



MINISTER OF FINANCE

The Honourable Colm Imbert
Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

F(SMEO): 3/33/5

August 25, 2022

Ms. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George
Speaker of the House
Speaker's Chambers
Office of the Parliament
Parliamentary Complex
The Red House
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain

Dear Ms. Annisette-George,

Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic

Reference is made to your correspondence **Parl.: 14/3/56 Vol. IV** dated May 27, 2022 on the subject Report and your request for a written response to the findings and recommendations of Joint Select Committee (JSC) relevant to the Ministry of Finance contained therein.

Kindly see attached the written responses from the Ministry of Finance.

Should clarification be required, please contact Ms. Atayla Guerra, Senior Project Manager, Strategic Management and Execution Office at 612-9700 ext. 2625 or via email at Atayla.Guerra@gov.tt

Yours sincerely,

Minister of Finance



Ministry of Finance

Responses to the Findings and Recommendations in the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic

The findings and recommendations of the Joint Select Committee (JSC) relevant to the Ministry of Finance (MOF) are outlined on pages thirty-eight (38) and thirty-nine (39) of the Report.

FINDINGS

- i. There needs to be greater coordination among State agencies that provide social support in order to reduce ambiguity and ineffective communication with clients.**

MOF Response

Greater coordination among State agencies that provide social support would benefit clients by improving communication and reducing ambiguity. It would also result in time savings for both the relevant agencies and the clients, as it was reported by the SRG processing unit that a number of queries on the status of applications, when investigated, revealed that applicants did not apply for the SRG and then had to be redirected based on the information provided. Considerable time was expended on gathering information and determining whether an application was submitted and to which agency/ Ministry. Although FAQs were published on the Ministry of Finance's website which provided a description of and highlighted the difference between the SRG and Income Support Grant (ISG), some members of the public still did not follow the guidelines.

- ii. The initial challenges with manual systems causing delays in processing grant applications underscore the importance of digital transformation across the Public Service.**

MOF Response

It is agreed that digital transformation across the Public Service is required. For Phase II of the SRG, the application process was digitized with the use of an online application e-portal. This first step towards digitization removed a number of the challenges experienced during Phase I and reduced the processing time as application collection was simplified and data entry eliminated. However, the back-end processing of applications remained a manual process which was very labor-intensive and time-consuming. Digitization of the whole process, where feasible, should improve efficiency in the processing and payment of grants.

- iv. **The high number of applications that were rejected due to errors and/or eligibility issues suggests a need for clearer communication with the public when disseminating information on application criteria and process for accessing support.**

MOF Response

While there were several applications that could not move forward to approval and payment due to errors or omissions in the application, the SRG processing unit communicated with such applicants, via both inbound and outbound calls, in an effort to rectify deficiencies and move the applications towards a favourable outcome. Once an applicant was able to provide the required supporting documents and satisfy the established eligibility criteria, their applications were reconsidered for payment. Accordingly, there was a decrease in the number of applications categorized as “rejected”.

Also, reference is made to **item 5.1.37 on page 38** of the Report which states that applicants whose last salary was on April 29, 2021 and become unemployed as at May 01, 2021 were not eligible to receive the grant. This statement is not applicable to the SRG. Please note that applicants for the SRG whose last dates of employment were from April 29, 2021 to June 29, 2021 were eligible for the grant, as follows:

May: Last dates of employment from April 29 – May 7, 2021 - \$1,500.00

May: Last dates of employment from May 8 – May 30, 2021 - \$1,000.00

June: Last dates of employment from May 31 – June 7 - \$1,500.00

June: Last dates of employment from June 8 – June 29 - \$1,000.00

RECOMMENDATION

- A. **The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the Ministry of Finance should collaborate with the Ministry of Digital Transformation to improve their application processes. During an inquiry into Work from Home arrangements in the public service during the pandemic, the Committee became aware of the project works to be executed to effect digitization and digitalization in the public service 2022. We recommend that the digitalisation of manual application process will be prioritised among these projects.**

MOF Response:

The MOF agrees that the digitization and digitalization of grant application processes should be prioritized. This will improve data sharing among the agencies/ Ministries and will allow for faster processing of grants where coordination and cross-checking is required to avoid the duplication of payments. This was a challenge experienced with the SRG and ISG which are similar grants with different target beneficiaries. The eligibility criteria and data requirements were different for these grants and the use of different unique

identifiers presented a challenge during data-sharing. A central database will also facilitate greater uniformity, the sharing of real-time information and better analysis of data which will result in increased efficiency and transparency and more effective policies.

Ministry of Finance
August 18, 2022