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**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NUMBER: 2559**

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**2559. Ms A L A Abrahams (DA) to ask the Minister of Social Development:**

With regard to the findings of the National Income Dynamics Study Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 2 showing that early childhood (ECD) attendance dropped to just 13% from July 2020 to mid-August 2020, which is the lowest rate of attendance in 18 years, what (a) financial and/or (b) other support is her department offering to the ECD sector and the millions of children who are dependent on this essential service for care, protection, nutrition and education? NW3230E

**REPLY:**

The *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 Reports*[[1]](#footnote-1) provided insightful information to the Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development appreciates that national surveys and studies assist with strategic decisions, while it is always important to interpret the findings of any study with rigour. However, the following needs to be noted with regard to findings and the generalisation thereof.

1. The *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data was collected through telephone interviews from a total sample of 5,676 individuals (80% of the original wave 1 sample), of which only 2,722 individuals (48% of the sample) indicated that they are in a household with children age birth to six years (sub-sample)[[2]](#footnote-2).

2. Furthermore, the data indicated that of this sub-sample 950 individuals (35% of sub-sample and 16.7% of total sample) indicated that their child(ren) aged birth to 6 years attended and early childhood development programmes “*such as a pre-school, creche, playgroup or day-mother*”. The questionnaire explicitly excluded attendance of Grade R in primary schools, where a large majority of 5 and 6 years find themselves2.

3. *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data, most likely due to the design of the questionnaire, does not differentiate between attendance of registered and unregistered early childhood development programmes2, which is an important factor to be considered in the understanding and interpretation of data and trends, especially under the national state of disaster, for some of the following reasons:

3.1 ECD programmes are legally required to be registered in terms of the provisions of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as to operate as a legal entity under the law passed by the Legislature and to be eligible for funding from government. Thus, a disaggregation in this study (and other studies by civil society) will be of value to indicate whether the impact of the minimum health, safety and social distancing measures to address, prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 has affected and is comparable between registered and unregistered ECD programmes similarly or not.

3.2 ECD programmes that are registered generally have the capacity to meet the minimum norms and standards prior to the onset of the national state of disaster, which could have made them more resilient towards re-opening. Furthermore, lumping registered and unregistered ECD programmes together as one homogenous sample excludes a number of critical variables that differentiate these two groups significantly, while it prevents an analysis to determine whether there is bias in the finding towards unregistered or registered early childhood development programmes. Thus, it is not sure whether the findings of the *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data are skewed towards the one or the other.

3.3 Registered ECD programmes are eligible to be funded by the provincial Departments of Social Development in accordance with section 93(1) of Children's Act 38 of 2005 should they meet the necessary requirements and subject to availability of funding. A disaggregation in such data will also assist in determining the different experiences between registered and unregistered early childhood development programmes.

3. At the time of the survey (July/August 2020), shortly after the re-opening date of all early childhood development centres on 6 July 2020, only 127 (13% of 950 individuals responded) of children attending an ECD centre in March 2020 had return to that ECD centre2. In this respect the following:

1. This was a relatively *short time* after the date of re-opening and as the *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data confirms1 the reports that the Department of Social Development received from the field is that significant numbers of ECD centres, especially in in under resourced and rural areas, did not re-open2 (*NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data indicates that 55% of the respondents cited this as a reason)2.
2. Furthermore, 5.6% of the respondents indicated that they did not return their children due to the fact that they believe that the ECD centre is not prepared for COVID-19, while a third (33.1%) cited fear of their child contracting COVID-19 at an ECD centre as the reason for not returning a child to an ECD centre1;2.

4. The findings of the *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* data should not be compared with other historic data as the methodology and sample sizes differs significantly, i.e. “*attendance dropped to just 13% from July 2020 to mid-August 2020, which is the lowest rate of attendance in 18 years*”. Firstly, it compares historic data with an extraordinary time in South Africa. Secondly, the GHS of 2002 (18 years ago) was based on a different sample size and methodology, while it confirmed the findings of the 2000 ECD audit was done with 22,256 ECD sites across the country of 16% attendance of ECD programmes for children aged to birth to 6 years, which was also prior to the introduction of Grade R.

5. ECD programmes have not been determined to be an *essential service*, though it is regarded as an invaluable part of young children’s growth, development and early learning. Other than with schools, attendance of early childhood development programmes is not compulsory and remain the choice of the parent at any time (before the national state of disaster and there-after). The closing of ECD programmes, however, did follow roughly the same timelines of closure and re-opening as schools. During the same period of the *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* cited by the Member, the attendance if schools showed a similar trend, with return to school at 37.3% (for open grades) at that time1, while it is currently still well below the percentage of attendance in March 2020.

6. At the time of the *NIDS-CRAM Wave 2* (July/ August 2020) on which the question is based:

*Part (a) of question*

6.1 the Minister of Social Development has issued Directions that directed the Provincial Departments of Social Development to continue paying subsidies to early childhood development programmes (see Government Notice 517 published in Government Gazette No 43300 of 9 May 2020 and Government Notice No. 762 in Government Gazette No. 43520 of 10 July 2020), which was executed by the Provincial Departments of Social Development in accordance with section 93(1) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as provincial competency (see responses to Question [NW1318](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14346/)).

6.2 The payment of *social relief in distress grants* during this time is believed to also indirectly benefitted children birth to 6 year old in households (see response to Questions [NW2068](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14791/) & [NW1853](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14669/))

6.3 Minister announced on 30 July 2020 the Department of Social Development’s contribution in relation to the Presidential Employment Stimulus (South Africa’s Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan) towards the early childhood development workforce. Since the following was approved by the national Treasury for the National and Provincial Departments of Social Development to continue to mitigate the impact of the national state of disaster on ECD programmes and to facilitate the continues re-opening of ECD programmes:

1. R380 million was allocated for unemployment risk support that will benefit 83 333 existing ECD related workers
2. R116 million was allocated for the support of 25 500 compliance support officers, who are existing staff members at early childhood development programmes that will play a compliance support role within their ECD programmes, contributing to mitigating a second wave of COVID-19
3. R16.5 million was allocated for registration support officers who will assist in scaling up registration as part of Phase 2 of the Vangasali campaign
4. The Department of Social Development engaged with experts from UNICEF and the Nelson Mandela Foundation as well members of the Inter-Sectoral Committee for ECD to develop an implementation plan for the implementation of this grant as part of the ECD stimulus package.

*Part (b) of question*

6.4 Funding was repurposed from the existing conditional grant allocation to provide PPE’s to qualifying ECD programmes (see responses to Questions [NW1318](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14346/); [NW1578](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14169/) & [NW1652](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14170/))

6.5 The Department distributed food parcels since the beginning of the lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus to indigent persons and those whose income was affected, which is believed to also provided support households with children birth to 6 years (see responses to Question [NW1561](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14368/))

6.6 The National and Provincial Departments of Social Development continued to provide advice and guidance to early childhood development programmes regarding re-opening, which include information on how to re-open safe and in the best interest of children (see responses to Question [NW1652](https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/14170/))

1. Spaull et al. NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 Synthesis Findings. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Wills, G., Kotze, J., Kika-Mistry, J. (2020) *A Sector Hanging in the Balance: ECD and Lockdown in South Africa* (National Income Dynamics Study-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) 2020, Wave 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)