie Kos te kry .ons Moet besigheid rekeninge Oop maak wat Elke maand so Baie bankkoste van jou vereis Al's gedoen met die hoop jyOm Weer Al's reg te maak en Weer nuut te begin .Jul los ons armdier .ek het op gee jy kry niemand niemand.
11. The worst part is believing that there's light at the end of the tunnel, just to be kept forever in the dark and struggling to educate, love and feed our beloved children. Children who hold the future of this country in their hands. It's a crime against humanity really.
12. It affect a lot before COViD I was having 40 kids but kids now are less I can't even pay my staff struggle ,even to buy food ,they did try to help us but bank verification it's the problem maybe by reporting it I will get help ,it's so painfully to sea my colleagues progress ING , others get this stimulus twice Kanti kunjani mhlabeni solingana Nini?
13. All ECD centres is doinggiving valuable input to our little children everyday but government is not noticing or acknowledge thatwhat happen to the fund that was create to help elevate our stresses and help our teachers to survive
14. I'm tired, speechless of even talking about it, seriously I've lost hope about stimulus.
15. Indeed we do not matter hence we did not receive anything during lockdown and the stimulus package we never received, whist they are getting paid fat checks for doing nothing at all
16. Is it worth it to talk to her.....she will just make empty promises again....but I believe God is on our side....what happen in the dark will come to light...WE WILL NEVER GIVE UP!!
17. D hele system is in sy hel gestuur met ou koeie wat in beheer is van sake

18. Still waiting to receive our share of the stimulus relief funds for ECDs as we were promised. Every preschool deserves a chance as we are still struggling to this date there's no excuse for withholding funds because if the ecd exists it has teachers who are struggling to make ends meet
19. I'm tired of even talking about it, it's draining me , I did everything I was expected to do but still no answer.
20. Why do we have to wait so long for money that was promised to the ECD....no communication with us when we send emails
21. There is people who cant even afford to applied since it's online and the lines were extremely long and social distances made more impossible they need to rethink the whole application process I'm sure there is more who find it difficult and just gave up. Our government certainly have up on them.
22. I was hoping that I could get my respond about the application that I made last year July in 2021 I made the application for stimulation relief fund and up to So far I haven't get an answer from you guys I was hoping for the light but the only thing that I found is darkness because you are giving us fools hope
23. It has been long staff waiting for this stimulus so quick action must be taken so that people gets their long waited money .Time and hope has been wasted people were rushed to do the paperwork as required but to no avail .now it has affected staff performance that is a huge blow to the development of children.I wish the president should interfere if aware of the situation what is his response and what is he think about the walfare of people who have kids future at heart
24. Om vir amper n jaar sonder werk te sit. Geen salaris. Dagsorg if creche moet sanitizers en temperatuur masjiene koop maar daar is nie geld wat in kom nie. As jy dit self beleef het sal julle dit beter verstaan
25. We are so disappointed in them, for not worrying or caring about our leaders of the future it is absolutely heartbreaking. Our school is so in desperate need, because the Wendy house that we are in need fixing and this year we truly have an influx of children, so our space is also not sufficient and how could you tell parents that need to go to work and is looking for a safe place for their children, No. We truly need this funding to make the difference in little one's life's.
26. They are s useless department. WehDpromises, visits and verifications. Nothing happened. Leavesa serious??????

27. We applied for the stimulus relief fund, filled out all the documentation, had people come out to our school, advised teachers accordingly. Turns out the guy who came to help us do verification left his job because he came out did the work and then never got paid. He was using public transport to get to where he needed to go and I even gave him taxi fare to go home because of where we are situated and he was struggled to get here. Thereafter we were referred to another lady who we followed up with for a few months, she then said their department no longer exists because they didn't renew their contract and we were referred to another guy who has never ever gotten back to us. This has caused me to feel like I lied to my teachers who desperately need the money. Why make promises that can't be kept and yet "new" stimulus relief programs are being run and will probably have the same outcome. It is very upsetting to know that we live in a country where there is no accountability for money that has gone missing or been mismanaged. Times have been really hard and we had to support our staff out of the little we had during the covid lockdown. We are still recovering from it. As soon as we closed parents stopped paying. Where is the empathy? We have very little trust. The online system also no longer works? We have been left on our own once again.
28. Why is no one even answering phones or emails?
29. It was so obvious that all was a plan of making you and your families rich by using our centres to get the money from government congrats you won because there's nothing else we can do about it you people you control everything I just asking my self why did you make it so difficult because dsd have all the info you were needed then but you keep making stories of us not giving enough info that was a big fat lie I'm praying that God punish you all one day  
30. Since 2021 we have been waiting but nothing is happening...calls are never answered, It's been a very difficult year... We did everything they asked for but nothing is happening our staff members start to think we are lying to them that we want the money to ourselves which is not true and i dont blame them because wow we have been waiting... We requested the local DSD Office to assist, they say go to District Office... And they also say the same thing... Where can we get help??? Because wow
31. We are struggling with information,our status changed to eligibile for payment in September last year,we been calling the dept of social developoment almost everyday since nov/Dec last year no one answers the call!!it has affected us badly,it has gotten to a point where we are relying on our partners to buy us our basic needs as the school is barely making ends meet with the debt it is in,but we love our jobs and we love these kids so much that we cannot possibly think of leaving this is our passion!we are taken for granted and lied to we are definitely the forgotten sector!what we do is thee most important step in a child's life,without us a child would struggle!we do not receive any gov support!!

32. I would tell her the feeling of empty promises, how painful it is to be given something all of a sudden you do not get it, I would then ask her how would she feel if she was in our shoes...
33. When will we see your promises being full filled? How long must we still wait ?
34. I would tell the President and his caring government the following * ECD workforce holds the key to their dream of Job creation and to the countries economic growth. * ECD is only used as a Marketing tool when government negotiate financial investments for the country. * With or without government support ECD Workforce will always try their best to CARE for the young vulnerable children of our country. We as the ECD Workforce have climbed mountains and cobblestone roads filled with thorns but we will never fail the children of our country uncle Mr President and his government. Therefore we shall never surrender.* Cut the RED TAPE and let us do what we do Best.
35. Why is your department not communicating with the ED'S regarding our status .We have sent numerous emails to the relevant people but no communication.How long must we wait?
36. I submitted everything that they want but even today we never get anything. Why are you promising something that you can't do. No communication at all, and no one is responsible for this delay. Tell us what should we do and how long should we wait. Really should we trust you or what because we are tired of waiting.
37. While we are bleeding someone is getting the interest at the bank.
38. Local DSD are not helpful. You visit now then, not available. Hire people who are passionate about children, working with communities and other stakeholders.
39. M really disappointed..wat is worse thy no longer answering our calls it's frustrating Indeed
40. I have more than 10 years running care centre, I've never received cent even stipend or stimulus fund or lottery sponsor nothing at Brits madibeng it's worse we are struggling to even registration
41. Not receiving affected me and my school in very bad way not able to pay the bills not able to put food on a table is was very very bad in such a way I am still in debt and they need to be paid they can't vanis , with out being paid

42. Why you so selfish we really need this money. teachers are complaining
43. I've lost hope about stimulus relief,
44. People who don't have centres they got registered and they receive money and share with, while we wait until nothing comes
45. Good day. When we closed our Baby and Toddler school on 18th March 2020 after having received the email informing ECD's to close, staff to be laid off and centers to close, I send 16 staff members home as well as 65 children. President informed SA was in level 5. I locked the Center and I went home. Apart from receiving no income I still was charged for, April, May, June, and July's Municipal bill. When I enquired I was abruptly told by Municipal officials I have to pay because an average was calculated. Remember with no income, at home in level 5, we had to eat but could not work to earn a living. This situation was extremely taxing and stress levels were out of hand.
46. I heard what Mr President said and applied for TERS. TERS took a long time to pay out. I battled to get TERS paid out for my Staff that were suffering. Eventually TERS payments came through. I did not know that there was a Stimulus fund and we ECD.'s could claim from it. I completely missed that communication.
47. Good day. Okay since we could reopen in July 2020 we lost a lot of children and income. Before the lockdown I had 65 children. When we could reopen I only had 15 children that came back in July 2020. 2021 came and I had only 30 children. 2022 is here and I have 25 children. Financially we are struggling a lot. Yes I have applied for the stimulus fund and up till now no payment has been received.
48. We are struggling a lot since we wait for the payment and when the inspector visits our center they tell us to renew painting, but this is that while we were not working for some months.
49. Since I applied I am still waiting.. no communication. No response on email.. meaning you don't care about our children and their place of development. I also need that money I am affected like those who already get paid
50. This is another Government scam. Someone is going to benefit from a Tender for billions of rands. But the ECD Centres will only benefit a small fraction. The Government is a body that has a lack of conscience, and only focus on self enrichment, focusing on increasing their waist size and their own assets. Can the current government run anything efficiently? Everything that they lay their hands on fails miserably. The dinosaurs in Government must go and be replaced by qualified people who can

express themselves intelligently. It is embarrassing to have MP's who sound so illiterate. Please can the ANC stop robbing the country, and raping our economy. Why doesn't Malema fight for Pre-schools? He is so accustomed to inflammatory instigation. But where it really matters, he us as silent as a mouse.

51. I've lost hope about stimulus relief,
52. Why do you make empty promises with the money whereas you know that since COVID - 19 สมุทรสาคร started we were financially broke.
53. Please pay us our stimulus relief 🙏
54. This thing has affected us so much,because I have lost so many children.i used to o have a big number of children but now I only have a few of them.its not easy to take care of children without a funding,because i struggle to buy groceries, equipment and even to pay my staff.why are u doing this to us,why u promise us something and then u don't give it to us just like u promised.what about us who didn't get the funding??
55. The service is poor no any notification, after waiting for so long we received a message saying we must reapply again even today we're still waiting, pls guys help us to reserve this funds its difficult for us to cope during this time of pendemic. Atlist do make messages to tell us what is happening at your side were still waiting even today pls help
56. WHY.....
57. Our team spent DAYS collecting information from almost 30 Creches so that we could apply for the relief fund on their behalf! It's poor stewardship of tax payer funds! Those who steal from the future/ educational opportunities of our children must be held accountable!!! We see how hundreds of thousands of schools, Children, parents, principals, teachers and Creches and day care staff in poor areas are suffering at the hands of greedy individuals! #PovertyMustFall 🔥🔥🔥🔥
58. Yes not receiving ECD stimulus relief funds has affected us so much.First of all it has been long we applied for it and when we applied we used our time and our money,although things were so tough by the time of shutdowns.2 Our staff has been waiting for so long since our organisation are no longer operating well since 2019 March.They have families to take care of ,so they are thinking we are cheating on their money.3Its long time now since they say we must wait for there call.We are

struggling to communicate.If we call they don't answer,we don't know if those numbers are still working.We were approved on our everything so why are they holding those funds.Please we need help on where to call,we stay in Limpopo province,District of Waterberg.We also need full information. Since 2020 I mean

59. Why the relief fund don't being deposited in our account and we should wait until when to receive ours its being a long time.
60. I'm in Eastern Cape still waiting for the money
61. But one of the Social workers told us that we are one of the 7 creches ho don't have any money
62. They call us at social development to come and bring bank verification letter so that they can proceed the money still nothing from last year 11 of November till today we are still struggling, our practitioners call us thieves it's very sad.