Children & social assistance: Investing in children

Why invest in social grants for children

The right to social assistance
- Parents have the primary responsibility for providing for their children’s well-being, but families are unable to meet children’s basic needs, the Constitution says they are entitled to receive State support:
  “Everyone has the right to have access to social security, including... if they are unable to maintain themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance.”
- “The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.”

Mitigating child poverty
- Poverty undermines people’s dignity and compromises children’s survival, growth, development, and educational opportunities.
- The need for social grants is widespread: 6 out of 10 children live below the upper poverty line in households with per capita monthly income of less than R93 in 2014 prices.
- Where there is little or no income from work, social grants can help families meet children’s basic needs.

Supporting care of children
- Three-quarters of children live with their biological mother, while 38% live with their biological fathers, and only one-third live with both their parents.
- Women often carry a double burden of care and financial support for children. Yet women are less likely to find employment, and when they do find work, they are likely to earn less than men.
- Household forms are often fluid as adults and children move to access educational opportunities and child care: 20% of children in South Africa live with relatives rather than with their parents.

This rise to 28% of children living in former homelands where families historically have been historically on the burden of caregivers for children of migrant workers.

- The Child Support Grant is therefore targeted at the child’s primary caregiver (rather than only the biological parent), and is designed to “follow the child.”

How social grants benefit children

Social grants have proven effective in reducing child poverty and improving children’s health, nutrition and education outcomes. The sooner and longer a child receives the Child Support Grant (CSG), the greater the impact.

Nutrition
- The CSG enables households to increase expenditure on food and has a positive impact on child hunger and nutrition.

Schooling
- Access to the CSG is associated with improvements in school attendance, and early and continued receipt of the CSG may have a positive effect on grade progression and learning outcomes.

Adolescents
- The CSG has a protective effect in adolescence. Early receipt of the CSG is associated with reduced alcohol and drug use and delayed sexual debut among teenage girls.
- Household receipt of the CSG helps reduce the incidence of transactional sex and sex with older partners amongst teenage girls.

How the Child Support Grant has grown
- The CSG was introduced at R100 in 1998 to improve the nutrition of children under seven years old. The grant amount, age, and income thresholds have increased over time, so that in 2016 the CSG is valued at R360 and targets all income-eligible children under the age of 18.
- The CSG has a wide reach and provided essential income support to 12 million children in 2016.
- Yet the small grant amount of R360 per month (R12 a day) is not enough to meet children’s basic needs. In 2015, 20% was below the food poverty line (a measure of basic nutrition) and was less than half the value of the upper bound poverty line (which includes an allocation for basic shelter, clothing, transport, and education).

Some challenges remain
- Despite its rapid expansion, in five eligible children still do not benefit from the CSG: 1.8 million children take-up is particularly low among children under one year.
- The earlier a child receives the CSG the better the outcomes, so children should receive the grant as soon as they are born.
- Key barriers include: difficulty accessing the required documents, confusion around who is eligible for the grant, and an application process that is often time-consuming and costly.

Beneficiaries are at times treated with disrespect — in particular teen mothers and refugees who report hostility and suspicion from some SASSA officials. Yet caregivers are entitled to receive the CSG from the age of 16, and refugees have been entitled to receive the CSG since 2012.

Accurate information is needed at community level and grant beneficiaries are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

Social grants for children

Three social grants are aimed at children. Each serves a different purpose and has different eligibility requirements:

Table 1: Social grants for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social grant</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Child Support Grant</th>
<th>Foster Child Grant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td>Income support for caregivers of children living in poverty</td>
<td>Support for foster parents who have been legally appointed by the court to care for a child (requires a valid court order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant value</td>
<td></td>
<td>R360</td>
<td>R190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single caregiver: R3,620 per month or R43,800 per year</td>
<td>Single caregiver: R15,100 per month or R181,200 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td></td>
<td>Married caregiver: R2,300 per month or R27,600 per year</td>
<td>Married caregiver: R17,700 per month or R212,400 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
<td>11,972,900</td>
<td>131,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning outcomes

30% of children live in unemployed households

63% of children live in poverty

Decline in food poverty

60%

30%

2023

2014

To support children’s optimal development, the CSG should be targeted towards 75% of government spending on social assistance going to the poorest 40% of households.

Social grants for children

Child Support

- The CSG is designed to help families meet children’s basic needs, so no funeral insurance may be deducted from children’s grants.

Foster Child

- Some challenges remain:
  - A sworn statement by a reputable person (e.g. a councillor, traditional leader, social worker, priest, school principal) who knows you and the child, and/or other documents such as a baptism certificate, school report or clinic card.

All copies must be certified (signed by a commissioner of oaths).

How will you be paid?

- If your application is approved, you should receive your first payment within 2 weeks.

- Once your grant is approved, you will receive a SASSA payment card and can use this card to access your money, for example, through SASSA pay points, participating shops or ATMs.

- You can apply for social relief of distress vouchers or food parcels while waiting for your grant to be processed.

- If your application is not approved, you should receive a letter giving reasons for the rejection. You have the right to appeal.

Are deductions allowed?

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  - A sworn statement by a reputable person (e.g. a councillor, traditional leader, social worker, priest, school principal) who knows you and the child, and/or other documents such as a baptism certificate, school report or clinic card.

All copies must be certified (signed by a commissioner of oaths).

What is meant by “the child”?

- The person who applies for the grant must:
  - Be the primary caregiver of the child (the person responsible for meeting the daily care needs of the child).

- Be the owner of the age:
  - Be a South African citizen, permanent resident or refugee
  - Be living in South Africa

- Pass the means test and fall below the income threshold (see table 1).

- The child must be under the age of 18 and not living in a state-funded institution.

- A caregiver cannot apply for more than six non-biological children, or receive the grant if she or he is paid to care for the child.

What documents do you need?

- You must provide proof of identity, marital status and care arrangements if married

- A birth certificate is required if you are applying for the first time

- A death certificate is required if you are applying for the second time

- For same sex applicants, you must provide proof of understanding and consent

- For foster children, you must provide proof of identity, marital status, and care arrangements

- For foster children, you must provide proof of identity, marital status, and care arrangements

- If you are applying for the second time, you may be required to provide a court order

For more information

Call the SASSA toll-free helpline: 0800 60 10 11.

For paralegal support and advice call the Black Sash helpline: 076 463 7393 or email: help@blacksash.org.za.