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PROCEEDINGS OF VIRTUAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

The Council met at 14:00.

The House Chairperson Committees took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayers or meditation.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The House Chairperson Committees announced that the virtual sitting constituted a sitting of the National Council of Provinces.

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

CLUSTER 2B - SOCIAL SERVICES

Question 41:

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The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson of the House, hon members, one of my key priorities following my appointment as Minister Social Development was to stabilise the department through the filling of key leadership positions. To this end, critical positions of chief financial officer and deputy director-general welfare services were finalised with Cabinet concurring with the appointment on 26 February 2025. The director general's position was filled with the Cabinet concurring with the appointment on 26 March 2025.

The remaining senior management positions identified will be filled during the 2025/25 financial year that has commenced on 1 April. This will create stability as well as service delivery efficiency needed by the department. Thank you, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much, Minister. Minister, your microphone is not very clear. If I can ask that you make sure it's pointing directly to your mouth, we would appreciate it for further responses. Let's move on and give the hon Fienies an opportunity to ask a question.

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Ms D W FIENIES: Minister, we congratulate the recently appointed officials, including the new director-general. Minister, what is the current vacancy rate of funded positions at the senior, management services, SMS level and what impact do these vacancies have on service delivery? I thank you, hon Chair.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon members, the department has 80 permanently filled senior management positions and 21 vacant positions from director to director-general positions and all of them will be filled within this financial year as they are budgeted for.

The vacancies at the SMS level do have an impact on service delivery. However, this is mitigated by acting appointments and the expeditious filling of positions as it would be seen from the appointment of the director-general, DG and deputy directors-general, DDGs as they stabilise the leadership position. Priority is now being given to chief directors and directors.

The recent filling of the and DG and chief finance officer, CFO social welfare positions have resulted in reciprocal

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vacancies at chief director and DDG level. Chair, the department has advertised the executive director inspectorate position at the DDG level. Also, the filling of the Sassa chief executive officer, CEO position is at advanced stage. We are in the process of filling the regional executive managers of Sassa. I thank you.

Ms N S DU PLESSIS: Minister, the 2025 budget has a table showing staff numbers significantly in table 19.4 on page 378 that is of the estimates of national expenditure. It further shows that the staff complement in 2023/24 is at 711 staff, and it has dropped to 618 in 2024/25 with no significant increase in the current financial year.

It is clear that your staff complement is decreasing with the work increasing, also, while the budget keeps increasing, as well as an additional need for 1 279 social workers with an estimated 9 000 qualified social workers currently unemployed in South Africa.

There is also the concern of the department's irregular expenditure that has increased in the past financial year. How will you ensure that the budget in the department is correctly

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spent on hiring of key positions that address the needs of the mandate of the department of ensuring social protection and promoting social development? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, the hon member's last point covers exactly what the department is doing. As a result, our structure is now complete. Indeed because of the fiscal shrinking, we cannot expand anymore. However, what we have now has been extensively consulted with relevant parties. The Department of Public Service Administration, DPSA has played a role here as we have put this against our mandate.

We can safely say, even though there is an increase, it's an increase that is unavoidable. Regarding the matter of the social workers that are outside, we are already embarking on a strategy to ensure that we are working with all other stakeholders that can assist in this regard.

Hon Chair, as the hon member is correctly saying that some of those social workers were trained by government and this is why we have taken it upon ourselves to ensure that we extend our wings so that come the next financial year, we will be

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able to absorb a few of them. Of course, working with other sister departments like SA Police Service, SAPS and all other stakeholders.

We have also been in negotiations with other departments as well as people who are outside government, for them to assist in this regard. This needs to be addressed as soon as we can. Thank you very much.

Ms M SIWISA: Chair, can I keep my video off, the network is very bad. Minister, South Africa continues to experience gender equality challenges in the workplace. This evidenced by the wide and stubborn gap between men and women in senior management positions. In light of this lack of progress, what measures have you put in place to ensure that the genuine strategy to address gender inequality is taken in the filling of senior management positions in your department? Thank you Chair.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, indeed, the hon member is correct to raise the fact that we have found it very difficult to find women in strategic positions. This is my direct experience when I was looking for a DG of the

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department as well as DDG and CEO of Sassa. I found it difficult as such. I would really like the government to do something in this regard.

However, as the department we have been able to appoint a woman CFO a woman DDG. We are also targeting ramps in Sassa to make sure that we balance the number. This is a matter that needs our attention, this is a matter that is my priority, and this is a matter that I am hard at work in making sure that I address the gender imparity in the department by making sure that I look for women that are capable to occupy the positions. Thank you very much, hon Chairperson.

Ms T BREEDT: Hon Minister, given the persistent underperformance in critical programmes, how do you justify the slow pace and apparent politicisation of senior appointments in your department?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, although I don't understand what the hon member is asking. However, I must take this House into confidence that the position of the CEO that was appointed by Cabinet in 2024 is coming to an end. As a result, I have embarked on a process to make sure that I

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appoint a new CEO hence I made mention of the fact that the processes are way ahead.

We are now waiting for Cabinet to make its own recommendations because everything has been concluded from our side. This is a clean process because we had to make sure that it becomes a clean process because Sassa is expecting a permanent CEO to change things around. To an extent, we must say we are on track to make sure that Sassa is at least being able to be assisted to get out of the quagmire that it was involved in. Thank you very much, Chair.

Question 50:

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon House Chairperson, in responding to the question, the Department of Social Development works in collaboration with other role-players, including government departments and civil society organisations and other nonprofit organisations, NPOs, in the service delivery and aiming of the ending of the gender-based violence and femicide, GBVF. In this regard, the budget is not sitting in one department, it spreads to other departments, including nongovernment organisations, NGOs, and NPOs that are

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providing services in the space of gender-based violence and femicide.

The department implemented the national strategic plan on gender-based violence and femicide in terms of the following Pillars: Pillar 2, that talks to prevention and rebuilding social cohesion; the other Pillar, which is 3, justice, safety and protection; Pillar 4, which is response, care, support and healing. I must make mention of the fact that last Tuesday I witnessed the handover of five properties by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to our department in Gauteng. These sectors and this partnership will furthermore build into the relationship that we are having in making sure that we deal with the scourge.

Furthermore, the department is providing psychosocial services in the Thuthuzela Care Centres and victims-friendly rooms in police stations. Khuseleka One-Stop Centre is focusing on providing psychosocial support services and skills development programmes to victims of gender-based violence and femicide, having been established in four provinces, which is Limpopo, North West, Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

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House Chair, the department is hard at work together with other sister departments as well as the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to ensure that the existing buildings are repurposed for gender-based violence services.

In conclusion, House Chair, the department condemns the increase of gender-based violence against children and women. Therefore, it is committed to end the scourge through partnership with other government departments and stakeholders. I thank you.

Ms N S DU PLESSIS: House Chair, through you to hon Minister, there are too many whistleblowers who are scared to speak up about the well-known sex for job system in South Africa. What will you and your department implement to ensure that this is eradicated in the public sector? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon House Chairperson, the Department of Social Development is one of the departments that is in the centre of fighting gender-based violence and femicide. As such, we are doing everything to make sure that we deal with anyone or any tendency that seeks to confirm that there's anyone who has been alleged embarking on this.

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Therefore, so far, we have not been having anything in our records, nor anybody who came forward to make these allegations.

However, I want to assure this House, House Chair, that we'll do everything according to our laws to ensure that those who are alleged will be dealt with decisively as the country is going through the difficulty of gender-based violence. There's no way that we can at any given time, really, really tolerate anything that talks about gender-based violence and femicide. I thank you.

Mrs N N CHIRWA-MPUNGOSE: thank you very much, House Chairperson. Am I audible?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): You are, indeed, mam. Please proceed.

Mrs N N CHIRWA-MPUNGOSE: I thank you. Minister, we want to find out to what extent are you encouraging the involvement of victims of those who are being socially integrated back into society in that process? How is your department leveraging that process to be able to be inclusive of the voices of those

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who are the actual victims of these perpetrators that are being offered and given parole? Thank you so much.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon House Chairperson, I indicated that our centres are now ... the department has introduced a multipronged approach to deal with the victims. We are doing so because we want to ensure that when they find time and are very lucky to get into our centres, they are being well-looked after. There's no way that they can get secondary abuse as we are working with all other relevant departments to make sure that we process them properly: The Department of Health, some social workers, ourselves and everybody who is trained and professional in that regard.

Again, House Chair, we are embarking on a process which we have concluded in ensuring that we repeal any existing legislation that seeks to leave behind the victims, as it has always been the case. We have made mentioned of many of those that seek to make sure that the victims are on the centre of these cases so that their voices can be heard, but not only that they also are able in a very comfortable space give their own evidence. They are also being look after in being able to be reintegrated to the society.

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I can assure this House that this is being done now by the department and all other departments. We also do provide skills into those victims who are in our centres so that we do address all the pillars because majority of time women can't walk away from their spouse whom they are abusing because they are the breadwinners. Therefore, this is why we provide skills to them so that as they will be reintegrated to the society, they can be able to oversee their lives, even economically. Thank you, House Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you, Minister. I do not know if the hon Feni has reconnected. Hon Feni, would you like to pose your supplementary question, please?

Mr M FENI: Thank you, hon House Chair, and I also thank to you, the hon Minister. Hon Minister, thanks once again for your detailed answer to my question. How will the recommendations made by the health market inquiry regarding private health care influence the process of implementation of the National Health Insurance, NHI?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon House Chair, as members we would understand that the NHI will be a

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responsibility of almost all departments as the Department of Social Development will also be on the sender. As such, we are part of the process that seeks to implement NHI in its totality. We are ready to get there because it talks to everything especially our mandate.

Of course, not all by ourselves, but with our NGOs that we are working with as well as our NPOs. We will make sure that we empower them and then understand all this that is enshrined in the NHI. We will also provide the universal access to health services in all times. Thank you very much, hon House Chairperson.

Ms Z N NGCOBO: House Chair, through you to hon Minister, transforming societal genders stereotype and breaking down harmful masculinity is crucial in preventing GBVF. The Provincial Council of GBVF in Mpumalanga has placed its work hard in creating a safer and more inclusive province for all. What role will traditional leaders play in supporting the government's efforts to combat GBVF, and how will the government measure the effectiveness of its policies and interventions in reducing GBVF cases over the year? Thank you.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you, hon Ngcobo. Before you start, Minister, sorry, hon members, I do need to point out that the rules of the House apply to virtual sittings as well. We must please, therefore, ensure that we are abiding by the rules and ensuring that we're not wearing party regalia. Minister, if I can ask you to respond to the question, please.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon House Chairperson, we must make mention of the fact that traditional leaders are one of our most important stakeholders. We are not doing anything outside them. As such, all the knowledge and wisdom that they have as the people who are working directly with people, especially in the rural areas, we do participate, and we do really get that those advice for them. We are also training some of them so that they can understand the concept of gender-based violence and femicide so that they can be able even to understand the complicated issues of the family that we all know, as South Africa we're the only country that has recognised them.

I wish to ensure that this House is taken into confidence for the fact that our provinces in all our Minister and Members of

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Executive Council, Minmec, we do work together, we do exchange programmes, and we do build into our national days for us to celebrate together. Any wisdom and well-processed programmes in all our provinces will indirectly be part of our programme as we are forever working with them.

House Chair, once again, we must emphasise that traditional leaders are one of our stakeholders into an extent of having a clear partnership with them to make sure that together we fight the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide. Thank you.

Question 35.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson and hon members. The renovations as per the scope of the work were completed, and no work was outstanding, hence the readmission of children from 5 April 2021 to date. The scope of work entail the following: The maintenance of dormitories and ablution facilities; fixing and replacement of kitchen equipment; maintenance in the admin block; and paint work inside and outside the building.

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Despite the centre having been operational, continuous day-to-day maintenance onsite is attended to when they need arises. The current renovations fall under the new scope of work and commenced in August 2024. The scope of work entails the following: The replacement of security lights inside and outside; the installation of solar panel security lights, the servicing of generator; the erection of additional carports; the replacement of gate motor and wheels; and guiding rollers.

The institution is fulfilling its purpose and mandate of caring for the vulnerable children awaiting trials. Chair, the House must take into consideration the fact that all these children are brought into the institution by court orders. Thank you very much.

Ms M MAKESINI: Thank you very much, Minister, for the response on the centre. Indeed, now I have observed that it is functional. However, how much cost have we used for the renovation of this centre? Thank you, Chair.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: The expenditure goes as follows: In the 2017-18 financial year, it was allocated R9 988 511, and the expenditure was R9 444 720; in 2018-19 the

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centre was allocated R9 223 801, and the expenditure was at R10 580 225; in 2019-20 it was R9 809 000, and the expenditure went to R12 244 671; and, in 2020-21, the centre was allocated R11 218 740, and the expenditure went up to R13 891 274.

In the instance of over expenditure as highlighted above, the department did virement during and towards the end of the financial year to adjust the budget. Thank you, Chair.

Ms M M BAINS: Hon Chair, good afternoon. Minister, I think that you actually covered my question that was really detailed. I just need to add on the question: Given that these renovations were done about four years ago, are there any additional renovations and maintenance planned for this facility. Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chair, as hon Bains indicates that we have covered the question. As indicated in my response, there are day-to-day maintenance such as the scope of work that falls under the replacement of security lights inside and outside; the installation of solar panel system security lights; services of a generator; erection of additional carports; replacement of gate motor and wheels; and

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guide rollers; paving; and feeling of swimming pool and covering, with a complete current work. That is what is happening, and there are others, as the need will arise. Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr J H P BRITZ: Hon House Chair and hon Minister, this facility was designed to provide secure care for youth offenders. If you really care for and prioritise rehabilitation and integration of youth into society, responsible officials would have been held accountable for possible mismanagement of public funds associated with this project. What have you done to hold the responsible officials accountable in accordance with National Treasury Regulations?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, indeed, there was a report that suggests that, at some point, the officials that were responsible with the process did something else. As such, we were assured that: They were taken through a process of disciplinary hearing; the matter was concluded; this is something of the past; and the centre is operational.

I want to emphasise the fact that indeed this was identified, a process was followed to make sure that this matter has

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brought those alleged people to the book, and this is what we have as a report. Thank you very much, hon Chairperson.

Mr B J FARMER: Chairperson, hon Minister: What steps is your department taking to rebuild trust within the community and demonstrate transparency in the management of funds for projects like these? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, I have alluded to fact that in the process of renovations, the department had an opportunity to train, further train and empower the management to make sure that are ready and well skilled for them to be able to manage the centre. This, for us, was quite important, especially when we were to realise that there are other things that we did not foresee when the centre was established. As such, we can safely say that everybody is ready now to make sure that the centre is run according to the legislation that exist, and according to expectations of the people who are occupying the centre. Thank you.

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The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chairperson, let me firstly use this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all stakeholders and Members of Parliament who joined us on the oversight visits that we undertook across the country to monitor the card replacement process for social grant beneficiaries. I also need to emphasise that the card replacement process being conducted by the Postbank is not a SA Social Security Agency, Sassa, process but a regulatory requirement on the Postbank issued by the SA Reserve Bank. The Social Assistance Act, Act 13 of 2004 is responsible for transferring funds to the bank of a beneficiary's choice.

During my oversight visit to various card replacement sites in the Western Cape in particular, upon arrival, I found long queues of beneficiaries. People travelled from far, and most beneficiaries also slept over at the centres so that they can be first in the line, as they came, sometimes, for the third time. Certain areas like Grabouw and Caledon that are more rural did not have service sites, and beneficiaries needed to travel to Eersterivier to get services.

The inadequate personnel deployed to most of the sites illustrated the lack of dignity in providing services. There

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were no chairs and toilets, but Sassa then provided. There were network glitches that disrupted the process. At one of the sites we visited, I personally observed how slow the process was, with only 13 cards issued in three hours.

I have had several engagements with the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies and insisted that we must take immediate action to address these issues and develop a workable plan to ensure a smooth and efficient card replacement process. I have also instructed Sassa to provide additional support to the Postbank, especially in rural areas. Sassa immediately extended the targeted Integrated Community Registration Outreach Programme, ICROP, which is used as additional sites for the replacement of cards. Through this intervention, we were able to significantly increase the number of replacement cards for Postbank clients and also provide support to those beneficiaries who chose to exercise their right to use a bank of their choice.

I facilitated direct engagement with the SA Reserve Bank to seek their indulgence in terms of possibly extending the validity of the old cards for those beneficiaries who would not be migrated by the end of the extended period. The Reserve

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Bank has granted an extension for the Postbank to continue using the gold card and ensuring that beneficiaries are sorted. Thank you, hon Chair.

Mr M F MOKWELE: House Chair, I greet the Minister, hon members on the platform, special delegates that are now on the platform, and fellow South Africans.

Thank you very much, Minister, for your response. We really appreciate that the deadline has been extended until 31 May 2025. My question is this: What will happen to the Postbank clients – I am referring to those pensioners who are receiving grants from the Postbank – beyond May if they have not yet replaced their cards? I thank you, Minister.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chair, the SA Reserve Bank has given an instruction to the Postbank to ensure that the gold cards remain active and that the Postbank must honour all transactions on these cards until they are replaced, thereby expressing a commitment to ensure that social grant beneficiaries will not be compromised.

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However, we must be reminded that these cards were compromised by the Postbank, and the SA Reserve Bank cannot maintain them in circulation for an indefinite period. Should the Postbank not be able to meet the requirement of the SA Reserve Bank to replace all the gold cards within the given timeframe, their clients will be migrated to another bank or banks as per the SA Reserve Bank's original condition when the first violation notice was issued. [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): I beg your pardon, hon Minister. Hon Radebe, can we ask you to mute, please? Hon Minister, were you finished replying?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Yes, Chair. I finished by saying should the Postbank not be able to meet the requirement of the SA Reserve Bank to replace all the gold cards within the given timeframes, their clients will be migrated to another bank or banks as per the SA Reserve Bank's original condition when the first violation notice was issued. I thank you.

Mr J H P BRITZ: House Chair, to the Minister: In light of ongoing delays and difficulties faced by beneficiaries,

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especially those in rural areas, what urgent, drastic steps is your department taking to ensure that no one is left without access to their grants? How will it effectively safeguard against fraud and financial mismanagement during this critical transition?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chairperson, as I have indicated, as Sassa, I took it upon myself to interact directly with the SA Reserve Bank, which is something that we had to do having noticed that the Postbank's plan was not working. As such, we are comfortable to announce that, through those interactions, we were able to get yet another extension. The SA Reserve Bank has also assured us that if it happens that, at the time, this very last extension is not adhered to, the SA Reserve Bank allows us to encourage our pensioners or our grant recipients to be taken to all other banks beyond the Postbank that is failing us.

Furthermore, where they are unable to cover rural areas, as I have indicated, we put in place a plan to mitigate that. Hence, we can today report a lot of progress made after our intervention as Sassa. Thank you very much.

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Ms M KENNEDY: House Chair and Minister, good afternoon. Minister, what measures have you put in place to ensure that the transition of switching from the Sassa gold card is a smooth process that is not hampered by any confusion, long queues, and technical problems, as it happened? Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you, hon Kennedy. It appears you missed the training session earlier. Nonetheless, Minister, over to you for a reply, please.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chairperson, as I have indicated on the progress that Sassa made in mitigating on the slow paced that you all experienced and the devastation that our grant recipients went through, Sassa took it upon itself not only to put ICROP in place, but our communication as Sassa was strengthened to an extent that we were talking directly to our grant recipients, especially those using the Postbank, to encourage them to go and make sure that they replace their cards.

This did not solve all problems. This is why, as Sassa and the Department of Social Development, we made sure that we put all other mitigating processes in place. We have queue managers

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who make sure that people don't have to stand in queues. They are well managed, and they are a little more secure because they were exposed to many other things. This is what we experienced when we embarked on our visits to those areas. Staff has been sensitised to make sure that, in their individual areas in all nine provinces, they do come in whenever that need arises to make sure they assist in this regard.

We can boast and say that, if Sassa did not come in during this process, we would have seen even more devastation experienced by our people. We are not proud of what happened. However, we did put a plan in place, and we can say in this House that the plan worked. The numbers tell the story. We can submit those statistics on how we have turned the corner in making sure that the replacement of cards sped up after the Sassa intervention. Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms T BREEDT: House Chair, to the Minister: You have now extensively spoken about and admitted what the problem was with the replacement black cards and what we have seen.

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A few weeks ago, we had a meeting with Deputy Minister Hendricks. We also raised a few questions there, and I am hoping that that would have gotten to you as well because, yes, we face challenges with regard to long queues and long distances having to be travelled, but there is a specific subgroup of Sassa beneficiaries that has been forgotten. Those are the beneficiaries that are not mobile, that are, as we say in Afrikaans, "bedlêend" [bedridden], that are homebound. Two weeks ago, it was said that, in due course, there will be plans on how to assist these people. Phoning the call centres of both Sassa and the Postbank, I was informed that they will be put on a list, and we just have to be patient and wait.

So, Minister, I want to find out the following from you: Has this been addressed? What is the plan to deal with these people who are bedridden and cannot get to these physical points? You would agree we cannot forget about these people. Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chair, indeed, this sector was almost forgotten about. However, Sassa put a plan in place after that interaction. As such, we now have roving teams that seek to visit those elderly people and those using the

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Postbank for receiving their grants to make sure they are being visited in the comfort of their own homes for them to be assisted with replacing their cards.

This is what is happening currently. We can submit to you where this is happening and how it is being done. We can assure this House that it has been looked at, and it is being addressed. Thank you very much.

Question 28:

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, hon members, our department is implementing a basket of poverty reduction programmes which includes the following; The social assistance programmes in the form of social grants, linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods and opportunities, food and nutrition security intervention, funding of NPOs, development social welfare interventions, and the National Development Agency's contribution to poverty eradication through civil society organisation grant funding programme.

To stay within the allocated time, I will submit details of each programme in my report for tabling. Regarding inequality,

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the World Bank report has found that social grants reduce inequality by about 7% points, which means without these grants, the country would have a much higher level of inequality. Furthermore, the commitment by the government to at least maintain the value of the grants by ensuring they are always adjusted for inflation and ensures the beneficiaries are at a minimum protected from the erosion of their grants due to inflation. Almost all social grant values are above the monthly food poverty line of R760 currently, with the exception of the child support grant which is R530 with the values of older person grants, war veterans' grants, disability grants and care dependency grants also above the monthly upper-bound level.

Hon members can also read for themselves the effectiveness of our programme from the independent academic studies from the University of Cape Town by Professor Haroon Borat, Professor Alaa Qasim and the African Focus Journal of 27 January 2014 and Mohammed Zreik and Bada Alam Iqbal in the Southern African Development Journal Volume 41 of 29 November 2024. Both these studies looked at the effectiveness of social grants in South Africa over 20 years of the existence of the SA Social Security Agency, Sassa. I thank you, hon Chair.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Minister, I ask about those reports that you just highlighted now if we can request that your parliamentary liaison officer chat to the committee secretariat and submit those documents to the committee that can be properly interrogated. Hon Ngcobo, I note that the Minister has suggested she is going to give you more detail in writing but I'm sure you have a follow-up question, nonetheless. Hon Ngcobo.

Ms Z N NGCOBO: House Chair, hon Minister, the government's investment in social grants is a step in the right direction with R232 billion allocated to social grants in 2022-23, benefiting 19 million people. However, we need to ensure these efforts translate into sustainable poverty reduction.

What specific strategies will the department implement to ensure the social grant system effectively reduces poverty rates and bridges the socioeconomic divide, particularly for the most vulnerable population? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson of the House, my response articulated how we are making sure that beyond people receiving grants, we're embarking on other

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programmes by working with NGOs and NPOs and in the centre is the National Development Agency, NDA, that seeks to train and fund those institutions that can assist in contributing to poverty eradication. This is named under the linking of grant recipients to the economy. This seeks to address exactly the question of the hon member that people should not stay on the grant forever but those who are capable of working can be processed through and be able to be trained for them to work for themselves. This is happening, at the moment, in different provinces. As they are getting trained to be sustainable, they are also taught to save so that they are not only job seekers, but they can be creators of jobs themselves. Thank you very much.

IsiXhosa:

Mnu M FENI: Mandiphinde ndibulele kuwe Sihlalo. Ndibulele nakuwe Mphathiswa ngengcaciso yakho ngomgaqonkqubo karhulumente ocacileyo ukulwa neengxaki esijongene nazo zentswelangqesho nendlala. Ndifuna ukuthi ke Mphathiswa, ezi nkqubo uzibekayo apha ziinkqubo nam endizibonayo ukuba ziyahambelana nomgaqonkqubo karhulumente osekelwe kunyaka wama-2030 ...

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English:

... the National Development Plan, NDP 2030.

IsiXhosa:

Ndifuna nje ke ngoku Mphathiswa ukuqonda kwelakho icala kwezi nkqubo uthe wazidakanca apha phambi kwethu: Ingaba zikunika ithemba kusini na lokuba isebe eli liza kukwazi ukuqubisana nezi ngxaki zendlala nezinye ezi ubuthe wazikhankanya kwimpendulo yakho? Enkosi Mphathiswa.

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon members, it is probably a good time to remind you there is a translation facility available. If you click on the buttons at the bottom of your screen, you can activate the translation. But I'm sure, Minister, you got the question and over to you for the reply, please, Minister.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chairperson, ...

IsiXhosa:

... liyinene eli lokuba asingekhe sikwazi ukufikelela kulo mda sizibekele wona wonyaka wama-2030 sibe sesiyitshayele sayisusa

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neengcambu indlala. Ndiyafuna ukuyitsho loo nto kuqala ukuze abantu bayiqonde le nyaniso.

English:

The target cannot be achieved by a single actor, but it requires collaboration with all sectors of society. Members will remember that section 27 of the Constitution recognised this by allowing for the progressive realisation of social security. Poverty reduction requires a multisectoral approach that goes beyond the focus on food and up to a broader anti-poverty approach. Poverty alleviation does not only concern itself with ensuring that everyone has sufficient income to buy food but also other social protection initiatives such as education, basic services and health care.

This requires a focus not only on food production, distribution, and pricing but goes, hand-in-hand, with other sustainable development initiatives such as access to land, capital markets, functional labour markets, adequate infrastructure and the entire socioeconomic landscape of a country.

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This also requires a multisectoral approach where all government departments, the private sector and civil society work together to ensure no one is left behind. This calls for a relevant government institution to remove those underlying structural barriers that limit the participation of vulnerable communities in the economy. Thank you, Chair.

Mr P J SWART: Good afternoon, Chairperson, good afternoon, hon Minister, I have listened to you, you claim to have strategies to reduce poverty, but we all know that poverty is becoming a crisis in South Africa. Poverty levels continue to rise in our country. We know that grants are not reducing poverty. Can you provide this House with what are currently quantifiable targets from your department for real poverty reduction with specific programmes that have already been implemented under your leadership? Can you also share with us evidence of any success stories or measurable improvements that demonstrate real progress in reducing poverty, particularly in the most vulnerable communities? I thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, as I have alluded to the fact that poverty reduction cannot be a one-

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department business because of the many effects I spoke about. The fact that the fiscal is shrinking and as such, all we want to have and to do might not be able to be achieved by one department. However, we are as a department embarking on a meaningful food nutrition programme which can be seen and visible in different provinces.

We are at the centre of building jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP. We are working with NPOs that are sometimes funded by us and other stakeholders for sustainable livelihoods as well as social grants. I guess we must accept the fact that grants play a meaningful role in making sure they mitigate our people and hunger, especially after the issues where the country was engulfed by COVID-19 wherein we had to introduce this social relief of distress, SRD, limited as it is but does make a difference from people who lost jobs at the time but also people who could not even embark on the small business that they had before COVID-19. Thank you very much, hon Chairperson.

Ms M KENNEDY: Hon House Chair, Minister, what specific role have you played since coming into office in co-ordinating efforts with other government sectors, private institutions

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and civil society organisations to ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to poverty reduction? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, the House must accept that we cannot work and do this work alone.

However, as the Department of Social Development, we have been able to work with the Community Nutrition Development Centres in partnership with departments like the Department of Health and other departments. We have pilot projects, for example, in the Free State and Gauteng of bricklaying, bakeries and hair salons.

This is an initiative that is to make sure those younger people who are also victims of unemployment and poverty are also taken through those training so that they can be able to be employers to bring all others who are grant recipients into the economic line. We are doing this in line or partnership with organisations like the National Youth Development Agency, the Department of Public Works, the Labour Department, as well as the private sector. This is what we are doing as a department to make sure that we eradicate poverty in our society. I thank you.

Question 43:

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, hon members, the outcomes of the vulnerability assessment and penetration test of the Social Relief of Distress system discover the following: The assessment of the overall child level for the SRD grant interface is classified as medium. Despite the overall child access as medium, the vulnerabilities identified reveals several vulnerabilities including potential issues with authentication mechanism server our configuration, data encryption and missing security headers. These vulnerabilities create opportunities for attackers to exploit weak points in the system.

I would also like to emphasize that the audit on the SRD online grant system was not an investigation but an audit of vulnerability assessment and penetration of SRD online grant system. The outcome on the Social Relief of Distress is used as an input for drafting the scope of work for full investigation. Thank you, Chair.

Mr M P SIBANDE: Thank you very much, hon Minister, for your fabulous respond. But nevertheless, I will ask a question that

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who will conduct the full investigation and how long is it expected to be concluded? I will thank you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, the service provider that will be selected to conduct investigation will be appointed to the competitive bidding processes. Members will be informed of their appointed service provider as soon as critical possible.

An independent service provider with extensive experience in investigating social grant fraud. Relevant tools for conducting digital forensic investigation and the national footprint. While I appreciate the agency and priority study and conclude the investigation within the reasonable period, it is quite difficult to determine the time frame to complete investigation due to the following reasons, amongst others, hon Chair, the extensive scope of work that would be covered.

The enormity of the fraud risk identified with various assurance providers such as inspectorate, the SA Social Security Agency, Sassa, internal audit, DSD and Sassa management. Significant system weaknesses identified during the recently concluded audit on SRD online system. The

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complexity of information technology system involved in the administrating and the managing all social lives across all Sassa regions and periodic to be covered for investigation. In spite of the above, Chair, the Director-General Office will oversee the process to ensure that successful appointment service provider is concluded investigation with the reasonable timeframe.

Mr M M PETER: Greetings to, hon Minister. Minister, following the investigation instituted by the Minister of Social Development into the vulnerability of the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant application system prompted by whistleblower reports of fraud and manipulation, the SA Social Security Agency has outlined several interventions to strengthen cyber security, enhance account about verification and introduce biometric authentication to curb fraudulent activities.

Given these developments and the reported cases of identity theft and fraud in the system, can the Minister indicate which provinces or regions or local municipalities have been identified as the most affected by fraudulent SRD grant activities and how many grants have subsequently been

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suspended or withdrawn due to the suspected or confirmed fraud since these vulnerabilities were brought to light and the new security measures were introduced?. I thank you, minister.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Chairperson, indeed, this process has exposed us to a number of challenges hence Sassa put a plan quite earlier than now as there were suspicions already. We can safely say for now Gauteng and the Eastern Cape are two province that show a lot of those, and we can safely report to say it went up to almost 1 100. This process is still unfolding, hon Chairperson, and such we can conclude as hon members might have seen the institution that is responsible to deal with those who are alleged making sure that they are behind bars, meaning that the work that Sassa is doing is very progressive fruits in that regard. Thank you, Chair.

Mr K CEZA: Minister, given that the audit outcomes uncovered medium-term weaknesses online applications and payments which could compromise the systems integrity. What measuring scale did you use to arrive at the conclusion that the risk level, as is medium-term and not high risk as threats which they

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report describes fit the description of high-level risk? Thank you very much, Chair.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Chairperson, this process is informed by the first-round investigation or trying to find what went wrong. These are the findings that informed us on the process that I've just articulated. Yes, Chair, we are unable to conclude hence we then said there is now a process that is about to unfold wherein we are going to appoint a service provider that is well informed and well vest on this. And out of this we will bring those outcomes to this august House for the House to see for themselves on the work that we have done. `We are very hard at work, Chair, and we want to commit to say Sassa and DRS, we shall not tolerate any corruption that takes place within our systems as this is made for most vulnerable. I thank you.

Mr N GOTSELL: Good afternoon, Minister. Minister, social grant should be funded by cutting waste and not by raising taxes on struggling families. Now this is the real vulnerability of the system. so, Minister, my question to you is, whether your department is planning for the influx in social relief that will most certainly be sought from the state if the ANC, the

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PA and other popcorn parties plan to tax south African more succeeds?

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon members will be aware of the fact that the Social Development Department as well as Sassa are dispatching grants to its own rightful people. This is a process where only the Treasury has been able to give that money from the Treasury through social development towards Sassa. This is the responsibility of all other departments to make sure that the money that is limited or very limited taxes that we are getting are also made to benefit for the poor and this process is being done outside DSD and Sassa by process by the Treasury in this regard and we then received on an annual basis ours that we are supposed and expected as according to the law to disperse those to the most vulnerable to the process that Sassa is responsible for.

Chair, I might not be able to get into politics. Ours is to make sure that the most vulnerable do participate and do get what is due to them as be to the Constitution of the Republic. I thank you.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): I would like to thank the Minister for her availability and for her responses today. And I also like to thank all MECs, all permanent and special delegates and of course, the SA Local Government Association, Salga, representatives for availing themselves for today's sitting. Hon delegates, that concludes the business of the day, and the Council is therefore adjourned. Thank you very much for your attention.

The Council adjourned at 15:13.