



## **Family Digest 31**

**May 12<sup>th</sup> 2020**

### **The Human Cost of the Lockdown**

The implementation of the nationwide Level 5 lockdown was immediate and rigorous. The public were given a short time to prepare for it, but most of those who are able to work from home had the opportunity to make the necessary arrangements to do so. Essential services were defined, and citizens were only allowed to leave their homes to buy food, to seek medical treatment and to buy medicine at pharmacies. Schools were closed, industry came to a standstill, public transportation was limited, religious services ceased, restaurants closed, retail trade ceased, and the streets emptied. However, there was a sense of social solidarity and a certain national pride that the country had been swift in addressing a public health emergency.

While those with means took the opportunity to prepare and panic-shopped for everything from toilet paper to whisky, others were compelled to wait for their social grants to be paid. The difficulties associated with the payment of grants at the end of March were the first sign that there were serious flaws in the way that Level 5 was being implemented.<sup>1</sup> The inequality that dominates our society was brought into sharp relief, and the consequences of years of systemic neglect were painfully obvious. For many people the threat of starvation, or even the possibility of death from hunger, rather than from the coronavirus, became very real.

It is to be noted that the payment of social grants was later in the month of May, with no clear reasons for change having been given. Moreover, the widespread chaos in the payment of Old Age and Disability Grants on 4th May compounded concerns about access to social security. While the additional measures taken to address social security so far are to be welcomed, the implementation thereof has been fraught with difficulties, with devastating consequences for grant beneficiaries.

The dependence of many on the informal sector to augment their income was not sufficiently taken into account. Furthermore, the distribution of food parcels has been muddled and uncoordinated in some areas, resulting in considerable dissatisfaction and social unrest. Gift of the Givers spokesperson Badr Kazi commented that, “When delivering goods, checks and balances have to be put in place to ensure that aid is fairly distributed. This includes keeping a register of everyone who has been handed food parcels.”<sup>2</sup> It is very difficult to keep track of such “checks and balances” without some form of centralised system.

Moreover, those who are malnourished or who are immune suppressed are less likely to throw off the virus should they become infected. “Malnourished, desperately poor people die much earlier than those in higher income brackets. And those who lose jobs, income and status tend in greater numbers to suffer depression, commit suicide and abuse drugs as a consequence.”<sup>3</sup>

Bridget Masango, DA Shadow Minister of Social Development, comments that it is “the Department of Social Development’s responsibility to ensure that the people in their care can access immediate relief during this crisis period, and one way of doing this is to re-open all SASSA offices, in accordance with strict social distancing and hygienic measures.”<sup>4</sup> It is vitally important for SASSA and related departments delivering social security services to urgently open up their offices to full capacity in order to facilitate the social and economic relief measures as announced, as well as to assist new applications for existing grants such as the Older Persons Grant.

The roll-out of a temporary COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, available to those who have no income and who do not benefit from other social assistance programmes or the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), is a significant new intervention. The lack of access to social support for the age group between 18 and 59 has long been a cause of concern. However, the social relief offered has limitations in terms of timeframes, so it is palliative rather than transformative. The withdrawal of grant money in six months is going to result in destitution, especially as further job losses are anticipated post COVID-19. So the reality of unemployment looms large into the future.

In terms of the Level 4 lockdown regulations certain categories of workers have been allowed to return to work, but many remain at home and are deprived of their livelihoods. The consequences of the continued lockdown need to be measured against the socio-economic cost for those who do not have secure employment and who are not beneficiaries of the UIF. Anton van Dalsen argues that, “In proceeding, Government needs to apply its mind with great care, firstly in order to avoid potentially disastrous economic consequences, and secondly to deal with increasingly strident political and legal questioning of the nature and extent of the regulations.”<sup>5</sup>

The links below provide further information.

[https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/nonpayment-of-uif-to-361-557-workers-alarming--cos?utm\\_source=Politic](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/nonpayment-of-uif-to-361-557-workers-alarming--cos?utm_source=Politic)

[https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/vigilante-attack-on-sea-point-resident-for-feeding?utm\\_source=Politicsweb](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/vigilante-attack-on-sea-point-resident-for-feeding?utm_source=Politicsweb)

<https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/govt-should-strongly-consider-covid19-basic-inc>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-17-the-biggest-lockdown-threat-hun>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-21-the-lockdown-may-be-unconstitut>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-21-some-relief-for-13-million-people->

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-05-actuaries-warn-ramaphosa-of-a-humanitarian-disaster-to-d>

[https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-11-grant-applications-pour-in-and-volunteers-assist-to-distribute-food-parcels/?tl\\_inbound=1&tl\\_groups\[0\]=80895&tl\\_period\\_type=3&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Coronavirus%20special%20edition%2011%20May%202020&utm\\_content=Coronavirus%20special%20edition%2011%20May%202020+CID\\_2e74f12f306e7cd9d8cce783885e5603&utm\\_source=TouchBasePro&utm\\_term=Grant%20applications%20pour%20in%20and%20volunteers%20assist%20to%20distribute%20food%20parcels](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-11-grant-applications-pour-in-and-volunteers-assist-to-distribute-food-parcels/?tl_inbound=1&tl_groups[0]=80895&tl_period_type=3&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Coronavirus%20special%20edition%2011%20May%202020&utm_content=Coronavirus%20special%20edition%2011%20May%202020+CID_2e74f12f306e7cd9d8cce783885e5603&utm_source=TouchBasePro&utm_term=Grant%20applications%20pour%20in%20and%20volunteers%20assist%20to%20distribute%20food%20parcels)

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<sup>1</sup> In spite of the planned staggering of payments, with the elderly and those with disability being prioritized, pay points ran out of money as many flocked to them on the same day.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-05-how-red-tape-is-hampering-the-hungry-from-receiving-f>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-05-actuaries-warn-ramaphosa-of-a-humanitarian-disaster-to-d>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/social-development-minister-has-until-1700-to-resp?utm\\_source=Politicsweb+Daily+Headlines&utm\\_campaign=13c8acc3c7-](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/social-development-minister-has-until-1700-to-resp?utm_source=Politicsweb+Daily+Headlines&utm_campaign=13c8acc3c7-)

[EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_05\\_04\\_10\\_49&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a86f25db99-13c8acc3c7-140187545](EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_04_10_49&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a86f25db99-13c8acc3c7-140187545)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-regulations-adopted-for-level-4-of-the-nationa?utm\\_source=Politicswe](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-regulations-adopted-for-level-4-of-the-nationa?utm_source=Politicswe)