



**THE RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE  
IMPLEMENTATION AND UTILISATION  
OF THE SPECIAL COVID-19 SRD  
GRANT**  
JULY 2021

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction and Background

South Africa went into a nation-wide lockdown from 26 March 2020, which was extended through a risk-adjusted approach ranging from Alert Level 5 to Alert Level 1. The loss of jobs and income for millions of South Africans living in poverty and without income protection saw the announcement and implementation of the Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant for an initial period of 6 months. This was further extended by additional months to end in April 2021.

The criteria for the grant was: South African citizens, permanent residents or refugees registered with Home Affairs; resident within the borders of the Republic of South Africa; above the age of 18; unemployed; not receiving any income; not receiving any social grant; not receiving any unemployment insurance benefit (UIF) and does not qualify to receive UIF; not receiving a stipend from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme(NSFAS); not receiving any other government COVID-19 response support; and not a resident in a government funded or subsidised institution.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) planned and designed online digital technology systems and platforms for the application, assessment, verification and payment of the grant. During the rollout of the grant, the aforementioned institutions commissioned a Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant. The Rapid Assessment triangulated information gathered through the adoption of a mixed method approach. This included the online survey and in-depth interviews with key informants and focus groups. The triangulation process also made use of insights from the literature reviewed. The design of the rapid assessment comprised of four (4) parts namely: (i) analysis of the information and data on all applicants for the grant. This information and data were collected by SASSA through the application and verification process; (ii) quantitative research based on a stratified, representative sample of the grant applicants. An online survey (online self-administered questionnaires) on utilisation and implementation was administered; (iii) qualitative research – undertaking in-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions with those who qualify but did not apply. This required the interviewees to first identify the individuals; (iv) qualitative research – interviewing key informants involved in the design of the systems used by SASSA in the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant application, verification and payment process.

### Special COVID-19 SRD Grant Applications

In the period May to November 2020, SASSA received 9,537,077 applications (with more males applying). Of these 6,449,916 (67.6%) were approved, with men making up 67.9% (4,379,331) of approved Special COVID-19 SRD grant applications compared to only 32.1% (2,070,285) women. Out of the 9,537,077 received applications, an overwhelming majority (80%) used the USSD channel to apply. This was followed by WhatsApp (12.5%), website (7.4%) and emails (0.1%). The age distribution from the information collected by SASSA shows that applicants below age 20, age groups 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 when combined make up 61.3% of all applicants. However, when analysis of age and gender distribution is undertaken, it shows that in the 18-24 years and the 49-59 years age categories more women than men applied. The lower applications submitted by women were at their peak reproductive ages. This suggests that the receipt of the Child Support Grant (CSG) was a key factor driving the applicants submitted by women. Furthermore, two provinces (Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal) were found to have disproportionately higher number applicants with 21.4% and 21.1% respectively.

### Rapid Assessment Findings

Four (4) questionnaires were undertaken using the Survey Monkey online platform. The questionnaires comprised of 1) Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for recipients, 2) Non-utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for those rejected, 3) Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for recipients, and 4) Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for those rejected. The sample was drawn from the total number of applications (9,537,077) received in the said period, and was stratified by age, gender and province. The sample was representative of the population of all those who applied. The results indicate that age groups 18-24 and 25-34 made up 69.5% of respondents and Black Africans constituted 82.8% of all applicants with the Coloured population group accounting for 10.6% of applicants. The online survey returned higher percentages of applicants from Gauteng at 28.2% and KwaZulu-Natal at 18.7%.

Higher numbers of applicants were found in metropolitan municipalities (urban areas) compared to district municipalities. This urban bias was evident in all provinces with metros. On education, 68% of respondents had matric and higher education (degree or diploma). This is an important observation when we consider that online digital technology platforms were used in the application process which required ownership of devices and digital literacy.

The household size of respondents shows that 71.6% live in households that have a minimum of 4 people. This figure rises to 86.1% when those who live in households with 3 people are included. Only 15.5% of respondents said they live in households with 2 members. When the situation of applicants before the lockdown is analysed, a high proportion were found to have been unemployed and looking for work (57.57% for recipients and 47.03% for those rejected). A smaller proportion (4.05% for recipients and 10.26% for those rejected) were found to have been employed on a full time basis.

During lockdown the situation changed drastically for both individuals and households as 42.93% recipients and 49.85% rejected were not able to look for jobs like they used to prior to lockdown, 32.68% recipients and 33.71% rejected lost their jobs, and 26.26% recipients and 22.44% rejected were not paid during lockdown. A further 18.69% recipients and 13.32% rejected reported that they stopped their business because of lockdown. The main issue for the respondents (53.49%) was that they were not able to look for jobs like they used to because of the lockdown. Other respondents answered that they lost their job (11.07%), were not paid during lockdown (9.40%) and for 9.66% 'stopped my business because of lockdown'.

The main sources of information on the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was the television (53.65% recipients and 58.01% rejected) and radio (32.59% recipients and 35.75% rejected). DSD and SASSA were generally ranked lower than social media and friends as sources of information, with 6.08% recipients and 8.40% rejected and 11.22% recipients and 15.36% rejected choosing DSD and SASSA respectively as a source of information.

The month of May, the very first month the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was open for application, is the month indicated by respondents as the month they first applied for the grant. For recipients of the grant, more than 70% applied in the month of May compared to 57.77% rejected applicants. This shows that the need for the grant was strong amongst those that applied as there was no delay in applying after the grant was announced. The number of times respondents applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant is reported as applied once only (66.68% recipients and 42.41% rejected), applied twice (14.83% recipients and 25.54% rejected) and applied more than twice (18.50% recipients and 33.05% rejected). First payments were received mostly in the first 3 months (May, June and July) of availability of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

The Rapid Assessment found that the grant is mostly used to purchase food, as reported by 93.3% of surveyed applicants. Electricity was a distant second choice with 31.85% of respondents saying that they use the Special COVID-19 SRD grant to purchase this commodity. This result and observation support and is in line with studies and research conducted in South Africa on the use and benefits of social grants.

It is also important to note that 53.11% of respondents say that they put the grant money of R350 together with other monies received by members of the household for household consumption. For 34.97% of respondents this only happens sometimes. Only 11.92% of respondents stated that this never happens.

When respondents were asked if the Special COVID-19 SRD grant made a positive difference in their lives and that of members of their households, roughly 80% confirmed that the grant made a positive difference in their lives and those of their household. A substantial number of respondents (88.14% of recipients of the grant and 73.85% of those who were rejected) maintained the view that the grant should be given to everyone that applies. The reasons mentioned by the respondents was that 1) there are many poor people in South Africa and the R350 would help (77.10% recipients and 76.06% rejected), and 2) the cost of living is high indicated (30.42% recipients and 29.99% rejected).

A significant number of respondents (59.15%) claim that they were 'not given any reason' by SASSA for the rejection of their applications. An even higher number of respondents (81.20%) stated that they do not agree with the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of their applications with only 18.80% agreeing with the reason given.

A high number of respondents were found to own cellphones (95.84% recipients and 96.76% rejected). Respondents (95.14% recipients and 98.21% rejected) also revealed that they have access to a cellphone when they need to use one. The cellphone has a wide range of uses that include searching for jobs, education, internet, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp and the usual make calls, receive calls, send SMS and receive SMS. Internet use is high as shown by 85.24% recipients and 82.39% rejected indicating this, 77.94% recipients and 75.31% rejected have an email address, 79.37% of recipients of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant applied themselves and 80.72% of rejected applicants also applied themselves.

Positive views on the information and application process are held by both those receiving the grant and those whose applications were rejected. 92.58% of recipients agreed that the information on how to apply was easily available and clear. 88.68% agreed that the process to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was easy and straightforward. 85.59% agreed to the statement 'I received clear information on the outcome of my application, where to get the money and how to get the money.' When considering the views of those who applied and were rejected, on information and process 81.65% agreed that the information was easily available and clear. On the process to apply, 75.01% deemed the process easy and straightforward. The conclusion is, even amongst those that applied and were rejected, SASSA implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was viewed positively.

Focus groups discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews conducted with those who qualify but did not apply indicate that the main reasons provided for not applying is the 1) lack of a smartphone to use when applying and 2) lack of identity documents (IDs). In-depth interviews with key informants on the design and digital technology platforms provided an overview of how SASSA had to explore, consider, evaluate, test and bring in new digital technology-based application, evaluation, verification and payment systems in an integrated fashion, the challenges encountered and the achievements made.

In conclusion, the evidence from the study indicate that the grant's criteria was exclusionary and disadvantaged women receiving grants such as Child Support Grant (CSG) for their children. There is thus a need to carefully craft the criteria for similar grants to ensure the people in need are not unfairly excluded/disadvantaged. The findings indicate that communication about access, application process and criteria was misunderstood by those in need. This area requires improvement. The beneficiaries of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant are most likely in rural areas, less educated, less tech-savvy, and heavily reliant on word of mouth communication. Reach was subsequently hindered as those that qualified did not have the means and/or knowledge of how to apply. There is also a strong need to find ways to mitigate and bridge the digital divide in the administration of social security. This is supported by majority of the respondents (88%) who maintain that the grant to be accessed by all poor individuals that apply as there are many poor people in South Africa, as explained by 77% of respondents.



In addition, seven (7) policy briefs were drafted. These included:

- **Who applied? A profile of applicants for the grant.** Analysis of applications received by SASSA and results of the online survey indicate a profile of recipients of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant that is different to South Africa's poverty profile especially on gender, education and geographic location.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD grant – A critique from a gender perspective.** The top up of social grants, the Child Support Grant (CSG) caregiver allowance and Special COVID-19 SRD Grant translated to unequal treatment of men and women. The different amounts and different duration for the top up, caregiver allowance and the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant created different relief regimes for men and for women.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD Grant and the use of digital technology systems in the application, verification and payment process: Lessons learnt and implications.** The use of online digital platforms has prepared the ground for the advent of digital welfare in South Africa which means SASSA's current operations model and expenditure of grant administration will come under scrutiny and savings and efficiencies from digital technology have been proven through the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant.
- **COVID-19 pandemic and exploring a single citizen database/social protection register in South Africa – what are the issues?** The goal of government is the upliftment of all South Africans through the provision of quality goods and services. Public goods and services have to be accessible in a manner that is convenient to citizens. The structure, configuration, operations and systems of government have to be geared towards this goal. There is ample evidence for the need of a government-wide integrated social registry and the COVID-19 pandemic has made this to be paramount.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD grant: What the grant is used for and who received the grant?** The purchase of food is the main use of the grant and 70% of recipients of the grant live in households with 4 and more household members. This reinforces research undertaken in South Africa on the use of social grants and it strengthens calls for a grant to cover 18 – 59 years group.
- **Special COVID-19 SRD grant - eligible beneficiaries, annual cost, and impact on poverty.** The Special COVID-19 SRD grant makes an important dent on poverty. When considering options for the extension of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant or the introduction of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) it is important to consider not only the cost of the scenarios, but also how different subgroups are affected, and how the benefit relates to other existing benefits. In order to reduce the very high levels of poverty in female-headed households, receipt of child benefits must be disregarded when determining eligibility for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant or a Basic Income Grant.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1:** Utilise the evidence of the support for the payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant by an overwhelming majority of respondents as evidence-base for policy arguments and advocacy at the political level.

**R2:** Improve communication channels and access to information for low income groups. Communication has to be modelled on access to information and the understanding of those who are potential beneficiaries, not government officials. Continuous research is critical in this area to test if the message is well received.

**R4:** Mitigate and bridge the digital divide in the administration of social security.

**R3:** Development of a single citizens' registry for government services. Many countries have started to implement single registries as a central repository of data across several identification and social protection programmes. The drive should be towards a single registry that provides a total view and social and economic circumstance of beneficiaries including employment, education, skills, social grants, EPWP, etc.

**R5:** Continuous update and refresh of Management Information Systems (MIS). MIS are of critical importance and the foundation in the administration of any social protection programme, including the identification and registration of beneficiaries

**R6:** Elimination of exclusion of qualifying citizens through design of application, verification and payment processes. Nearly all systems that are based on a means-test or criteria will have errors. Exclusion errors deny the very people that the programme is targeting.

**R7:** Conduct regular and periodic assessment of the application and payment system to continuously establish its reach and effect and timeously eliminate obstacles.

**R9:** Prepare and advise SASSA for the imminent future based on online digital technology systems and platforms that will radically change the current SASSA operations model and the application, assessment and verification processes.

**R8:** Match beneficiaries of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant (or similar grant) through established statistics, research and evidence on gender, geography and socio-economic profile. Young, urban based, matric and higher education, Black Africans as the main group that received the grant, is not the age, gender, and provincial profile of poverty in South Africa. This means that any future plan for a grant that covers the 19-59 years' age group will have to find innovative ways to reach the target population in all regions of the country, particularly rural areas.



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## I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

In March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. South Africa went into a nation-wide lockdown from 26 March 2020 which was extended. The loss of jobs and income for millions of South Africans living in poverty who had no income protection saw President Ramaphosa announce that 'a special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant of R350 a month for the next 6 months will be paid to individuals who are currently unemployed and do not receive any other form of social grant or UIF payment'.<sup>1</sup> The National Department of Social Development (NDSD) and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) designed the criteria for the online digital technology system for the application, assessment, verification and payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. The criteria for the grant was: South African citizens, permanent residents or refugees registered with Home Affairs; resident within the borders of the Republic of South Africa; above the age of 18; unemployed; not receiving any income; not receiving any social grant; not receiving any unemployment insurance benefit (UIF) and does not qualify to receive UIF ; not receiving a stipend from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme(NSFAS); not receiving any other government COVID-19 response support; and not a resident in a government funded or subsidised institution.

NDSD in partnership with SASSA issued Terms of Reference for the 'Appointment of a Service Provider to Conduct a Rapid Assessment on the Implementation and Utilization of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant'. The Special COVID-19 SRD grant of was initially to be paid for a period of 6 months from May 2020 to October 2020. It was first extended by 3 months to January 2021<sup>2</sup>. A further extension by 3 months (February – April 2021) was announced by the Minister of Finance in the 2021 Budget Speech on 24 February 2021. The Rapid Assessment sought to assess the 1) grants accessibility to individuals, 2) utility of the grant by the recipients, and 3) potential policy shifts for government.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW – DEVELOPMENTS ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC ECONOMIC RELIEF

Consideration of literature and developments at the global level seek to provide an appreciation of what has ensued in different countries with regards to economic relief responses directed at income support after the loss of jobs. Cash transfers and their benefits as part of social security are well researched the world over. The extent of government responses in different countries is evident in the IMF's 'policy tracker' which 'includes 197 economies'.<sup>3</sup> Social security has a long history and is established in both developed and developing countries. The advantages and benefits of cash transfers in multiple forms such as subsidies, direct cash and tax credits are some of the means used.

<sup>1</sup> 21 April 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa: Additional Coronavirus COVID-19 economic and social relief measures. Available at <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-additional-coronavirus-covid-19-economic-and-social-relief>.

<sup>2</sup> Government Gazette, Vol. 665 2 November 2020 No. 43866.

<sup>3</sup> Government Gazette, Vol. 665 2 November 2020 No. 43866.

The European Union adopted a multipronged response in its 27 members' states with a comprehensive package addressing jobs and income retention through protecting employment, supporting companies and providing income support to individuals and households. In the USA the response and relief has covered a wide spectrum of areas including, unemployment insurance, direct payments to the self-employed, those in the gig economy, individuals, families with dependants and nutrition programmes. Bitler, et al (2020) note that 'the COVID-19 crisis has led to spiking unemployment rates with disproportionate impacts on low-income families', and 'two pieces of legislation, the Families First Coronavirus Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, include important provisions to respond to these historic job losses'. In South Korea, starting in April 2020, the government introduced 'emergency cash payments to households in the bottom 70 percent income bracket, financially hit by the novel coronavirus'.<sup>4</sup> The scheme was aimed at providing '1 million won (\$814) each to four-person households with salaried workers that paid March premiums on health insurance that were below 237,000 won'.<sup>5</sup> The government scheme extended to business owners and the self-employed.

In India, 'already amongst the most vulnerable in normal times, informal economy workers find themselves bearing the brunt of this economic fallout'<sup>6</sup> as measures that have been taken on physical distancing mean that, for these workers 'their usual channels of income are broken'.<sup>7</sup> The Indian government, with some of the benefits initially availed for 3 months:

... enacted several emergency legislations to provide direct and indirect relief to workers and households and India's COVID-19 social assistance package, namely, PM-GKY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana), announced in March 2020, was designed to provide immediate relief to the vulnerable population. The PM-GKY provided cash direct benefit transfers (DBT) and in-kind supports (IKS) through existing schemes.<sup>8</sup>

Namibia introduced the COVID-19 Disaster Relief Fund directed at supporting the retention of jobs and direct cash transfer to households through the Emergency Income Grant of the Economic Stimulus and Relief Package. A number of studies have emerged from South Africa's research and statistics bodies and groups of researchers. Statistics South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), collaborations between the HSRC and the University of Johannesburg have issued analyses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research studies are based on online surveys undertaken during the pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200403000603>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200403000603>

<sup>6</sup> [https://ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS\\_740095/lang--en/index.htm?fbclid=IwAR2qzZ-f900ICZGXNIG7bkwwX15B-yUelwzwm3aHzFyQgip86RCO2hHCLI](https://ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_740095/lang--en/index.htm?fbclid=IwAR2qzZ-f900ICZGXNIG7bkwwX15B-yUelwzwm3aHzFyQgip86RCO2hHCLI)

<sup>7</sup> [https://ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS\\_740095/lang--en/index.htm?fbclid=IwAR2qzZ-f900ICZGXNIG7bkwwX15B-yUelwzwm3aHzFyQgip86RCO2hHCLI](https://ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_740095/lang--en/index.htm?fbclid=IwAR2qzZ-f900ICZGXNIG7bkwwX15B-yUelwzwm3aHzFyQgip86RCO2hHCLI)

<sup>8</sup> <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/indias-covid-19-social-assistance-package-and-its-impact-agriculture-sector>

The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM), which is a partnership between the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP) group at Stellenbosch University and the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town, undertook several waves of to investigate developments in key social and economic indicators as an outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first wave of NIDS-CRAM (7 May to 27 June 2020) showed that ‘employment has declined substantially and that the effects of this are largest for the most disadvantaged’.<sup>9</sup> On hunger, it is reported that ‘47% of respondents reported that their household ran out of money to buy food in April 2020’.<sup>10</sup> Wave 2 (30 September 2020) found that ‘the 3-million jobs lost between February and April have not returned by June’ and ‘half of shack dwellers (51%) reported running out of money to buy food in June and 22% reported that someone in their household went hungry in the previous 7 days’.<sup>11</sup> Wave 3 of the NIDS-CRAM (2 November and 13 December 2020) showed improvement in the employment situation in the country whilst showing worsening levels of hunger.

The use of technology in the provision of social benefits such as cash transfers, medicine, health and education has become a feature of social security systems in many parts of the world. The advent of the digital welfare state, Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) and the very recent exploration of digital technology in social assistance transfers for Covid-19 relief<sup>12</sup> as part of the response of governments across the globe, are pertinent issues of the present moment.

The digital welfare state ‘may be defined as having systems of social protection and assistance which are ‘driven by digital data and technologies that are used to automate, predict, identify, surveil, detect, target and punish’.<sup>13</sup> In Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age, the World Bank points to the ‘overwhelming trend toward digitalization of economies and societies’.<sup>14</sup> The advent of the digital welfare state raises critical issues on policy, exclusion and human rights as questions for consideration in the development of application, evaluation, verification and payment systems.

And digitalisation can make it easier for people to access the benefits that they’re entitled to. They can apply for them online or on the phone, for example, rather than in writing or at public offices. Claims can be processed through faster automated systems. Entitlements can be cross-checked through different databases. Response times can be reduced, helping those in sudden or in urgent need.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup>National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) - Overview and Findings NIDS-CRAM Synthesis Report Wave 1

<sup>10</sup>National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) - Overview and Findings NIDS-CRAM Synthesis Report Wave 1

<sup>11</sup>National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) - Synthesis Report NIDS-CRAM Wave 2

<sup>12</sup>Alan Gelb and Anit Mukherjee, Center for Global Development, Policy Paper 181, September 2020.

<sup>13</sup><https://www.socialeurope.eu/digital-welfare-states-boundaries-and-opportunities#:~:text=Digital%20welfare%20states%20may%20be,detect%2C%20target%20and%20punish>. 21 May 2020

<sup>14</sup><https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/470971616532207747/principles-on-identification-for-sustainable-development-toward-the-digital-age-second-edition>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.apc.org/en/blog/inside-digital-society-whats-digital-about-welfare> David Souter, 25 May 2020

The concerns and reservations on the digital welfare state emanate from observations that the application of technology, particularly in the context of developing countries, is fraught with problems of infrastructure, access, ability to use technology on the platforms for interfacing and the recognition and respect of human rights.

### **The UN Rapporteur’s Digital technology, social protection and human rights: Report raises concerns on the use of digital technology in welfare pointing to:**

*A lack of digital literacy leads to an inability to use basic digital tools at all, let alone effectively and efficiently. Limited or no access to the Internet poses huge problems for a great many people. Additional barriers arise for individuals who have to pay high prices to obtain Internet access, travel long distances or absent themselves from work to do so, visit public facilities such as libraries in order to get access, or obtain assistance from staff or friends to navigate the systems’.<sup>16</sup>*

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights directs our attention to the fact that ‘at the macro level, however, big tech has been a driver of growing inequality and has facilitated the creation of a “vast digital underclass”’.<sup>17</sup>

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The Rapid Assessment triangulated information gathered through the adoption of a mixed method approach. This included the online survey and in-depth interviews with key informants and focus groups. The triangulation process also made use of insights from the literature reviewed. The design of the rapid assessment comprised of four (4) parts namely:

- 1. Analysis of the information and data on all applicants for the grant. This information and data were collected by SASSA through the application and verification process;**
- 2. Quantitative research based on a stratified, representative sample of the grant applicants. An online survey (online self-administered questionnaires) on utilisation and implementation was administered;**
- 3. Qualitative research – undertaking in-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions with those who qualify but did not apply. This required the interviewees to first identify the individuals;**
- 4. Qualitative research – interviewing key informants involved in the design of the systems used by SASSA in the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant application, verification and payment process.**

<sup>16</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/DigitalTechnology.aspx>. UN Special Rapporteur, Digital technology, social protection and human rights: Report. Issued by The Special Rapporteur for extreme poverty, October 2019. Presented to the General Assembly at its 74th session.

<sup>17</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/DigitalTechnology.aspx>

## The main research questions for the rapid assessment were:

- a. What are those who are receiving the Special COVID-19 SRD grant of R350 (the recipients) using it for? What goods and services are they purchasing?
- b. Were the systems and their design (online platforms, access to and use of devices), that SASSA put in place for the application process accessible to those that the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was targeting?

### 3.1 Data analysis – information on applicants collected by SASSA

The application process for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant employed by SASSA required and collected the following information from all those that applied for the grant: names and surname; ID; channel used by the applicant (USSD, WhatsApp, email, and website); mobile number; email address; citizenship; disability status; address; city; province; district municipality; ward; longitude; latitude; contact number of submitter; and submitter surname and submitter name. The data from SASSA also included outcome of verification and reason for being declined.

SASSA provided a data file that contained anonymised information (excluding name, surname and address of applicants) of all applicants. The data file contained data fields and data labels as indicated in the list of information collected. The age and gender of applicants was compiled using ID numbers in the data file. Population group was collected through the online self-administered questionnaires. The Special COVID-19 SRD grant file of applicants from SASSA contained information on application assessment outcome (approved or rejected) for each applicant.

### 3.2 Online survey on utilisation and implementation

The online self-administered survey questionnaires were formulated and structured as per the table below.

**Table 1: Utilisation and Implementation Survey Questionnaires**

Separating utilisation and implementation – 4 different questionnaires	
UTILISATION	IMPLEMENTATION
1. Recipients (use of the grant)	1. Recipients (questions on implementation)
2. Non-utilisation (not receiving the grant)	2. Rejected (questions on implementation)

Two questionnaires were constructed to assess the grant utilisation and non-utilisation for grant recipients and those rejected respectively. The central focus of the utilisation questionnaire was on what the grant is used for. The aim for the non-utilisation questionnaire was to test if there is any difference between those receiving the grant and those not receiving the grant.

An additional two questionnaires were constructed to assess the views of the grant implementation by grant recipients and those not successful in getting the grant. Both questionnaires focussed on investigating issues on implementation, the systems and platforms that SASSA provided, ownership and the use of devices in the application for the grant as well as views on the online digital technology application process that SASSA put in place. The questionnaire utilised on those rejected sought further to establish the reasons given for the rejection of their applications.

### 3.2.1 Questionnaire Construction, Testing and Pilot study

The first step was identifying the topics and areas of focus and investigation for each questionnaire. The development of questionnaires was through a rigorous process that commenced with a draft questionnaire and continuous review of the questionnaire until it was ready for testing. Testing each questionnaire was to check language, understanding, sequence of questions, logic and flow of the questionnaire. The pilot study tested and validated the research tools that were used in order to pick up any challenges or problems in the research and to address them prior to actual data collection. The Survey Monkey online platform for self-administered questionnaires was used for the online survey along with the services of a company that sends SMS in bulk.

### 3.2.2 Questionnaire Construction, Testing and Pilot study

The sample drawn was stratified by age, gender and province. It was designed to be representative of the total grant applicant population.

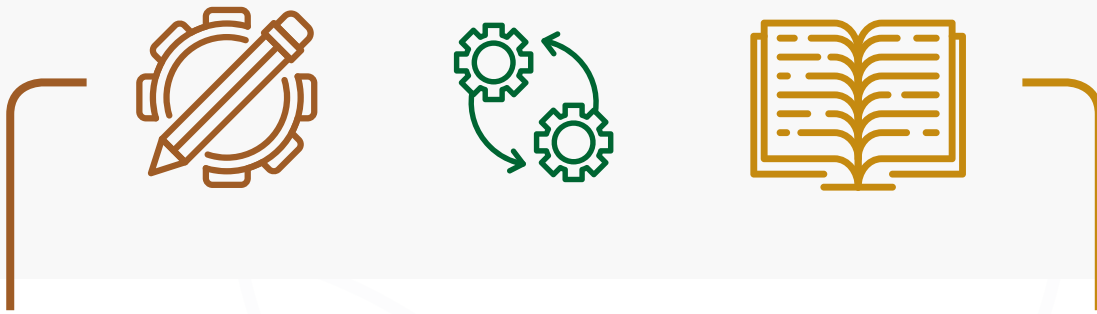
Mobile phone numbers were used for the random selection of respondents. Each respondent received only one questionnaire of the four (4) questionnaires sent electronically. Completed questionnaire responses received were not linked to the mobile phone numbers of respondents in the sample. There was adherence to the latest data governance legislation titled Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) Act No 4 of 2013 to ensure anonymity of the beneficiaries in the study.

Table 2: Rapid Assessment Survey Sample

	Name of Survey	Respondents Target (N)	Percentage	Sample drawn
1	Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients	32 250	33.8%	33 800
2	Non-utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected	32 250	33.8%	43 800
3	Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients	15 436	8.1%	16 200
4	Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected	15 436	8.1%	26 200
	<b>Total</b>	<b>95 372</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>120 000</b>



The size of the sample realised (10,241 completed questionnaires) was pre-determined by a target of minimum 10% response rate based on 1% of 9,537,077 applicants.



### **3.3 Qualitative Research - Identifying and interviewing those who qualify but did not apply**

The most convenient way of reaching and accessing this group of 'those who qualify but did not apply' was finding 'men on the side of the road', which is a feature in many urban areas in South Africa. Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were approached to assist in identifying those who fall in this group. An in-depth semi-structured interview guide was constructed, which allowed the exploration of pre-determined topics and questions whilst allowing those interviewed the freedom to express their views using their own language, explanations and perspectives. Four (4) focus group discussion and forty-two (42) in-depth interviews were conducted in EThekweni Municipality in the areas of New Germany, Pinetown and Springfield, and in Cape Town in Oceanview. Strict protocols on social distancing and the wearing of masks were applied.

### **3.4 Qualitative research – Interviewing Key Informants on the Design and Systems Used in the Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant**

The focus of this part of the research was to establish the path followed by DSD policy makers and SASSA programme managers from the time the grant was announced to the first payment that was made and the subsequent changes and improvements made. The overall guiding questions were How was this project to implement the Special **COVID-19 SRD grant undertaken in terms of design and digital technology systems and platforms?**; **Who were the key actors? Which institutions played a pivotal role? and What challenges were experienced?**

**A total of 9 key informants were identified and in-depth interviews held.**

## 4. FINDINGS



The presentation of the results of the rapid assessment follows the sequence outlined in the research design and research methodology these 4 topics:

- a) Data analysis – information on applicants collected by SASSA
- b) Online survey on utilisation and implementation
- c) Qualitative research - identifying and interviewing those who qualify but did not apply using
- d) Qualitative research – interviewing key informants on the design and systems used in the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant

### 4.1 Data analysis – information on applicants collected by SASSA

Analysis of all applications received by SASSA involved placing the applications into two categories of (i) those who applied, were approved and therefore receiving the Special COVID-19 SRD grant, and (ii) those who applied, were not successful, therefore rejected and not receiving the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

Table 3: Applicants - Approved and Rejected

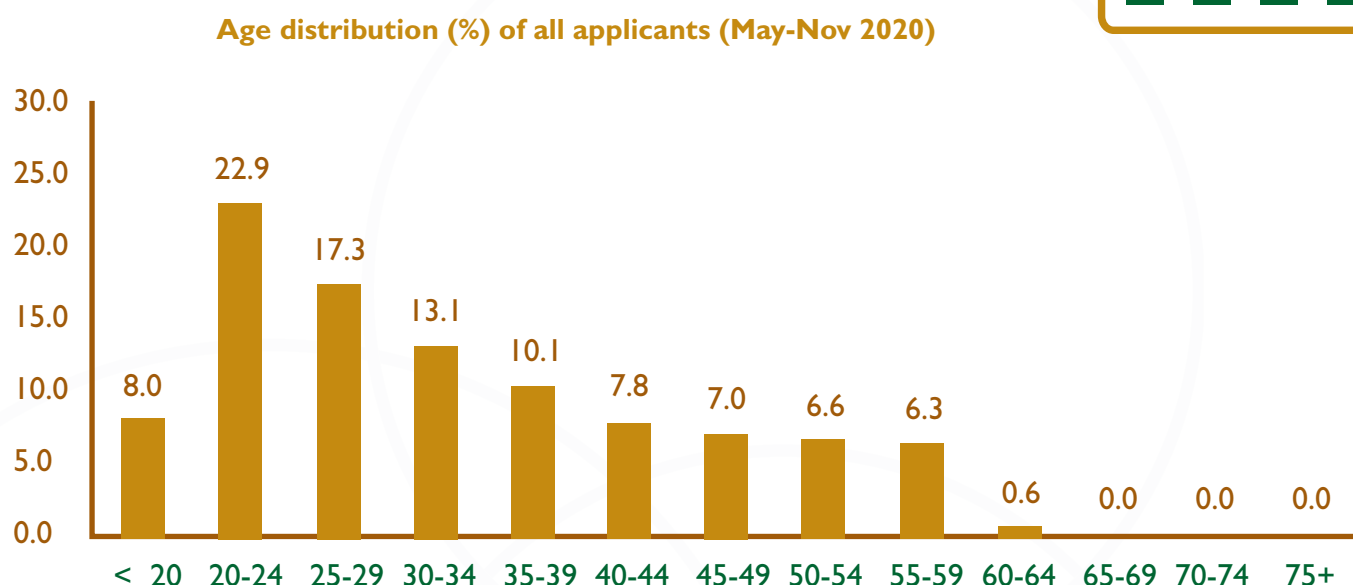
<b>Total Applicants</b>	<b>9,537,077</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Approved</b>	6,449,916	67.6%
<b>Not approved, rejected</b>	3,087,161	32.4%

Out of the 9,537,077 received applications, an overwhelming majority (80%) used the USSD channel to apply. This was followed by WhatsApp (12.5%), website (7.4%) and a small section used emails (0.1%).

#### 4.1.2 Age and gender distribution of applicants

The data was further analysed using the identity numbers that SASSA collected and the age and gender of the applicants was determined.

Figure 1: Age distribution of COVID-19 SRD grant applicants



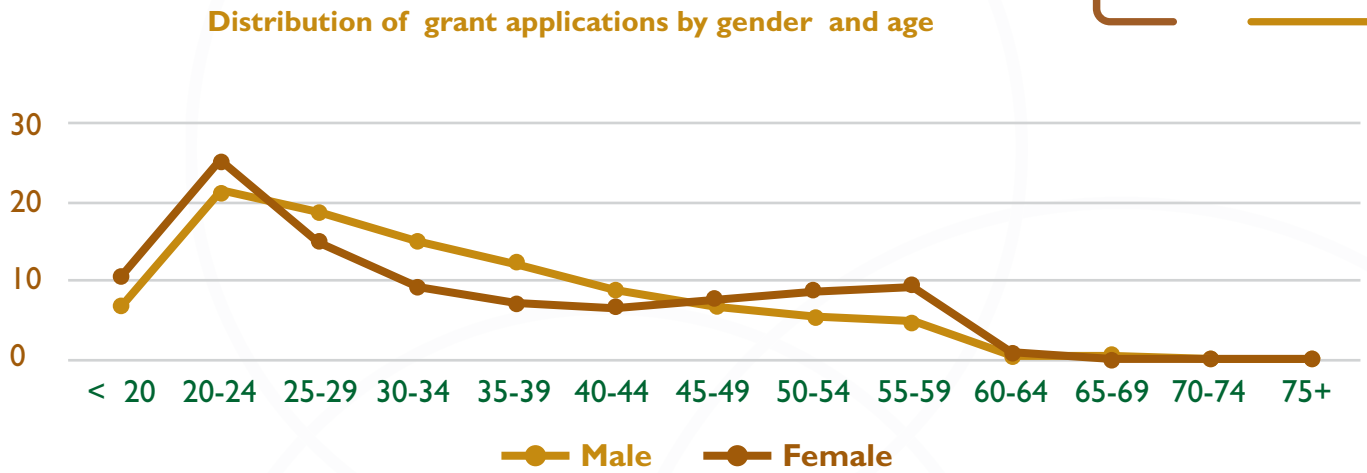
Applicants below age 20 constituted 8% of all applicants. Five-year age intervals from 18 years to 60 years show a clear youth bias in the applications received by SASSA. The age groups less than 20, 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 accounted for 8.0%, 22.9%, 17.3% and 13.1% and when combined make up 61.3% of all applicants. This is the group that is experiencing higher levels of unemployment and defined as the NEET population, that is young people not in education, employment and training. A far higher number of males applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant compared to females as shown in the 63.3% of males that applied and 36.7% of females that applied. The higher number of males compared to females is attributable to the criteria used which excluded a significant number of women from applying as they receive the Child Support Grant (CSG).

#### 4.1.3 Distribution of applicants by province

Grant applications are not evenly distributed across provinces. The data shows that Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal had disproportionately higher number applicants (21,4% and 21,1% respectively). Provinces that accounted for less than 10% of applicants each were Western Cape (8.9%), Mpumalanga (8.3%), North West (6.8%), Frees State (5.3%) and Northern Cape (2.3%). Eastern Cape and Limpopo had 13.0% and 12.8% respectively.

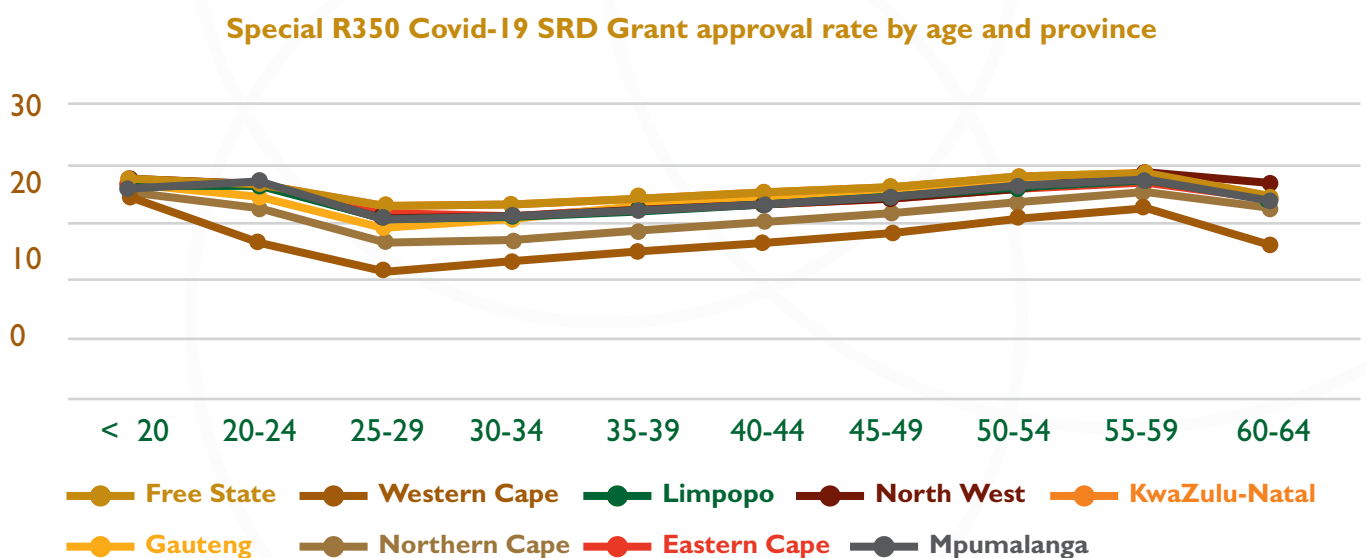
#### 4.1.4 Analysis of age and gender distribution

Figure 2: Distribution of COVID-19 SRD grant applications by gender and age



Overall more men than women applied. However, when analysis of age and gender distribution is undertaken, it shows that in the 18-24 years and the 49-59 years' age categories more women than men applied. The lower applications by women were at peak reproductive ages suggesting receipt of CSG as a factor.

Figure 3: Approval of COVID-19 SRD grant applications by province and age



The chart shows a similar pattern of approval of applications in all provinces. The rate of approval differs in different ages, notably higher in teen ages and lowest in mid-twenties. Low approval rates coincided with peak reproductive ages. Approval rates did not differ much in various provinces, with a distinct exception in the Western Cape, which had comparably, the lowest approval rate in all ages.

## 4.2 Online survey on utilisation and implementation

The results presented are based on the online survey with the 4 online self-administered questionnaires. The discussion starts with the results on the profile of all respondents to the online survey which is based on questions that were common in all the 4 questionnaires. The profile of all respondents (combining the 4 questionnaires) indicates age, population group, province, metro or district municipality, highest level of education and household size.

### 4.2.1 Profile of the respondents in online survey

#### 4.2.1.1 Age of respondents

Comparable to the information on applications from SASSA from which the sample was drawn, the percentage of age groups 18-24 and 25-34 made up 69.5% of respondents. This is the youth population in South Africa in line with the youth bulge and this indicates the high number of applicants (both approved and rejected from all the 4 questionnaires) that applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. The survey informs us that 70% of applicants were below 34 years.

#### 4.2.1.2 Population Group of respondents

Black Africans made up 82.8% of all applicants of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. The Coloured population group accounted for 10.6% of applicants. These figures are indicative of poverty levels in the different population groups in South Africa. The exclusion of predominantly Black African women who are recipients of the CSG did not alter the racial profile of applicants for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. This reflects the extent of poverty in the Black African population in South Africa.

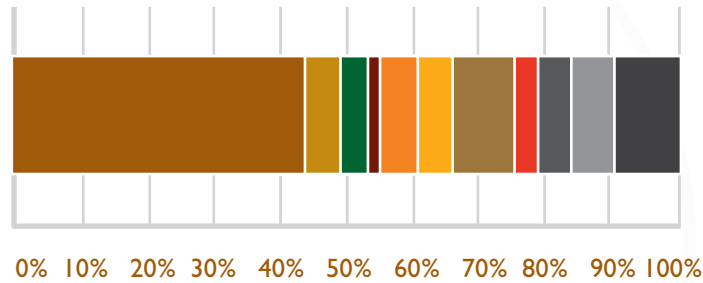
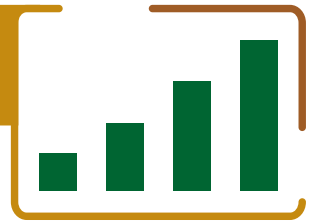
#### 4.2.1.3 Provincial profile of respondents

Responses on province from the online survey indicate the same pattern observed with the information on applications from SASSA. Gauteng had the highest number of respondents at 28.2%, KwaZulu-Natal at 18.7%. Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Limpopo showed similar percentages of 10.8%, 10% and 11.1%. The Northern Cape accounted for only 2% of responses received.

#### 4.2.1.4 Urban bias - profile of respondents by metro and district municipalities at provincial level

The results of the online survey show that far higher numbers of applicants are in metropolitan municipalities (urban areas) compared to district municipalities. This trend of urban bias was evident in all provinces with metros. The results of the Utilisation of the *Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients* online questionnaire are used to demonstrate the difference between metro and non-metro areas. The provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape are examples used to illustrate the urban bias. KwaZulu-Natal distribution of respondents by metro and non-metro

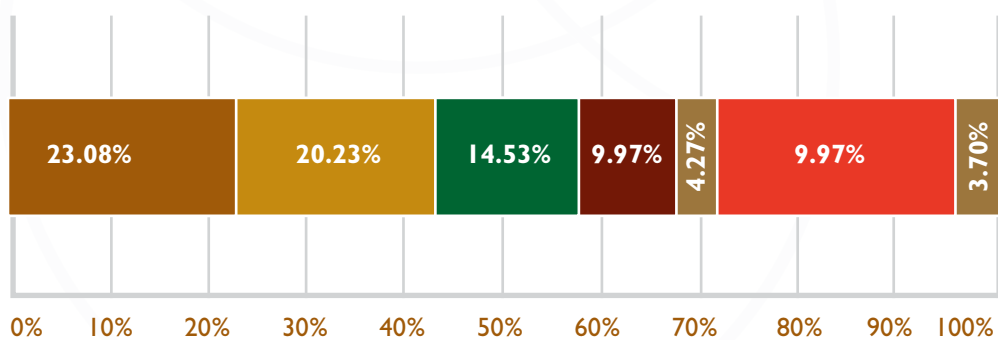
Figure 4: KwaZulu-Natal distribution of respondents by metro and non-metro



- eThekweni Metro
- Amajuba
- Ilembe
- Sisonke
- Ugu
- uMkhanyakude
- uMgungundlovu
- uMzinyathi
- Uthukela
- Uthungulu
- Zululand

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
eThekweni Metro	43.94%	283
Amajuba	4.97%	32
Ilembe	4.66%	30
Sisonke	1.71%	11
Ugu	5.90%	38
uMkhanyakude	5.28%	34
uMgungundlovu	9.16%	59
uMzinyathi	3.57%	23
Uthukela	5.12%	33
Uthungulu	6.21%	40
Zululand	9.47%	61
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>644</b>

Figure 5: Eastern Cape distribution of respondents by metro and non-metro

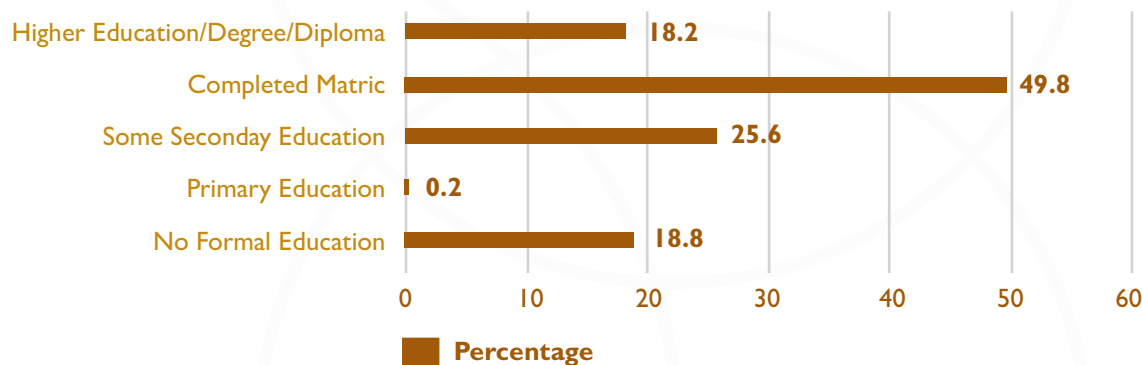


- Buffalo City Metro
- Nelson Mandela Bay Metro
- Alfred Nzo
- Amathole
- Joe Gqabi
- O R Tambo
- Sarah Bartman

The picture that emerges when looking at the profile of respondents by metro and district municipality at province level, shows a very strong urban bias. The population demographics and socio-economic characteristics of urban areas tend to show higher education levels, better access to infrastructure and technology devices compared to rural areas. This resonates with the observation that ‘digital inequality is evident between communities living in urban areas and those living in rural settlements.’<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.2.1.5 Highest Level of Education

Figure 6: Respondents highest level of education



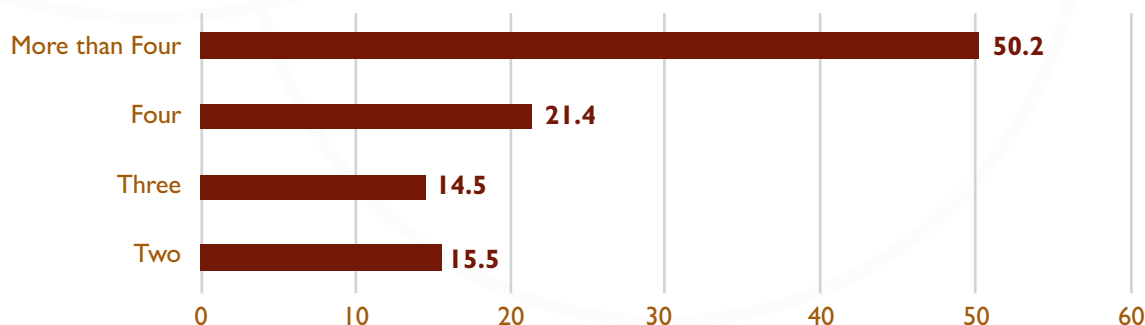
The responses of the online survey show that 68% of respondents had matric and higher education (degree or diploma). This is an important observation when we consider that online digital technology platforms were used in the application process which required ownership of devices and digital literacy.

#### 4.2.1.6 Household size

All respondents in the 4 online questionnaires were asked the question ‘Do you live alone?’ For those who answered No, the next question was ‘How many people do you live with (include yourself in the total number)?’ and a choice of 2, 3, 4 and more than 4 was allowed and respondents could choose only one.

Figure 7: Household size

#### Household Size (%) - How many people do you live with (include yourself in the total number)



<sup>18</sup> <http://www.digitaldividecouncil.com/what-is-the-digital-divide/> and <https://theconversation.com/digital-equality-south-africa-still-has-a-long-way-to-go-131864>

As the Graph shows, 71.6% (21.4% and 50.2%) of respondents live in households that have a minimum of 4 people that are part of the household. This figure rises to 86,1% when those who live in households with 3 people are included. Only 15.5% of respondents said they live in households with 2 members. This informs us that more than 70% of those who applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant live in households with 4 and more household members.



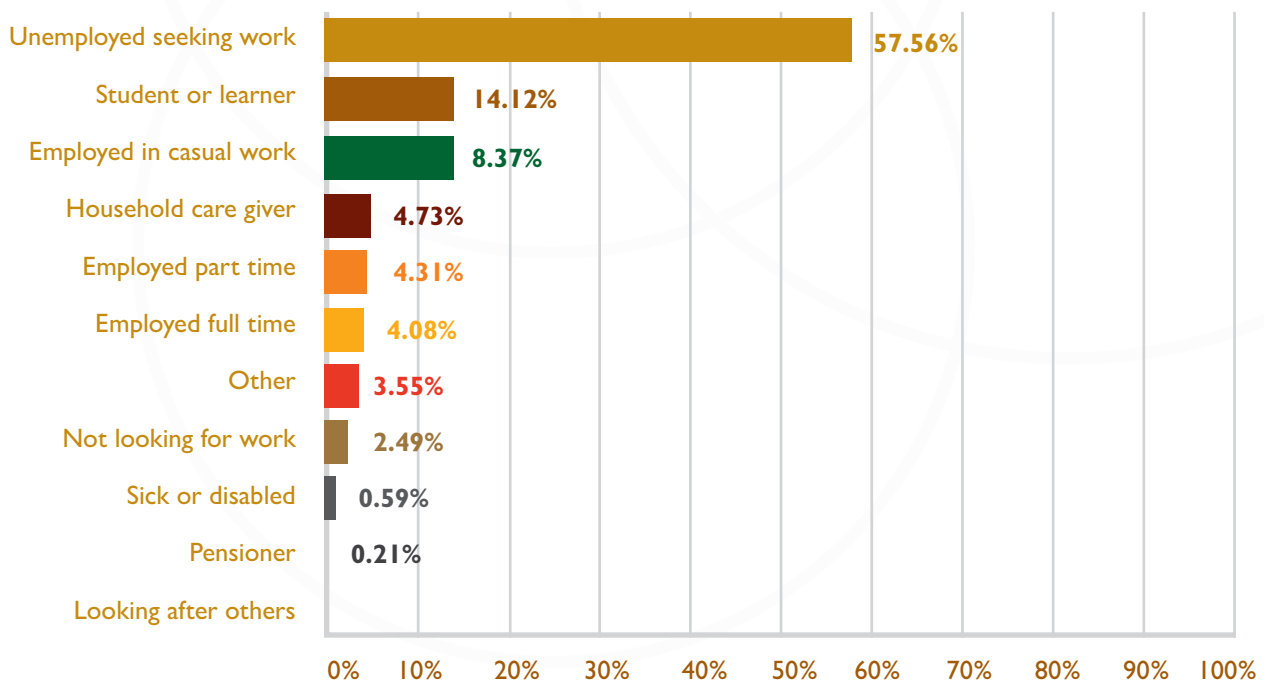
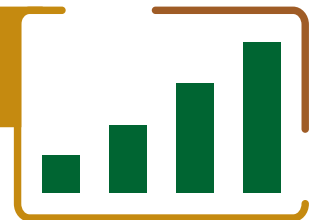
#### 4.2.2 Results of the online surveys

The results capture the outcome of the 4 different, separate questionnaires sent to respondents who applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. The approach adopted is that of themes whereby one or several questions are considered together as they relate to an area of research focus. The sections that follow, sections 4.2.2.1, section 4.2.2.2, section 4.2.2.3 and section 4.2.2.4 discuss results based on the 4 questionnaires that made up the online survey.

##### 4.2.2.1 Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients

The first theme explored as part of ‘utilisation’ is the household situation before lockdown. The questions for this theme were: (i) Before the lockdown, which of the following best describes what you were doing? (ii) Before the lockdown, what were your sources of income? and (iii) List all the sources of income for the household before lockdown.

Figure 8: Household situation before lockdown (utilisation – recipients)





The results show that before the lockdown 57.57% of respondents were unemployed and looking for work, 14.12% were students or learners, 8.37% were employed in casual work or piece job, 4.73% were household care giver and 4.31% were employed part time. Only 4.08% responded that they were employed full time.

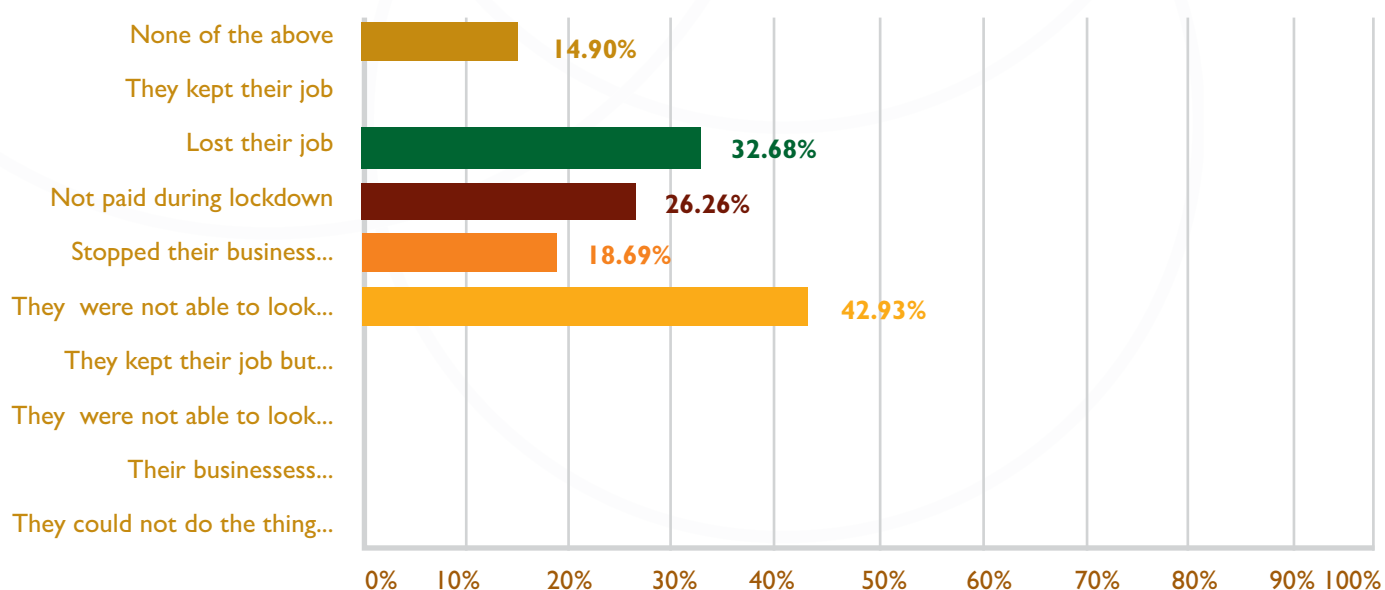
Before the lockdown the sources of income indicated were family members mentioned by 34.59% of respondents, 14.18% had a temporary job, 11.57% were self-employed with 6.78% were working part time. Only 3.35% listed a full time job as a source of income. Income for the entire household came predominantly from family members as this option was selected by 53.26% of respondents followed by Grant from SASSA which was selected by 44.69% of respondents. The rest of the sources of income selected were savings (10.39% of respondents), supported by charity, church, NGOs (6.90%) with rent (3.17%), UIF (2.29%) and loans indicated by 2.26% of respondents.

### Questions asked to establish the household situation during lockdown were:

- (i) During lockdown when factories, mines, offices, restaurants and other businesses were closed, describe what happened to members of your household? (tick all that applies) and;
- (ii) During lockdown when factories, mines, offices, restaurants and other businesses were closed, describe what happened to you?

As shown in the graph below, results show that situation changed drastically for both individuals and households. Household members were not able to look for jobs during lockdown like they used to (42.93%), lost their jobs (32.68%), not paid during lockdown (26.26%) and stopped their business because of lockdown (18.69%).

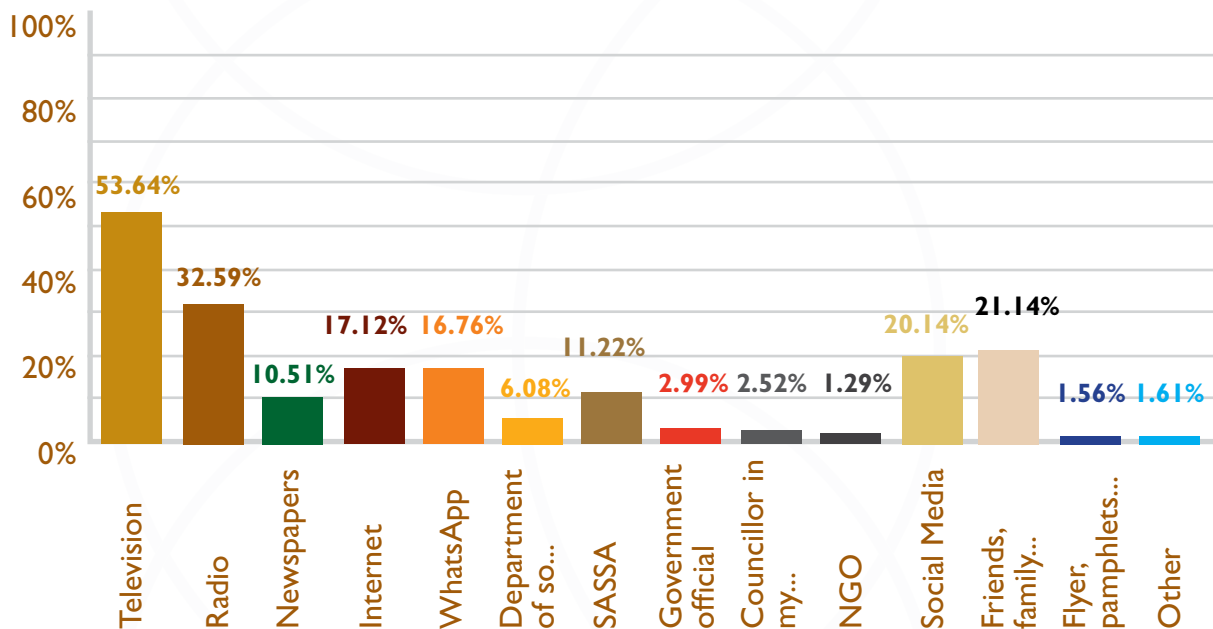
Figure 9: Household situation during lockdown (utilisation - recipients)



The main issue for the respondents was that they were not able to look for jobs like they used to (53.49%) because of the lockdown. Other respondents answered that they lost their job (11.07%), were not paid during lockdown (9.40%) and for 9.66% 'stopped my business because of lockdown'.

The respondents rated television and radio the highest as the source of information on the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. This was observed across the 4 surveys. DSD and SASSA were generally ranked lower than social media and friends.

Figure 10: Source of Information about the grant (utilisation – recipients)



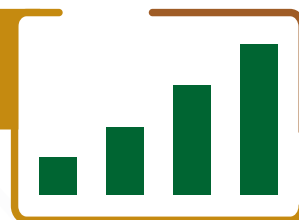
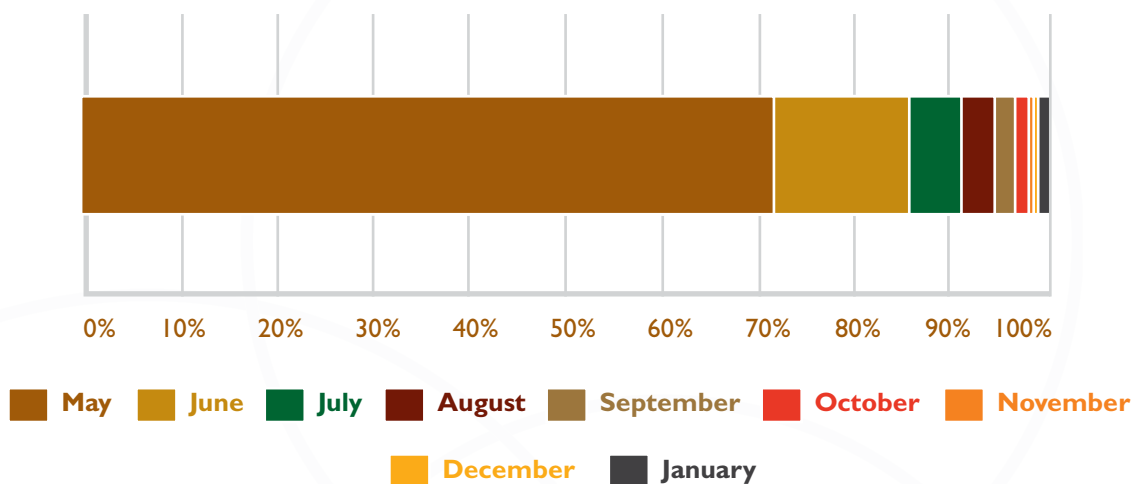
## RECEIPT OF GRANT

The questions to explore this theme were:

- (i) In which month did you apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for the first time?;
- (ii) How many times did you apply for the Special R350 Covid-19 Grant?;
- (iii) Q28: In which month did you receive the first payment of the grant? and
- (iv) List all the months you have received the grant.



Figure 11: First month of receipt of grant (utilisation – recipients)



The month of May, the very first month the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was open for application, is the month indicated by respondents as the month they first applied for the grant. More than 70% of respondents indicated the month of May as the month they first applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. By comparison, the first applications for the months of January, December, November, October, September and August are significantly lower. This shows that the need for the grant was strong amongst those that applied as there was no delay in applying after the grant was announced.

First payments were received mostly in the first 3 months (May, June and July) of availability of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. When asked the number of times respondents applied for the grant, 66.68% applied only once, 14.83% twice and 18.50% indicated they applied more than twice. There was no remarkable difference between the different months when it came to respondents listing all the months the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was received.

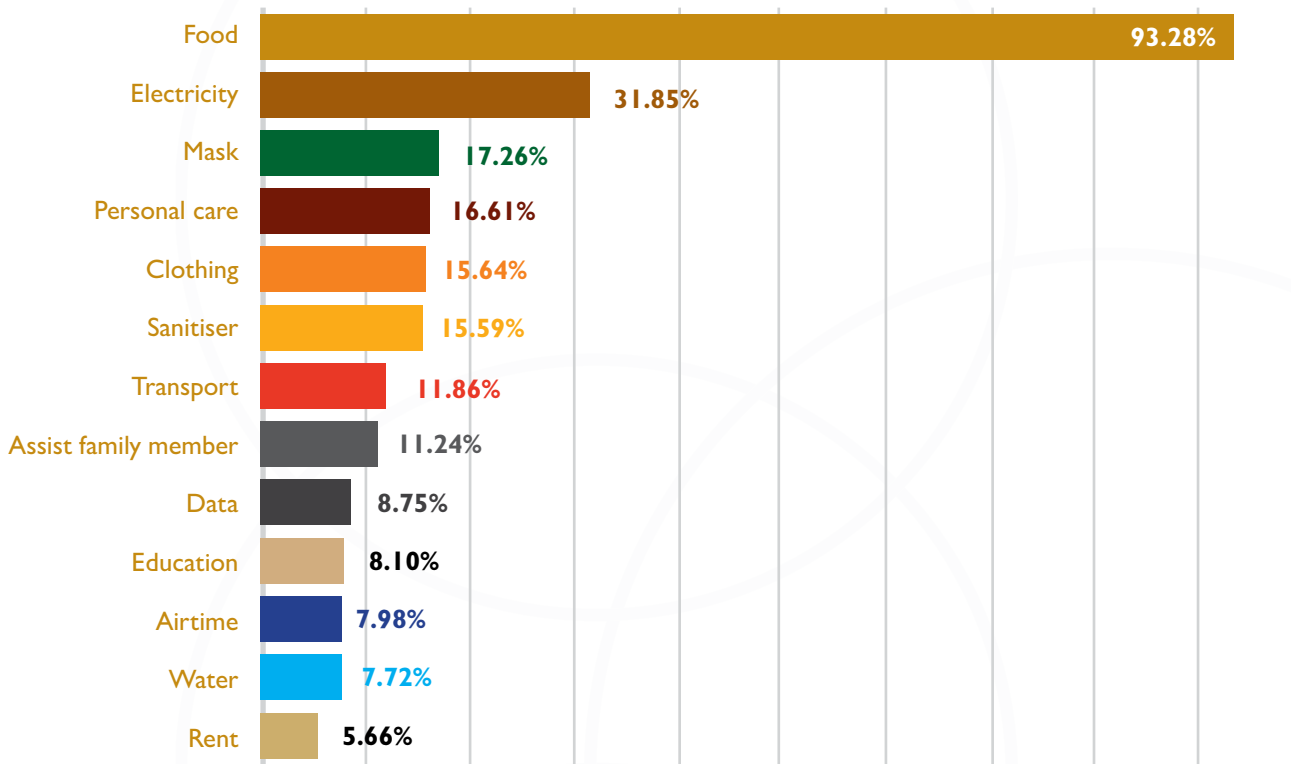
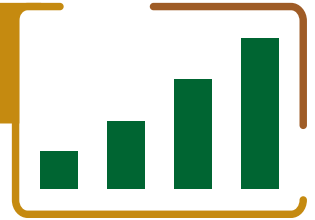
## UTILISATION (WHAT THE GRANT IS USED FOR)

This theme was explored through the questions:

- (i) What is the money from the Special Covid-19 SRD Grant used for?;
- (ii) Do you put the R350 grant money together with other money received by people you live with to buy items that are needed by all of you?;
- (iii) Do you think that the R350 Grant made a positive difference in your life? and
- (iv) Do you think that the R350 Grant made a positive difference in the life of members of your household?



Figure 12: Use of grant money (utilisation – recipients)



Food is by far the one single item that has the highest and clearest use of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. Food was chosen by 93.28% of respondents. In terms of the number of respondents that indicated food as the item that the grant is used for, it places food in a different category in terms of its importance as ranked by respondents. Electricity was a distant second choice with 31.85% of respondents saying that they use the Special COVID-19 SRD grant to purchase this commodity. This result and observation support and is in line with studies and research conducted in South Africa on the use and benefits of social grants.

It is also important that 53.11% of respondents say that they put the R350 grant money together with other monies received by members of the household for household consumption. For 34.97% of respondents this only happens sometimes. Only 11.92% of respondents stated that this never happens.

Figure 13: Whether grant makes positive difference in personal life (utilisation – recipients)

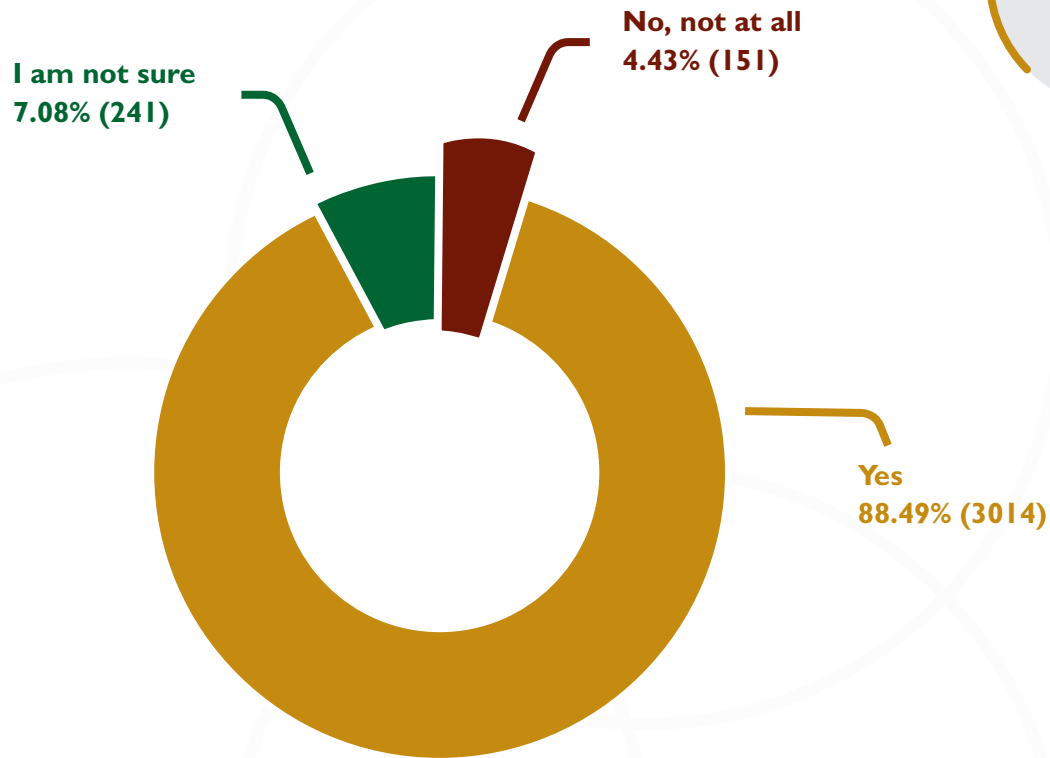
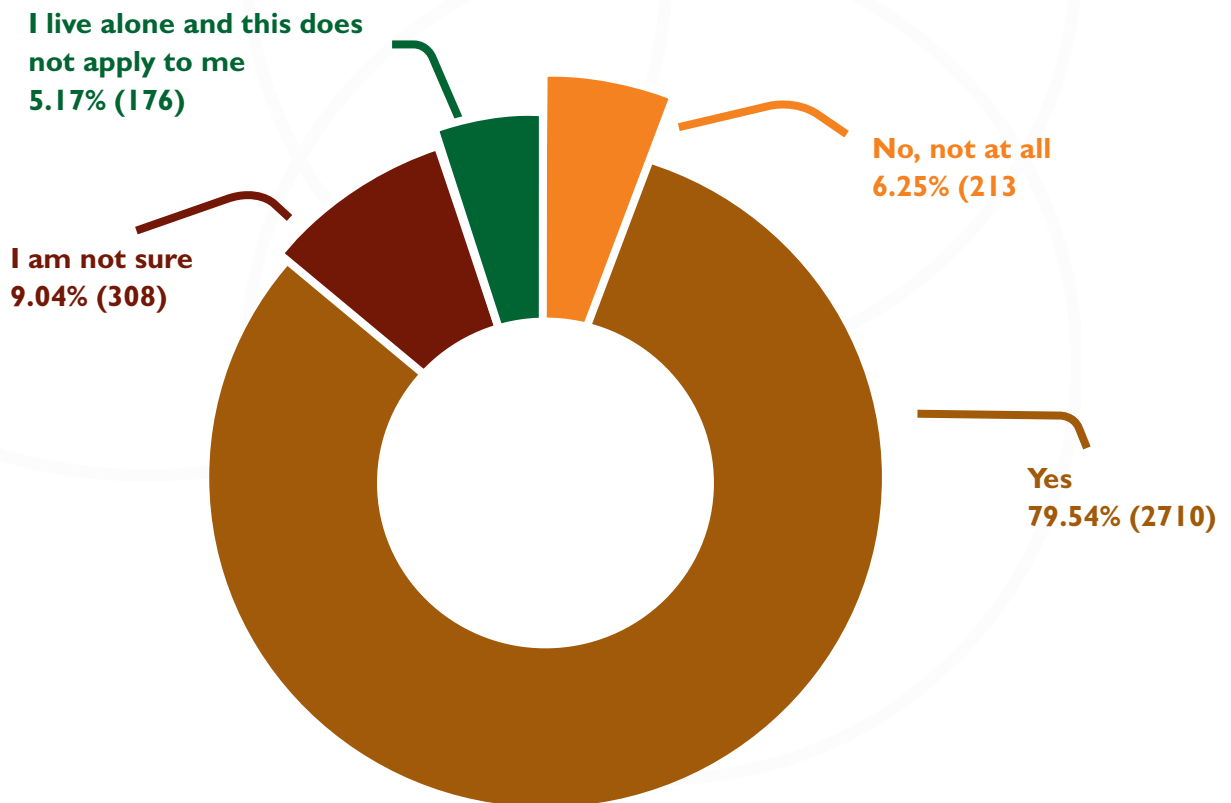


Figure 14: Whether grant makes positive difference in the lives of members of your household (utilisation - recipients)



When respondents were asked if the Special COVID-19 SRD grant made a positive difference in their lives and that of members of their households, 84.49% confirmed that the Special COVID-19 SRD grant made a positive difference in their lives. When respondents were asked if the grant made a difference in the lives of members of their households, 79.54% said the grant did make a positive difference.

### The questions that looked at policy issues included:

- (i) Do you think that the R350 Special Covid-19 SRD Grant should be given to everyone that applied for it? and
- (ii) If yes, what is your reason for saying the Special R350 SRD Grant should have been given to everyone that applied? The results to the policy questions are that 88.14% of respondents answered Yes on the Special R350 SRD Grant being given to everyone that applies. The reasons offered by those who agreed (answered Yes) were that there are many poor people in South Africa and the R350 would help (77.10%), cost of living is high (30.42%), food prices are high (30.12%), many people receive low wages in South Africa (20,46%), the value of the Special R350 SRD Grant is low (14.74%) and transport costs too much (13.01%).



#### 4.2.2.2 Non-utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected

##### Household situation before lockdown and during lockdown

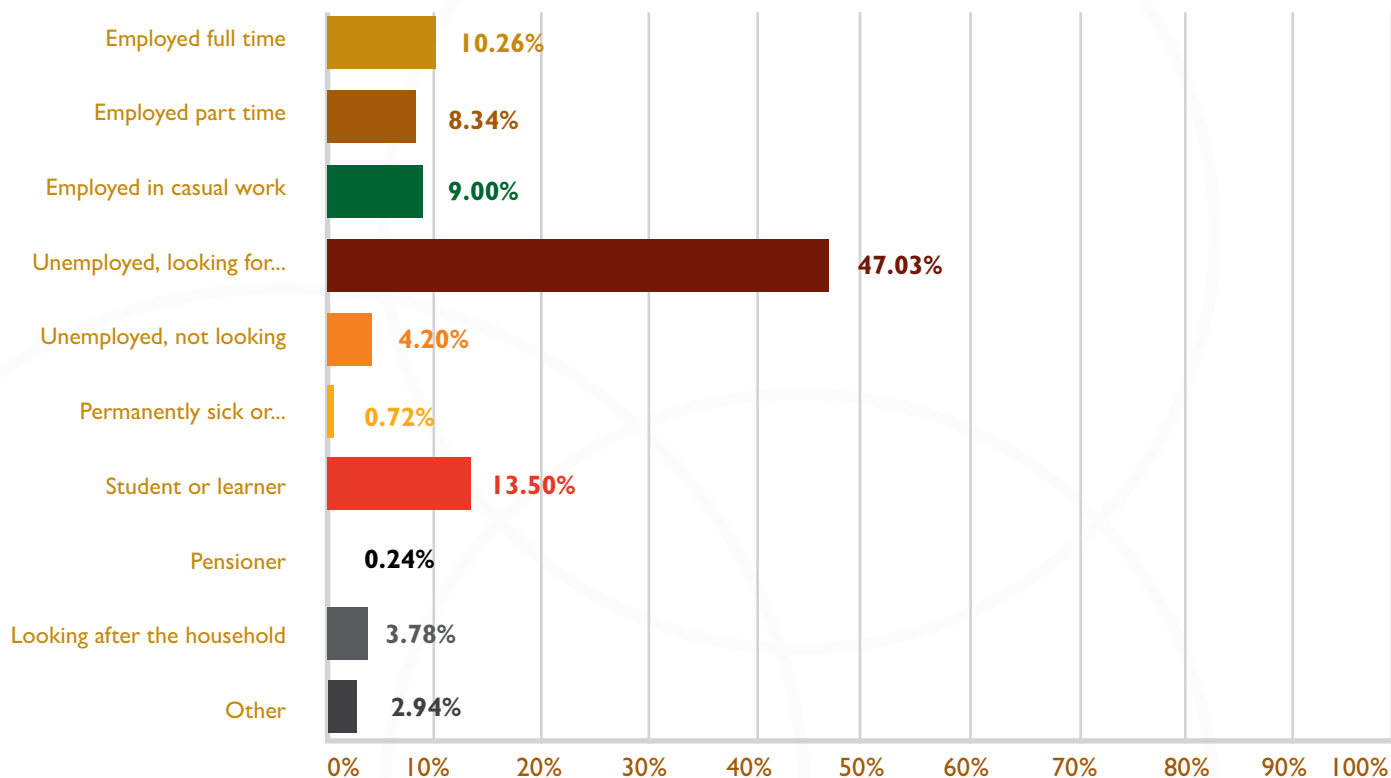
In the non-utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected questionnaire the questions that looked at the theme ‘household situation before lockdown’ were:

- (i) Before the lockdown, which of the following best describes what you were doing?;
- (ii) Before the lockdown, what were your sources of income? and
- (iii) List all the sources of income for the household before lockdown?



Similar to those who were approved and receiving the Special COVID-19 SRD grant (recipients), the aim was to establish the circumstances of individuals and their household before the lockdown also during the lockdown.

Figure 15: Household situation before lockdown (non-utilisation – rejected)



On circumstances before the lockdown and source of income, the results show that 47.03% of the respondents were unemployed looking for work, 10.26% employed full time, 9% employed in casual work or piece job and 8.34% employed part time. The sources of income for the respondents before the lockdown were family members (31.19%) and temporary job for 11.46% of respondents. For the household (Question 27), income from family members was mentioned by 53.39% of the respondents and grant from SASSA by 37.37% of respondents.

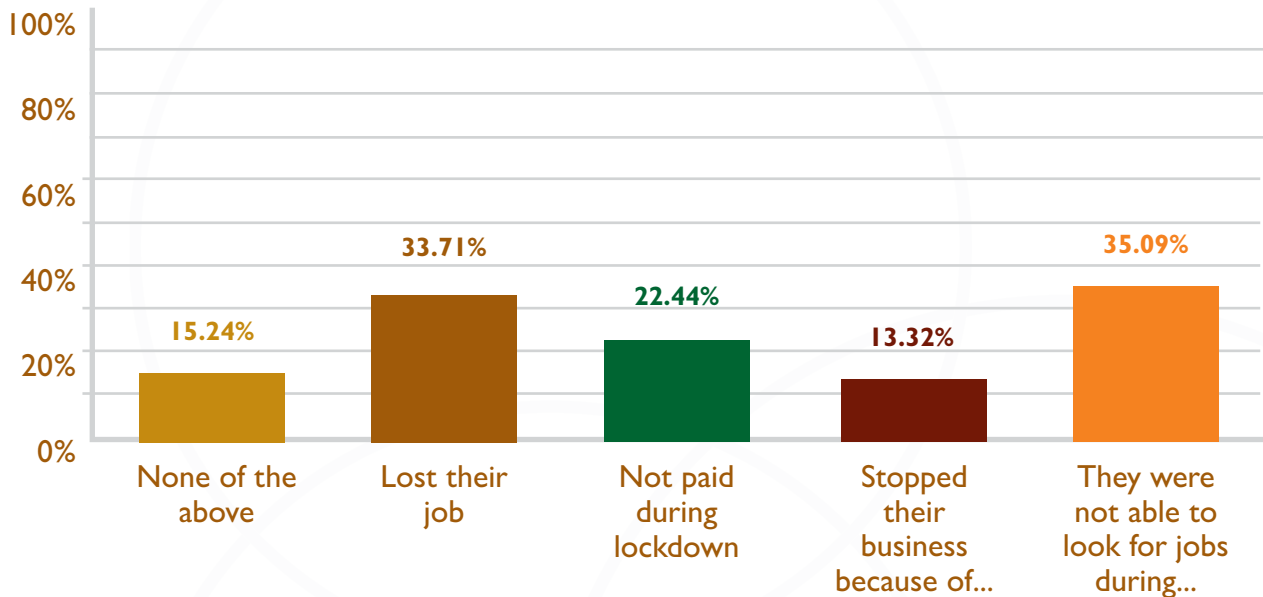
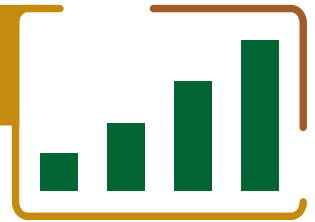
**In the non-utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected questionnaire the questions that looked at the household situation during lockdown were:**

This theme was explored through the questions:

- (i) During lockdown when factories, mines, offices, restaurants and other businesses were closed, describe what happened to members of your household? and (ii) During lockdown when factories, mines, offices, restaurants and other businesses were closed, describe what happened to you?



Figure 16: Household situation during lockdown (non-utilisation - rejected)



The following changes occurred during the lockdown for the individuals and their household members; 35.09% of members of the household were not able to look for jobs, 33.71% lost their jobs and 22.44% were not paid during the lockdown. For the individuals themselves 49.85% were not able to look for jobs like they used to with 22.26% indicating that they lost their job and 15.90% not paid during lockdown.

#### 4.2.2.3 Non-receipt of grant

The questions that looked at non-receipt of the grant were:

- (i) In which month did you apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant for the first time?;
- (ii) How many times did you apply for the Special R350 Covid-19 Grant?;
- (iii) What is the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of your application?;
- (iv) Before you applied did you know the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of your application?;
- (v) Do you agree with the reason given for rejecting your application?;
- (vi) Were you informed that if your application was rejected you can reapply? and
- (vii) Were you informed that you can appeal the decision rejecting your application?





Most of the respondents (57.77%) indicated that they applied in May with 12.84% applying in June. Applications made in December and January were around 2% for each month. On the number of times that respondents applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant, 42.41% answered they applied once, 24.54% applied twice with 33.05% having applied more than twice.

**Turning to the reasons given by SASSA for the rejection of application, the questions that investigated this were:**

- (i) What is the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of your application?
- (ii) Before you applied did you know the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of your application? and
- (iii) Do you agree with the reason given for rejecting your application?



A significant 59.15% of respondents claim that they were 'not given any reason' by SASSA for the rejection of their applications. Those who were given a reason for the rejection listed the reasons as - employed (4.26%), receiving an income (10.62%), receiving a social grant (6.96%), receiving unemployment insurance benefit (6.18%), qualify to receive unemployment insurance benefit (5.16%), receiving National Student Financial Aid Scheme (6.12%), receiving other government COVID-19 response support (1.08%) and resident in a government funded or subsidised institution (0.48%).

A rather high 81.20% of respondents stated that they do not agree with the reason given by SASSA for the rejection of their applications with only 18.80% agreed with the reason given. When respondents were asked if they were informed that they can reapply if their application was rejected, only 29.21% answered that they were informed, with 70.79% indicating that they were not informed. On being able to appeal the decision rejecting their applications, only 26.33% indicated that they were informed of the appeal process and 73.67% said that they were not informed.

**The questions that looked at policy issues were:**

- (i) Do you think that the R350 Special Covid-19 SRD Grant should be given to everyone that applied for it? and
- (ii) If yes, what is your reason for saying the Special R350 SRD Grant should have been given to everyone that applied?



Responses show that 73.85% of those who applied for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant and were rejected, hold the view that the grant should be given to everyone that applied for it. The main reason given by 76.06% of respondents is that there are too many poor people in South Africa.

#### 4.2.2.4 Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients

Device ownership, access and use and information and views on the application process were the themes the questionnaire on Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients investigated.

#### 4.2.2.5 Device ownership, access and use

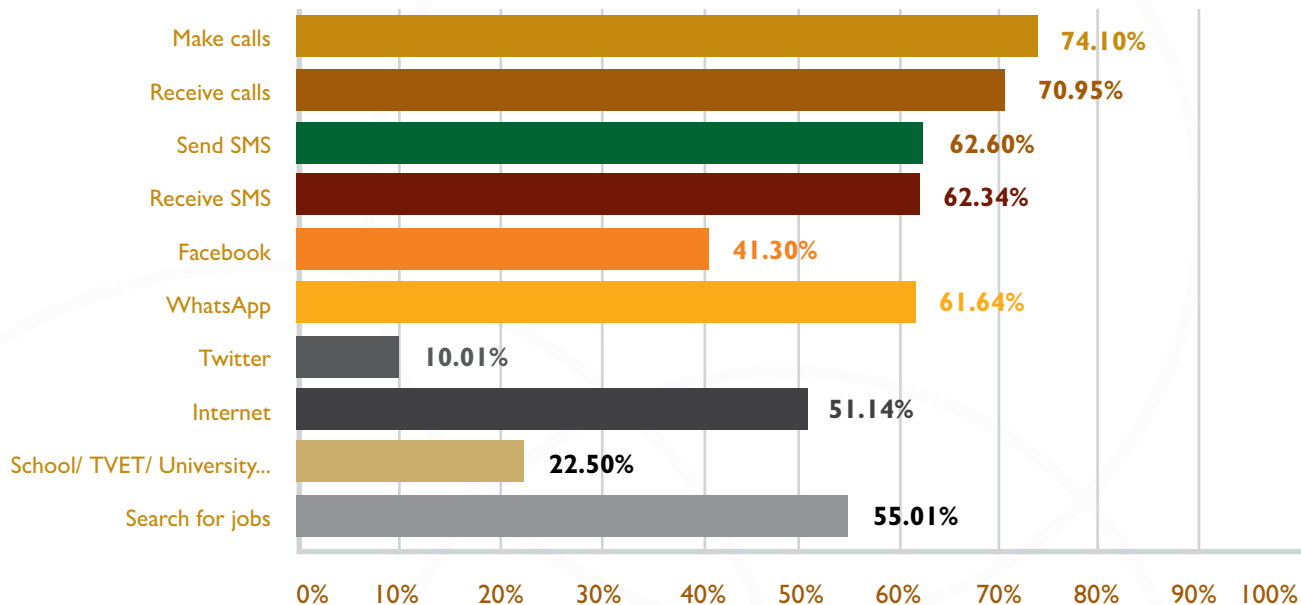
**The questions that researched device ownership, access and use were:**

- (i) Do you own a cellphone?;
- (ii) Do you have access to a cellphone when you want to use one?;
- (iii) Do you own a Computer?;
- (iv) Do you have access to a computer when you want to use one?;
- (v) Do you use the Internet?;
- (vi) Do you have an email address?;
- (vii) What do you use the cellphone for?;
- (viii) Did you apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant yourself or you were assisted by another person? and
- (ix) What device did you or the other person use to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant?



A high number of respondents own cellphones (95.84%) and 95.14% have access to a cellphone when they need to use one. The cellphone has a wide range of uses that include searching for jobs, education, internet, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp and the usual make calls, receive calls, send SMS and receive SMS.

Figure 17: Use of cellphone (implementation - recipients)



Only 14.35% of respondents own a computer with 40.37% having access to a computer when they need to use one. Internet use is high as shown by 85.24% of respondents indicating this, 77.94% have an email address, 79.37% applied themselves and 96.65% of those who applied themselves or were assisted by another person used cellphone device in the application process for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

### Information and views on process

This theme was directed at obtaining views of applicants about the design and systems used by SASSA in the application and payment process that were part of the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. Respondents were asked to Agree, Disagree or say they Do Not Know on 5 statements.

**Table 4: Applicants views on grants application and payment process (implementation - recipients)**

Statement	Agree	Disagree
The information on how to apply for the grant was easily available and clear	92.58%	5.59%
Most people that I know own cellphones	92.90%	4.10%
Most people that I know can use cellphones	92.40%	4.39%
The process to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was easy and straightforward	88.68%	8.96%
I received clear information on the outcome of my application, where to get the money and how to get the money	85.59%	11.82%

From the number of respondents that agree on information, process, outcome and where and how to get the R350 (ranging from 85.59 – 92.90%) which all formed the core part of implementation, the conclusion is that respondents hold a very positive view of SASSA processes.

#### 4.2.2.6 Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected

The questionnaire that explored implementation for rejected applicants was basically the same as that for implementation recipients. The difference is that the statement 'I received clear information on the outcome of my application, where to get the money and how to get the money' was not part of questionnaire for applicants that were rejected.

Device ownership, access and use and information and views on the application process were the themes the questionnaire on Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected investigated. The aim was to establish if there is any difference between those who receive the grant and those who were rejected on views on the application, verification and payment process employed by SASSA in the implementation of the Special R350 Covid-29 SRD Grant.

#### Device ownership, access and use

In the Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Rejected questionnaire the questions that researched device ownership, access and use were:

- (i) Do you own a cellphone?;
- (ii) Do you have access to a cellphone when you want to use one?;
- (iii) Do you own a Computer?;
- (iv) Do you have access to a computer when you want to use one?;
- (v) Do you use the Internet?;

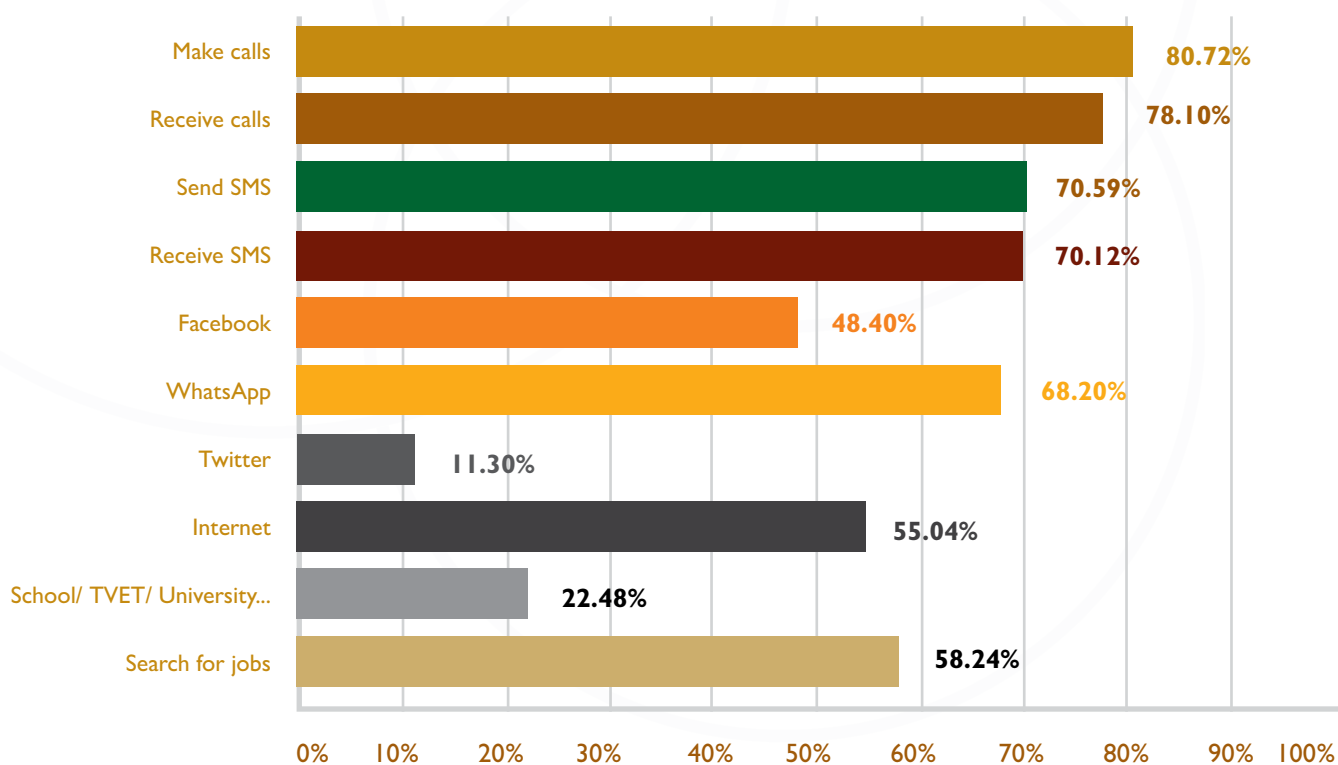


- (vi) Do you have an email address?;
- (vii) What do you use the cellphone for?;
- (iii) Did you apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant yourself or you were assisted by another person?
- (iv) What device did you or the other person use to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant? and
- (x) Which of the following did you or the person who assisted you use to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant?



Similar to respondents to 'Implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant – Recipients' among those rejected the ownership of cellphone is high at 96.76%, and having access to a cellphone when they need one was the case with 98.21% of respondents. In this group of respondents as well, the cellphone has a wide range of uses - searching for jobs, education, internet, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp and the usual make calls, receive calls, send SMS and receive SMS.

Figure 18: Use of cellphone (implementation – rejected)



Under implementation – rejected respondents, only 16.02% report owning a computer with 44.45% having access to a computer when they need to use one. Internet use is high as shown by 82.39% of respondents, 75.31% have an email address and 80.72% applied themselves with 97.44% of all those who applied themselves or were assisted by another person using a cellphone device when applying for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

### Information and views on process

This theme evaluated SASSA implementation design and the online digital technology systems and platforms used by applicants to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. Respondents had to Agree, Disagree or say they Do Not Know on the 4 statements.

**Table 5: Applicants views on grants application and payment process (implementation - rejected)**

Statement	Agree	Disagree
The information on how to apply for the grant was easily available and clear	81.65%	14.33%
Most people that I know own cellphones	93.13%	4.14%
Most people that I know can use cellphones	92.60%	4.89%
The process to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was easy and straightforward	75.01%	20.03%

When considering the views of those who applied and were rejected, on information and process 81.65% agreed that the information was easily available and clear. On the process to apply, 75.01% deemed the process easy and straightforward. The conclusion is, even amongst those that applied and were rejected, SASSA implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was viewed positively.

### 4.3 Qualitative research - identifying and interviewing those who qualify but did not apply

Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted using the focus group and in-depth interview guide. Topics and areas for the in-depth interviews and focus groups were: understanding of the criteria to establish those who Qualify but Did Not Apply; education level; understanding communication on the Special COVID-19 SRD grant; ownership of devices; ability to use devices; availability of persons to assist to apply for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant; what would have been the impact of the Special R350 SRD Grant if it was received?; goods and services, if any, that participants would have purchased if they received the Special R350 SRD Grant and subjective comparison with those who receive the Special R350 SRD Grant.

### 4.3.1 Education level of in-depth interviews and focus groups participants

**Table 6: Educational levels of respondents**

Reported education level of in-depth interviews (42) and 4 focus groups with 26 participants					
Never went to school	4	Standard 4	8	Standard 8	6
First year of school	4	Standard 5	10	Grade 9	5
Standard 1	1	Standard 6	5	Standard 9	2
Standard 2	6	Standard 7	5	Grade 12 / Matric	3
Standard 3	5	Grade 7	4	Post Matric	0
Never went to school	75.01%	20.03%	75.01%	Never went to school	75.01%

### 4.3.2 Reasons for not applying

When asked **‘Why did you not apply?’** the main reasons provided by participants in both the in-depth interviews and focus groups were:

- (i) Lack of a smartphone to apply (participants referred to a smartphone as a ‘touch’ and in ‘I needed a touch to apply’)
- (ii) IDs (do not have or damaged).

There was a commonly held view that only a smartphone could be used to apply. A significant number of participants own ‘button phones’ and there were certain that this type of cellphone could not be used to apply. A few do not own cellphones and do not know how to use a cellphone, with some only able to receive calls on the cellphone. A significant number of participants do not have IDs and the reasons given were ID was lost, ID damaged by water or fire in the shack, photo on ID no longer clear and lack of application fee for ID.

### 4.3.3 Goods and services listed by participants (if they received the grant)

The main items listed by participants were food, rent and providing for their children. This was expressed as:

*‘cook in the house, buy soap, candles, pay rent’; ‘food, take care of my children, rent’; ‘I go to bed hungry. Rent. It’s hard right now. Landlord is demanding rent’ and ‘Food. The stomach is the first thing’.*

#### 4.3.4 Communication on the Special COVID-19 SRD grant

The in-depth interviews and focus groups show that, for the participants identified, communication on the Special Covid-19 SRD Grant was not well understood. Most participants indicated that their source of information was people they live with and word of mouth as in 'People were saying ...'. The level of education, and therefore literacy, maybe a factor in this regard.

#### 4.4 Qualitative research – interviewing key informants on the design and systems used in the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant

Key informants provided insight into and understanding of the online digital technology systems and platforms designed by SASSA for the implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant. SOCPEN (social pensions), the legacy system that SASSA utilises for the enrolment and payment of social grants was found to be unsuited as its design did not meet the requirements for the application, assessment, verification and payment of the new grant. Three critical requirements that SASSA had to have in place were infrastructure, systems and capacity to meet the following challenge:

- a) Onboarding new applicants in the shortest time possible (days);
- b) Ensuring no contact between applicants and SASSA officials;
- c) Preventing the congestion and overloading of electronic and digital systems and platforms used in the application process; and
- d) Limiting or eliminating the cost of application for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

The first point of call for SASSA was to look at linking administrative systems within government. Two systems were considered, MonConnect and GovChat which, whilst providing knowledge on these online systems, could not be used.

SASSA, after a number of obstacles and challenges such as applicants uploading copies of documents that were not required that ended up crashing the IT platforms, opted for 4 channels to apply for the Special Covid-19 SRD Grant. These were USSD (free to applicants), WhatsApp, email and SASSA website. Most of applications received for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant (80%) were through the USSD channel.

The criteria demanded that SASSA verifies information provided by applicants using registers held by other entities. Receiving unemployment insurance or qualifying for unemployment insurance was a key part of the criteria. After initial challenges and delays, as the UIF database had its own inherent weaknesses, verification was done that allowed interface between information on the Special COVID-19 SRD grant applicants and the Department of Labour's Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). Banks carried out verification of funds in bank accounts for those who had applied and were successful. The assessment and verification of applications for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was undertaken and repeated every month without the applicant having to submit an application each month.



The payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was through EFT as the first method of payment. Recipients without a bank account had two options. The first is that the recipient received an electronic cash voucher payment with the major banks using this system. The second option was opening an account for the recipient at the South African Post Office.

Developments that unfolded with regards to systems in the application and payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant saw first payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant was made within weeks of the announcement. SASSA managed to enrol and on-board millions of new recipients in a few months as evident in the 9.5 million applications processed between May 2020 and November 2020 with 6.5 million recipients paid regularly. The role of technology and its advantages, benefits and shortcomings in social security in South Africa has been demonstrated and important lessons learnt.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are to be drawn from the rapid assessment of the utilisation and implementation of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant.

- The Special COVID-19 SRD grant is mostly used to purchase food, as reported by 93.3% of surveyed applicants. This is in line with previous research findings in South Africa, and strengthens calls for a social assistance programme to cover 18 – 59 years' age group. This is crucial as the income obtained is shared by household members, with 71% of surveyed applicants living in households with 4 or more members.
- A total of 9,537,077 applications were received and 6,449,916 approved. Of the approved, 4,379,331 (67.9%) were men compared to 2,070,585 (32.1%) women. The top up of social grants, the Child Support Grant (CSG), caregiver allowance and Special COVID-19 SRD grant translated to unequal treatment of men and women. The different amounts and different duration of the aforementioned grants created different relief regimes for men and for women.
- 70% of applicants in the survey undertaken were below 34 years, and have matric and higher (degree or diploma).
- Metros had disproportionately higher numbers of respondents compared to district municipalities indicating an urban bias. Analysis of applications received by SASSA and results of the online survey indicate a profile of recipients that is different to South Africa's poverty profile especially on gender, education and geographic location.
- Black Africans made up 82.8% of grant applicants and Gauteng had the highest number of respondents (28.2%) followed by KZN (18.7%).
- 59.2% of respondents claimed that they were 'not given any reason' by SASSA for the rejection of their applications.
- 88.14% of respondents hold the view that the grant should be given to everyone that applies, as there are many poor people in South Africa.
- Information on how to apply for the grant was easily available and clear (92.9% recipients agreed, 81.65% rejected agreed). The process to apply for the grant was easy and straightforward (88.7% recipients agreed, 75.01% rejected agreed).
- The use of online digital platforms has prepared the ground for the advent of digital welfare in South Africa which means SASSA's current operations model and expenditure of grant administration will come under scrutiny. 95.8% of respondents own a cellphone. Use of cellphone - searching for jobs, education, internet and the usual make calls, receive calls, send SMS and receive SMS.

- The grant makes an important dent on poverty. In order to reduce the very high levels of poverty in female-headed households, receipt of Child Support Grant (CSG) benefits must be disregarded when determining eligibility for the grant or a similar grant (i.e. Basic Income Grant).
- The qualitative research undertaken through in-depth interviews and focus groups demonstrates that there are South Africans who qualify for the grant but did not apply. One of the reasons given by the respondents was that they thought they needed a touchscreen to apply.

In addition, seven (7) policy briefs were drafted. These included:

- **Who applied? A profile of applicants for the grant.** Analysis of applications received by SASSA and results of the online survey indicate a profile of recipients of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant that is different to South Africa's poverty profile especially on gender; education and geographic location.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD grant – A critique from a gender perspective.** The top up of social grants, the Child Support Grant (CSG) caregiver allowance and Special COVID-19 SRD Grant translated to unequal treatment of men and women. The different amounts and different duration for the top up, caregiver allowance and the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant created different relief regimes for men and for women.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD Grant and the use of digital technology systems in the application, verification and payment process: Lessons learnt and implications.** The use of online digital platforms has prepared the ground for the advent of digital welfare in South Africa which means SASSA's current operations model and expenditure of grant administration will come under scrutiny and savings and efficiencies from digital technology have been proven through the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant.
- **COVID-19 pandemic and exploring a single citizen database/social protection register in South Africa – what are the issues?** The goal of government is the upliftment of all South Africans through the provision of quality goods and services. Public goods and services have to be accessible in a manner that is convenient to citizens. The structure, configuration, operations and systems of government have to be geared towards this goal. There is ample evidence for the need of a government-wide integrated social registry and the COVID-19 pandemic has made this to be paramount.
- **The Special COVID-19 SRD grant: What the grant is used for and who received the grant?** The purchase of food is the main use of the grant and 70% of recipients of the grant live in households with 4 and more household members. This reinforces research undertaken in South Africa on the use of social grants and it strengthens calls for a grant to cover 18 – 59 years group.
- **Special COVID-19 SRD grant - eligible beneficiaries, annual cost, and impact on poverty.** The Special COVID-19 SRD grant makes an important dent on poverty. When considering options for the extension of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant (or introduction of a BIG) it is important to consider not only the cost of the scenarios, but also how different subgroups are affected, and how the benefit relates to other existing benefits. In order to reduce the very high levels of poverty in female-headed households, receipt of child benefits must be disregarded when determining eligibility for the Special COVID-19 SRD grant or a Basic Income Grant.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1:** Utilise the evidence of the support for the payment of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant by an overwhelming majority of respondents as evidence-base for policy arguments and advocacy at the political level.

**R2:** Improve communication channels and access to information for low income groups. Communication has to be modelled on access to information and the understanding of those who are potential beneficiaries, not government officials. Continuous research is critical in this area to test if the message is well received.

**R3:** Development of a single citizens' registry for government services. Many countries have started to implement single registries as a central repository of data across several identification and social protection programmes. The drive should be towards a single registry that provides a total view and social and economic circumstance of beneficiaries including employment, education, skills, social grants, EPWP, etc.

**R4:** Mitigate and bridge the digital divide in the administration of social security.

**R5:** Continuous update and refresh of Management Information Systems (MIS). MIS are of critical importance and the foundation in the administration of any social protection programme, including the identification and registration of beneficiaries

**R6:** Elimination of exclusion of qualifying citizens through design of application, verification and payment processes. Nearly all systems that are based on a means-test or criteria will have errors. Exclusion errors deny the very people that the programme is targeting.

**R7:** Conduct regular and periodic assessment of the application and payment system to continuously establish its reach and effect and timeously eliminate obstacles.

**R8:** Match beneficiaries of the Special COVID-19 SRD grant (or similar grant) through established statistics, research and evidence on gender, geography and socio-economic profile. Young, urban based, matric and higher education, Black Africans as the main group that received the grant, is not the age, gender, and provincial profile of poverty in South Africa. This means that any future plan for a grant that covers the 19-59 years' age group will have to find innovative ways to reach the target population in all regions of the country, particularly rural areas.

**R9:** Prepare and advise SASSA for the imminent future based online digital technology systems and platforms that will radically change the current SASSA operations model and the application, assessment and verification processes.









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