



GLOBAL RISK INSIGHTS
Know Your World

South African Government Accused of Falsifying Unemployment Relief Denials



[by Natasha Louis](#) , [November 8, 2020](#)

(Source names have been changed in order to protect identities.)

Delays in the provision of COVID-19 relief have been causing anger among South Africans who are struggling through the pandemic. The government is accused of falsifying relief application denials, pointing to “alternative income” where none exists. As of early November, many of the country’s unemployed are still being denied assistance.

For six months, South Africans have been well aware of their government's corruption and incompetence in delivering its \$26 billion COVID-19 relief package. The [Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant](#) (SRD) promised 350 Rand (less than \$21) a month "for 6 months to be paid to individuals who are currently unemployed." Unfortunately, few – if any – South Africans received a single payment for nearly six months until the end of September or early October. A select number of 'qualified' South Africans received one deposit of R350 for the month of May. What is even more catastrophic is that many South Africans are being notified that their applications placed in May have now been declined. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) form states the denial reason is "alternative income source identified." Yet many citizens who have been receiving this reason are unemployed – some for years. Despite being unemployed for the last several months or longer, numerous South Africans are all receiving this same denial reason.

The image is a screenshot of a web application from the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). At the top, there is a yellow header with the SASSA logo and name. Below the header, the form displays the following information:

- south african id number of applicant ***: A blacked-out field.
- phone number used to submit your application ***: A blacked-out field.
- submit**: A yellow button.
- MAY2020**: A dropdown menu with a downward arrow.
- JUN2020**: A dropdown menu with a downward arrow.
- AUG2020**: A dropdown menu with an upward arrow.
- application id**: A blacked-out field.
- outcome**: A field containing the text "declined".
- reason**: A field containing the text "alternative income source identified".

A declined application for COVID-19 relief. Photo Credit: Anonymous Source

In a country already suffering severely from unemployment (the [unemployment rate](#) has risen to 40%), over [3 million jobs](#) have been lost due to COVID-19 with an additional 1.5 million lost during the lockdown. SASSA only announced in September that it would [outsource calls and emails](#) for assistance in order to address its significant backlog problem. SASSA “has been inundated with millions of applications and people desperate to ascertain the success of said applications since the announcement of the grant.”

Denied Assistance

Annika, a 22-year-old with three young children, has been unemployed since 2017 and has been earning only R700 (\$41) a month washing clothes – an unsafe occupation to have during the pandemic. Annika was a maid three years ago but her employer moved to another location. Unfortunately, Annika could not maintain her employment due to the additional cost of traveling. The side-income she is currently earning does not count as employment as it is a requirement that a person’s job be registered with the government by their employer. In Annika’s case, she is not a registered maid and therefore still qualifies for the SRD. Despite this, Annika is one of those who received the SASSA rejection that stated she was receiving an “alternative income.”

Lindiwe, a caretaker of five children, also has not received any governmental assistance and received a denial due to an “alternative income.” She has not found work since 2018. “What is actually going on is people are randomly now being given 350 Rand. [...] They’re just doing it to say, ‘No, we’ve given out money.’ But it’s just random.” South Africans have contested the inaction by the government every month but have not received any replies.

When asked where she thinks the money is going, Lindiwe believes that the funds are going into the pockets of politicians via deposits made to the bank accounts of their

friends and families. This is not a wild accusation, as the government is conducting its own investigation into itself regarding “600 corruption cases linked to \$294 million in coronavirus procurement tenders.” In August, the country’s ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), “called a meeting of its [National Executive Committee](#) to begin on Friday to probe corruption within its ranks.”

Unemployed Insurance Fund (UIF) spokesperson [Makhosonke Buthelezi](#) stated in late August that payment suspensions due to the investigation were lifted. “Its original deadline for claims was the end of June, but was extended to August 15. The payments, however, will be made until September 15.” Yet September 15 came and went with only a few receiving one month’s payment. Instead of handling millions of backlogged claims, the government has wrongly declined pending applications with a falsified reason.

Lindiwe states, “They will always use someone who cannot be traced back to them. The fact that they’re investigating any foul play [...] nobody is ever going to get arrested. It’s not going to happen. It’s just been the story for years, even before COVID happened. They’re just going to split the money.”

Anger Toward SASSA Grows

Thembekile Kimi Makwetu, the South African appointed Auditor-General, earlier this month pointed to the vulnerability of the SASSA system and laid the blame on [fraudulent activity, hacking and “double dipping.”](#) Yet it is unclear as to how hacking and ‘double dipping’ could be the cause of South Africans receiving only one, single payment over the course of six months and many unemployed people being declined for somehow receiving an income they do not have.

Upset has been rising significantly as people continue to struggle with no sign of relief. Faith in the government or of restitution being found through an investigation is limited, if it exists at all. While Makwetu is expected to release a report this month, any significant changes as a result are doubtful. As COVID-19 continues to impact the world significantly, South Africa and its unemployed are left to face economic strife, starvation and the risk of illness with no support from their government. It is implausible that the South African government can conduct a proper investigation into its own handling of a COVID-19 relief fund when its SASSA system is knowingly falsifying applications; stating that unemployed people are employed in order to deny them the funds they deserve and so desperately need.

The SASSA Info Facebook page attempted to mollify anger among South Africans by posting that they can appeal the declines on their applications. Yet based on public response, this was not a satisfying answer. Many South Africans, especially those most in need for assistance, do not have access to a phone or computer to access their applications or appeal the decision. Additionally, many feel that the program should be able to rectify the problem on its own; that the process will take an indefinite time as they have already waited for six months; or that a proper solution will never be found due to corruption.



Replies to a post on the SASSA Info Facebook page. Photo Credit: Natasha Louis

Ongoing Problems

As of early November, many unemployed South Africans are still getting declined even after challenging rejections. Payments were set to end in October but have been extended through December due to inefficiency. While it is possible those approved could receive back payments by next month, it is unlikely as few payments have been received thus far and many South Africans continue to receive denials despite no change in their unemployment status. “The extension of the scheme is [costing the](#)

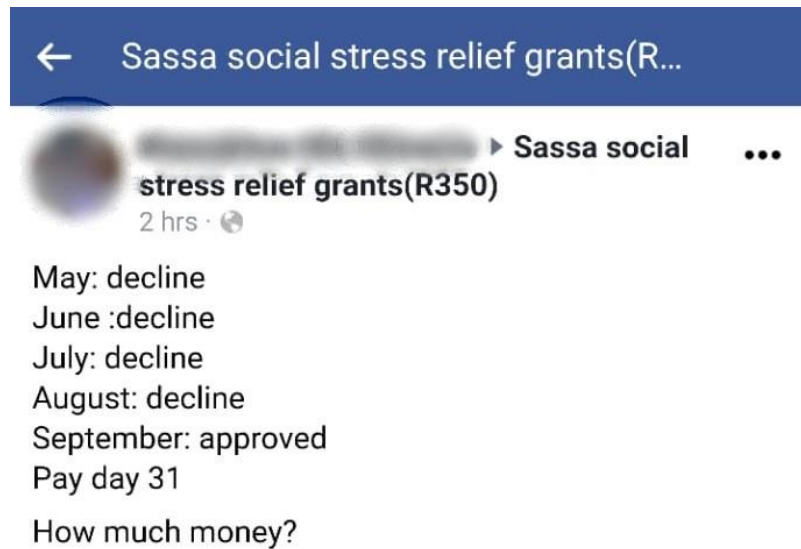
[government almost R7 billion](#) initially, but prices are likely to increase should they roll out these payments beyond January. Basic Income Grants remain popular – but tough to fund during a pandemic.”

The Democratic Alliance (DA) did not hold back on its criticism of SASSA when stating that it does not believe that the program can handle delivering payments. The DA Minister of Social Development [Bridget Masango](#) stated last month, “There is little doubt that the intention behind the grant was laudable, however, the implementation was chaotic from the start. Potential beneficiaries had to wait for months to find out if their applications had been approved, while others have still not received a cent. Beneficiaries who were lucky enough to receive grants at the start of SRD implementation, have since been removed from the list for seemingly arbitrary reasons.”

Approvals and rejections appear to be sporadic and not representative of someone’s actual employment status. Additionally, if someone has been approved for several months, they still may only receive partial payment. For example, Lindiwe states that she was approved for the first three months but still did not get paid. For the months of August and September, her status was ‘Pending’ for an extended time and eventually rejected due to them claiming that she was working. In October, they changed the status to ‘Approved’ for those two months but she has only received two payments of R350 for August and September that were paid on October 1, instead of all six payments owed. No communication has been given through the SASSA app on if or when back payments will be received.

This confusing process of SASSA repeatedly changing application statuses between pending, approved or denied is commonplace. Citizens only need to apply for the SASSA grant once but the program either approves or rejects an application on a monthly basis. Those who have been denied send appeals via email regarding

SASSA's incorrect declaration of their 'alternative income' but to no avail. South Africans can only send an email regarding the months they were denied but cannot appeal the fact that they have not been paid. SASSA has not sent any form of communication to acknowledge appeals have been received, are in process or are declined.



A comment on the SASSA Facebook page. Photo Credit: Natasha Louis

Masango believes that President Cyril Ramaphosa's speeches discussing the positive impact that the relief package has had on South Africans shows how Ramaphosa does not understand the severity of the government's failure. "What the Department of Social Development (DSD) and SASSA seem to consistently ignore is that their impotence directly affects the lives of those most vulnerable in South Africa. [...] They affect the lives of the desperate and needy who for whatever reason are not able to fend for themselves at the moment. And in this crisis SASSA showed its rotten core."

According to Lindiwe, "Somebody will always get silenced, somebody is always willing to pay something and there will always be somebody willing to be bought. Basically, everybody can be bought in South Africa."

<https://globalriskinsights.com/2020/11/south-african-government-accused-of-falsifying-unemployment-relief-denials/>

CATEGORIES: [AFRICA](#), [POLITICS](#)

TAGS: [COVID-19](#), [CYRIL RAMAPHOSA](#), [SOCIAL SECURITY](#), [SOUTH AFRICA](#)

ABOUT AUTHOR

[Natasha Louis](#)

Natasha Louis is a security analyst and Director of Research at the Amni-Forum for Defence and Security; a consultancy firm based in Somalia. Her specializations focus on African affairs and security, including terrorism, conflict and human rights. She has been published internationally and had work accepted by the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence's annual conference (2018). Natasha is currently based in New York and holds a MS in Global Affairs with a concentration in Transnational Security from NYU.