

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 4103**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 44 – 2022**

**4103. Ms C N Mkhonto (EFF) to ask the Minister of Home Affairs:**

(1) What (a) steps have been taken to ensure that communities living in rural areas are easily accommodated in the new online application system and (b) online awareness campaigns related to the new application system have been undertaken;

(2) whether any community education programmes aimed at empowering persons with the know-how were conducted; if not, why not; if so, what enabling resources does his department offer to persons to make the system more user‑friendly? NW5115E

**REPLY:**

(1)(a) We continue to make efforts to ensure that all communities, including those in rural areas, are accommodated in the new online application system. The Branch Appointment Booking System (BABS) is one of the Home Affairs interventions for improving services, including for our people located in rural areas.

Members of Parliament have been very helpful in the development and rollout of the online application system, particularly on the inclusion of offices in more rural communities in the pilot phase and also in the rollout of the project.

The online application system is only available for smart ID card and passport applications. Citizens are still welcome to visit Home Affairs front offices for other services.

The booking system is run on a hybrid model, with both online bookings and ‘walk-ins’ allowed. The Department allows and encourages walk-ins and also provides tablets to officials in order to help those who do not have data and would prefer to make a booking for another day instead of waiting in a queue. This is to ensure that as we rollout the new system, no one is left out, and all have access to services.

Following the launch, in June 2022, the booking system has been extended and is currently utilised in 163 of the 198 offices that have the ability to process smart ID cards and passports. At end of October 2022, more than 200 000 people have used this system.

(1)(b) I made a public announcement about the online booking system (BABS) during in my Budget Vote Speech, on 24 May 2022. This was followed by numerous radio and television interviews which I handled with the help of the Deputy Minister and delegated officials, to promote awareness on the new booking system. These interviews were in national, regional and community media platforms.

On 13 June 2022, I held a question-and-answer radio phone-in programme with 26 community radio stations.

The Communication Unit has also undertaken activations with Metro FM at Menlyn Mall, on 21 to 24 September 2022. This Unit has also developed videos and digital posters which it regularly runs on social media platforms of the Department and those of other Government departments.

(2) Yes, education programmes were and continue to be conducted, including the booking system’s activations I’ve alluded to. The Department has provided tablets to officials for them to take clients through the system and in this way we trust that those who were assisted will also be able to spread the message to others. Offices have floor walkers, queue marshalls and Office Managers to assist clients in the queues to make bookings.

To support this migration of service delivery platforms, the Communications Unit in collaboration with the BABS Project Management Office, did activations in selected offices in June 2022 where they were explaining to clients and officials how the system works.

The education programme explaining the new system was extended to cover officials in order to empower them to serve clients intending to use the new system. In this regard, information and posters were shared with Provincial and Office Managers to ensure that they assist in preparing their teams for the changes. A leaflet on the booking system was published in the in-house newsletter, *Ikhaya*, and the Director-General dedicated an issue of the online newsletter – *Notes from the DG’s Desk* – to the BABS and what it entails.

**END**