

CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

FACT SHEET

Alliance For Children's Entitlement To Social Security



Phased-in Extension of Child Support Grant up to 14 years

May 2003

Background

The Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security, a national alliance of 400 child sector organisations, has been calling for the extension of the Child Support Grant ('CSG') to cover *ALL* children up to the age of 18, as the first phase to a Basic Income Grant for everyone. It is the constitutional right of everyone to have access to appropriate social assistance if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants.

In the State of the Nation address this year, the State President finally announced that the CSG will be extended to eligible children under the age of 14. This is in line with the decisions taken at both the ANC Policy Conference in September 2002 and the National Conference in December 2002. ACESS members were overjoyed at this victory, as some have been fighting for wider coverage for many years.

But the thrill was short-lived. Shortly thereafter, the Minister for Social Development, announced that the extension to 14 years would be '*phased in*' over the next 3 years. A plan for phasing in the extension is now laid down in the Regulations to the Social Assistance Act.

According to the Regulations, the CSG will be extended progressively over three years to cover children under the age of 14.

- As of 1 April 2003, children under 9 qualify.
- As of 1 April 2004, children under 11 will qualify.
- As of 1 April 2005, children under 14 will qualify.

[Government Gazette No. 24630, 31 March 2003]

Impact of Phased-in Social Grants Programme

The phased-in plan was intended to bring clarity to the implementation of the extension of the child support grant to children under 14 years. However, much confusion still abounds due to the regulations being unclear, a lack of effective communication of the phased-in extension to the public and to social security officials in the provinces.

Since the announcement of the phased-in extension, ACESS has been monitoring the impact of the implementation of the extension on the ground. ACESS has received many reports of massive confusion around the implementation plan amongst applicants and officials alike.

Problems with the phased-in scheme include the following:

- Because of the confusion, the primary caregiver and their children have to travel back and forth to the nearest Social Development Office – which may not be so near – to find out whether they do or don't qualify. Many are turned away unnecessarily because officials don't know how to interpret the phased in extension. Families have to bear these extra, unnecessary costs in transport fees, documentation provision, time and otherwise.

- Welfare Departments in some provinces are taking their own decisions not to register children who are between eight and nine years old. In Provinces like Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, children “who are eligible in terms of the Regulations” are met with signs saying “Only children under 8” and officials who still insist that they will not register children who are over 8 but less than nine years because of “lack of capacity”.
- The Department has said that children who turn 9 before 1 April 2004 will fall off the system and their caregivers will have to re-register them on 1 April 2004 when they again become eligible, meaning that caregivers will have to incur the extra cost, time and effort of registering their child twice.
- Children who are currently 12 and 13 years old will never see the light of the child support grant.
- People are queuing in social services offices across the country to register 10 to 14 year olds because expectations were created that the grant would immediately be made available to children under 14 and people are desperate for income support to pay for food.

The following statements from people affected on the ground illustrate some of the problems and confusion that the phased-in approach has brought on the poor:

Florence Mahlangu’s son, Sibusiso was born in 1994 August 29, which means he is 8 years and four months old – therefore under 9 years and qualifies for the child support grant (CSG) as of 1st April 2003. However, Florence Mahlangu has been turned away several times by officials in the social services offices in Odi, Mabopane (Pretoria) claiming her son will only qualify for the child support grant on 1st April 2004.

Thoko Mkhwanazi pays just over ten rands from Kwamhlanga Township in Kwandebele to social services offices in Kwakga. She’s been to the social services offices more times than she can count. Every time she is told that her 8 year eight month old daughter, Sara Mokwena who was born on 25 August 1994, will only qualify for the child support grant after the 1st of April 2004.

“I have explained to the officials that on the radio they said she [Sara] qualifies for the grant,” says Mkhwanazi. “But they insist that she will only qualify next year.”

Winnie Leyane from Pienaar (KaDantjie) in Nelspruit was only told after queuing for a week that her 9 year old son Joseph, who was born in 1993, will only qualify for the child support grant from the 1st of April 2004.”These people gave me a number and let me queue for a week,” she says. “Then they tell me that I must come next year.”

“I’ve been waking up at 4.00am for the whole week. Most of these people [the caregivers] are turned away because we don’t know what’s the right age,” says Leyane.

“All the papers that they give us are written in English and we can’t read. We don’t know if they [the social workers] are telling the truth or not because some people are saying it’s all children under 14,” added Leyane.

From CSG Case Alert produced by the Children’s Institute for ACCESS.

The administration and delivery of social grants by the Department of Social Development is already swamped with problems. These problems are being exacerbated and perpetuated by the complex and unreasonable phased-in scheme.

The impact of these problems on beneficiaries’ access to social assistance rights will range from high costs to beneficiaries, long queues in very uncomfortable conditions, delays in the approval and payment of grants, and unnecessary suspension and termination of grants.

Due to these problems, ACCESS is calling on the Government to change the unreasonable phased-in policy and instead implement the extension to 14 years immediately.

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