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Honorable Lindiwe Zulu
Minister for Social Development

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Cc: Mr Linton Mchunu
Acting Director General – Social Development

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17 February 2020

Dear Minister Lindiwe Zulu,

RE: ECD-ESRF challenges

The application process for the Early Childhood Development Employment Stimulus Relief Fund (ECD-ESRF) bears reference. The ECD-ESRF was launched on Friday 5 February 2020 and due to close on Friday 19 February 2020, giving the ECD sector only 14 days to apply for this relief on the GovChat online platform.

The ECD sector has highlighted the following challenges in relation to the online application process for the ECD-ESRF:

1. The short notice period provided

Many applicants indicated they only became aware of the ECD-ESRF after the launch date of Friday 5 February, therefore, giving them limited time to apply. Some applicants have indicated that they work fulltime and can only work on these applications in the evening.

2. The requirement for business banking accounts

Many ECDs do not have business bank accounts and will have to open a business bank account in order to apply for the ECD-ESRF within the limited application period.

3. Low level of computer literacy

Many of the applicants have indicated that they have low computer literacy and have difficulty completing the online application. A handful have indicated that they solicited assistance from colleagues/friends/family members/etc.

4. Lack of access to resources such as the internet, computers, smartphones and data

The majority of ECD owners have highlighted that they do not have access to internet, computers, smartphones, and data, all of which would be needed in order to complete the online application with ease.

The access to data is crucial for applicants to be able to download the numerous explanatory documents as well as to upload the requested documents in image and PDF format.

5. Other official languages not accommodated

Applicants have to be conversant in English which disadvantages non-English speaking applicants as the online application is only available in English. Provision is not made for any other official language.

6. The online application is not user friendly

The online application is not user friendly.

An example of this is the inability of the online platform to save information at any of the seven steps. Applicants therefore cannot return to their existing application, but instead must start at the beginning each time.

7. ECD employees are disadvantaged

ECD employees are reliant on the ECD operator/owner /manager/NPO to apply. Should the ECD operator/owner /manager/NPO fail to apply, employees will be disadvantaged.

Minister, all of the above-mentioned challenges will need time to be resolved, but unfortunately the time provided to submit online applications does not allow for this.

If these challenges are not addressed the ECDs which fall within poor wards as determined by the STATSA multiple poverty index will not be prioritized in this ECD-ESRF. Sadly, these ECD employees and children will be left behind if the above-mentioned challenges are not addressed.

All ECDs deserve a fair opportunity to apply, however, the online only method, stringent conditions, lack of support and the challenges highlighted above will leave many stranded.

Minister, kindly look into resolving these challenges and reconsider the deadline of 19 February 2020 in light of the above.

Thank you

Kind regards,

A. Abrahams

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