

B L A C K S A S H
MAKING HUMAN RIGHTS REAL

April 2021

Social Grant Payments

Community Based Monitoring Report

BLACK SASH

April 2021 Social Grant Payment Community Based Monitoring Report

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Introduction

This report comprises a summary and analysis of Black Sash staff and Community Partners' monitoring of the SASSA Social Grant Pay Days in April 2021.

This is the first Community Based Monitoring (CBM) cycle for the year; the other CBM cycles will be on Grant Pay Days in June, August and October 2021.

For this year's monitoring, Black Sash Regional Offices have contracted with 20 Community Partners to monitor the staggered payment of social grants at South African Post Office (SAPO) branches, ATMs and retailers.

The Black Sash's Community Based Monitoring is fundamental to our work – it provides an opportunity for citizens to provide information, analysis and feedback about the quality of service delivery, specifically in terms of social assistance.

Black Sash recognises that communities, citizens and public service users are active holders of fundamental rights, and not merely passive users of public services. Our Community Based Monitoring reports draw on feedback from Community Partners to provide tangible feedback to policy makers and government in order to improve service delivery. This offers the opportunity for citizens, civil society and civil servants to work together to build a capable state.

Context

The Black Sash Community Based Monitoring programme has been through a number of adjustments in the last two years.

In 2019, after the removal of Cash Paymaster Systems (CPS) as the contracted social grant management agency, Black Sash initiated monitoring systems to track the implementation of the grant payment Service Level Agreement (SLA) between SAPO and SASSA. Community Advice Offices and Community Based Organisations contracted with Black Sash Regional Offices to track the implementation of the new grant disbursement system, and to assess the efficiency of service delivery for grant beneficiaries.

With the advent of the Covid-19 virus and Level 5 lockdown in early 2020, the Grant Pay Day Community Based Monitoring programme shifted to working remotely.

In March 2020, Black Sash Regional Office contacted Community Partners (CP) they had worked with over the years, and asked if they would be willing to conduct a unique COVID-19 lockdown cycle of remote monitoring by interviewing beneficiaries over Whatsapp and telephone calls. A questionnaire with guiding questions was developed and circulated. CPs responded with remarkable levels of commitment and energy. As some members of Black Sash CPs are beneficiaries themselves, they were able to provide first-hand accounts. For the September round of CBM, we moved onto a Google Forms system of monitoring – still monitoring remotely.

The April 2021 monitoring cycle has adapted the Google Forms questionnaires developed last year, with the key adaptation that there has been greater freedom of movement which enabled staff and partners to monitor in person – albeit using safety protocols such as social distancing, masks and sanitisers.

Black Sash staff met online in March 2021 to design two questionnaires: a monitor observation form and a beneficiary questionnaire form. Community Partners went through a series of training sessions run by Black Sash Regional Office staff to prepare them for this first monitoring cycle for the year.

A word of acknowledgement to the Black Sash Community Partners who monitored during April 2021:

Eastern Cape Regional Office: Middelburg Advice Office, Daliwe Advice Office (Cathcart), Tyinira Advice Office, Jersey Farm Advice Office (Mthatha), Mqanduli Advice Office

Gauteng Regional Office: Dirang Ka Kagiso Wellness Centre, Kgothatsanang Community Organisation, Jouberton Advice Office, Mankweng Community Legal Advice, Barona Child Care and Support

KwaZulu Natal Regional Office: Vianney, Zenzeleni, CINDI, Kwa Fene, Standerton

Western Cape Regional Office: SALDA, Mitchell's Plain Advice Office, Beaufort West Advice Office, Nuwekloof Advice Office (Riebeek Kasteel), Ubuntu (Klapmuts)

Summary of Monitoring Sites

Monitor Observation Submissions

Monitor observation and beneficiary questionnaire reports were submitted by individual monitors at various times over the three Grant Pay Days from the following sites:

SAPO branches:

- WCRO: Clanwilliam, Malmesbury, Kraaifontein
- KZNRO: Dalton, Edendale, Howick, KwaMahlanga, Pietermaritzburg, Standerton
- ECRO: Cathcart, Elliotdale, Mqanduli, Mthatha, Nqamakwe, Middelburg, Viedgeville, Xhorha
- GRO: Diepkloof and Diepkloof Square, Jouberton, Vanderbijlpark

ATMs:

- WCRO: Graafwater, Lamberts Bay, Riebeek Kasteel, Hermon, Mitchells Plain
- KZNRO: Mphohomeni, Standerton, Dalton, Pietermaritzburg
- ECRO: Namakwe
- GRO: Motla

Retailers:

- WCRO: Clanwilliam, Lamberts Bay, Klapmuts
- KZNRO: Howick, Dalton, Mphohomeni
- ECRO: Mthatha, Mqanduli

Findings

Impact of the Staggering of Payments

The staggering of grant pay days has significantly reduced the health and safety risks for staff and grant beneficiaries, as well as cash flow challenges in some cases.

Beneficiaries on OAPs have realised that collecting their grant on the third grant pay day is often an effective strategy, because queues are much shorter by that stage.

Monitors did not report significant problems for beneficiaries in knowing when their next grant pay day would be, suggesting that beneficiaries have adapted well to the new system.

Cash Supplies

SAPO is not consistently adhering to the SLA with SASSA, with numerous reports of cash shortages and erratic opening hours.

Late deliveries of cash at ATMs and SAPO branches are a matter of concern.

Safety of Beneficiaries, Staff and Cash

Armed robberies at retailers and SAPO branches on grant pay days are an increasing phenomenon, which leave grant recipients vulnerable to crime, at risk of having to find additional transport money to come back at a later date, and unable to receive their grants on time.

Help Desk Support in SAPO Branches

Reports suggest that there is currently a trend of SASSA reducing support to beneficiaries, particularly by no longer sending staff to rural areas and small towns. This is placing enormous burdens on beneficiaries, who have to find the money to pay for transport to the nearest SASSA office.

Compliance with Covid-19 Regulations

Sanitiser is generally available at pay channels.

There has been an increase in the number of reports of temperatures being checked at entrances to pay channels.

Social distancing is adhered to inside SAPO branches and retailers, but not outside in shopping centres, parking lots and streets. Crowding is a concern at many SAPO and retail pay channels.

Adherence to wearing masks has been affected by compliance fatigue, meaning not all beneficiaries in a queue necessarily wear masks in public.

Impact of Covid-19 on Organisations

The Covid pandemic is affecting every sector of society – including SASSA and SAPO. The impact of illness, bereavement, a sense of vulnerability to infection, and the trauma of our times is affecting the efficiency with which services are delivered, particularly through staff shortages. Those branches that have maintained good standards of service need to be commended.

Recommendations

Providing Support Services in the Covid Context

SASSA needs to ensure that it complies with its own Norms and Standards in terms of the quality of service and support it provides to beneficiaries, the challenges of Covid notwithstanding.

Safety and Covid-19 Regulation Compliance

While the staggering of payments has reduced the pressure of large crowds on grant pay days to some extent, the ongoing challenge of coping with large crowds at all grant pay channels needs to be addressed through more efficient payment systems and more rigorous policing in the areas outside of shopping malls and SAPO branches.

Crime Prevention

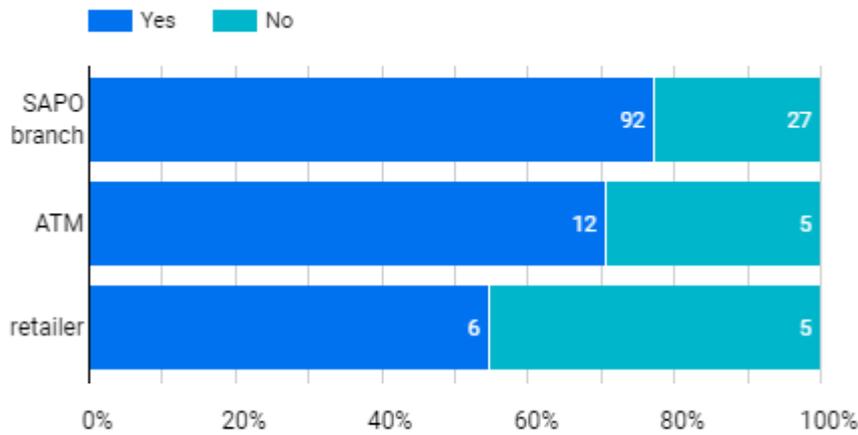
SASSA and SAPO need to engage more effectively with both SAPS and local community policing forums to ensure the safety of both cash supplies at pay channels and grant beneficiaries.

Summary of Submissions

Monitor Observation Forms

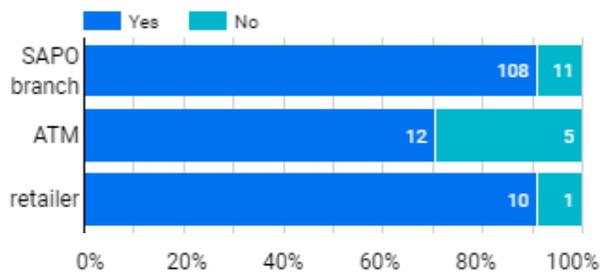
1. Covid-19 Regulation Compliance

Was information given about COVID-19 and safety at the venue?

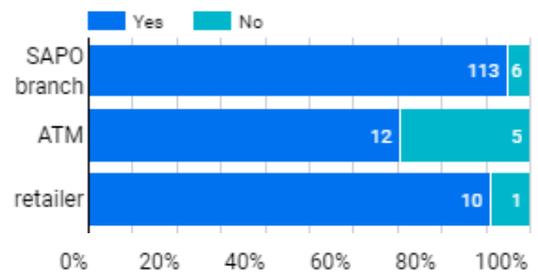


Were the following supplied:

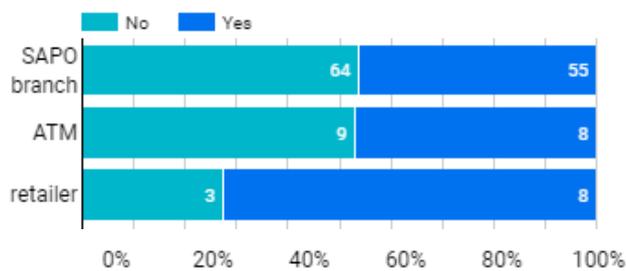
Hand sanitizers for staff?



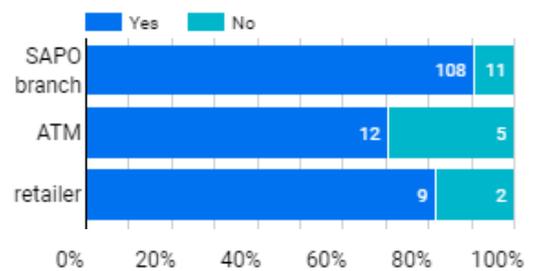
Hand sanitizers for beneficiaries?



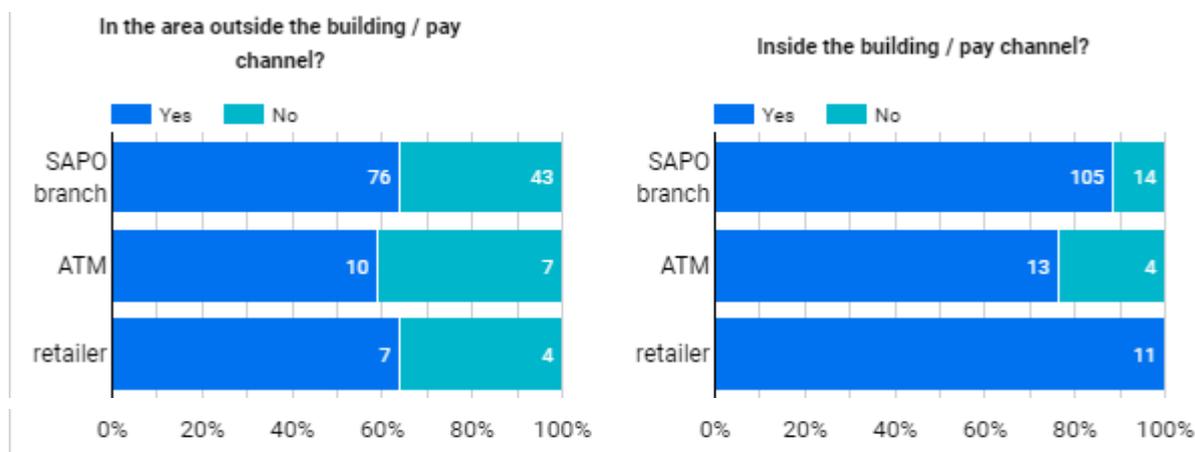
Glass/plastic screen protection for staff?



Did staff have masks or face shields?



Were grant beneficiaries asked to practice social distancing – standing or sitting 1-2 metres apart:



Specific feedback from monitors:

Mphohomeni, KZN	In spite of the fact that there is a new mall in the community, people still travel 20km into Howick to collect their grants, with high levels of risk to Covid infection
Pietermaritzburg, KZN	Despite the fact that this pay day was dedicated to Disability Grants, there were many elderly at the site coming to draw the Older Person's Grant. There was a massive overflow as the tent could not accommodate all the awaiting beneficiaries. One vendor was actually renting chairs at R5-00 for those who were forced to stand outside until they got into the tent. Social distancing at this site always poses a challenge. It must also be noted that sanitizers are only available when you enter the Post Office and not when you are waiting outside.

2. Safety and Security

How safe did beneficiaries feel when travelling to and from the pay site?

By far the majority of reports indicated that beneficiaries felt safe.

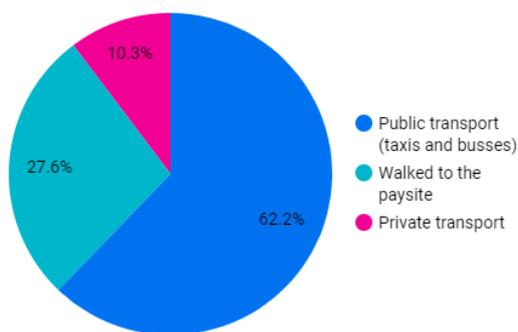
Reasons given for feeling the safest:

- When beneficiaries arrive early in the morning to queue – before there are long queues outside the pay channel.
- When there are security personnel and SAPS who show respect and assist beneficiaries with hand sanitising, checking temperatures and queue management.
- When queues are managed well, and beneficiaries comply with directions in terms of queueing and entering pay channels.

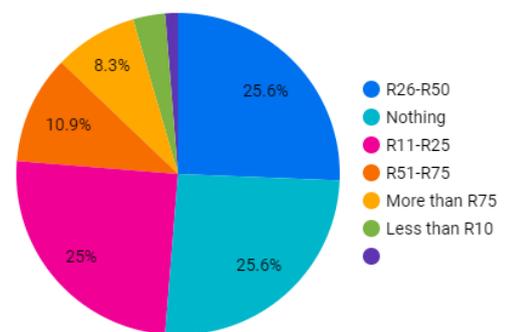
Reasons given for not feeling safe:

- The danger of being robbed when travelling to and from pay channels.
- The danger of being robbed when there are big crowds of people in centres and in the street.
- Not having tents for shelter and protection or chairs where they could sit and wait. Standing out in the open makes beneficiaries feel vulnerable and afraid.
- Not having facilities for physically disabled people such as a ramp at the entrance to the pay channel.

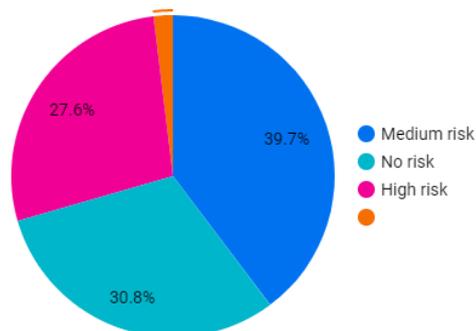
Transport: Did the majority of beneficiaries use public or private transport to collect their grant? *



Transport: How much did it cost in total for people to collect their grants (i.e. return)?

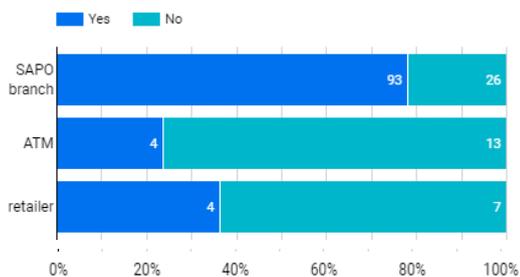


Transport: What levels of Covid risks did people face while travelling to collect their grant?

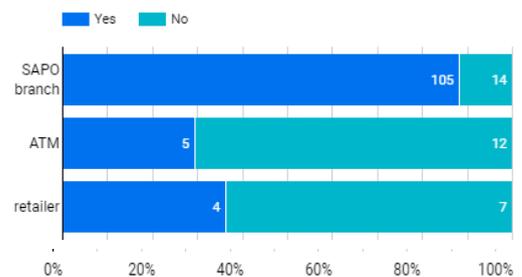


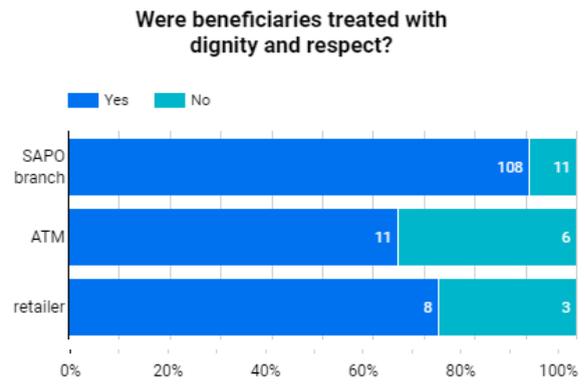
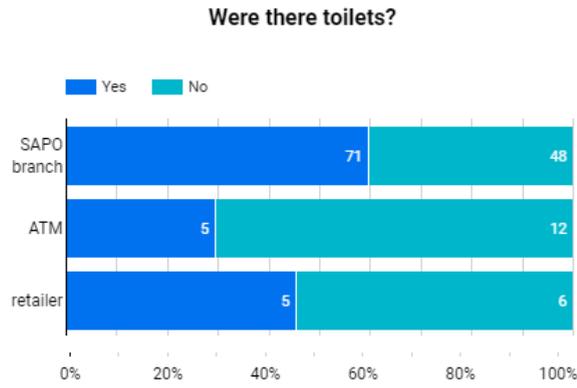
3. Dignity and Respect

Was drinking water available?

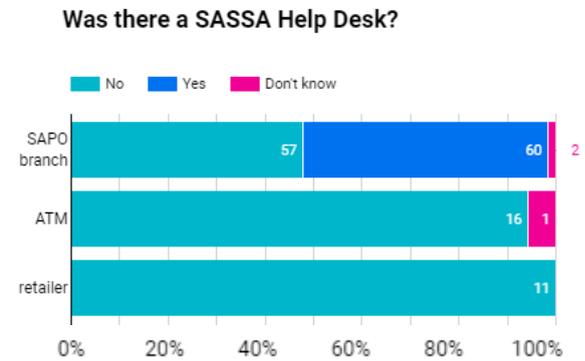
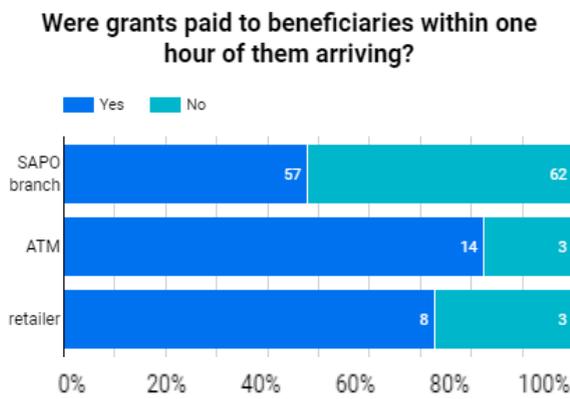


Were chairs or benches available?

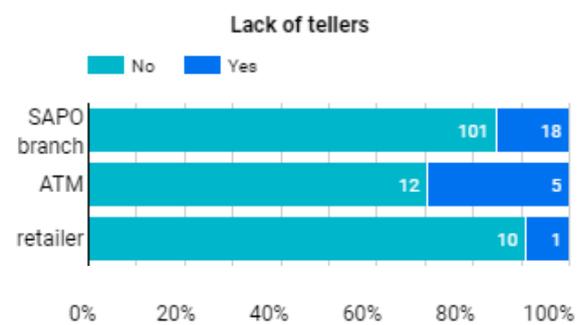
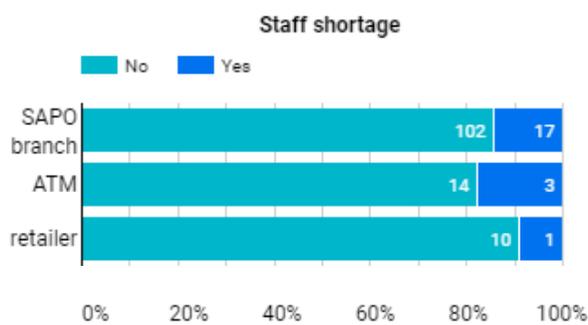
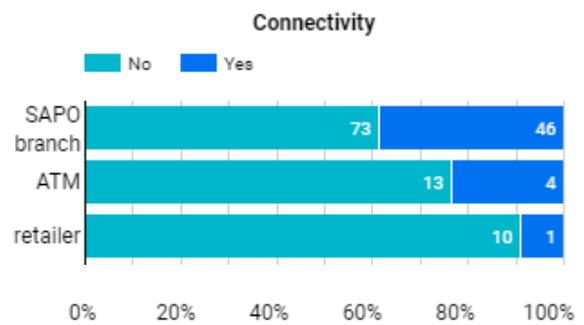
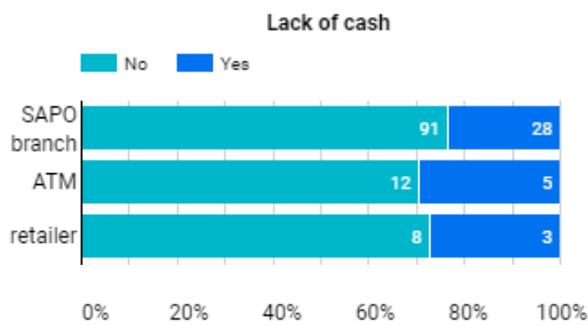


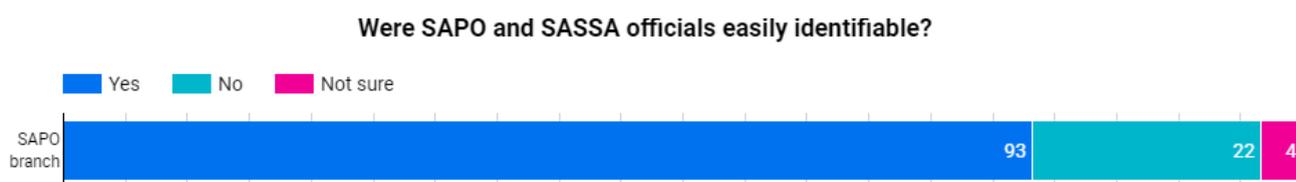
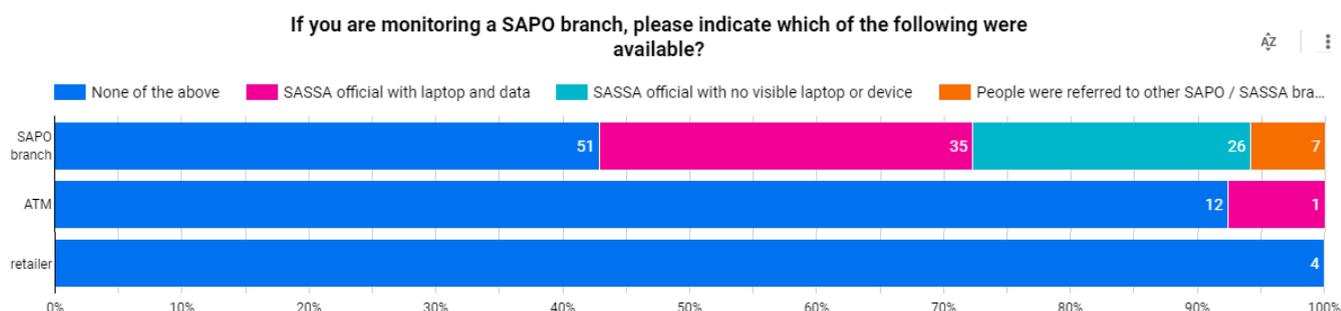
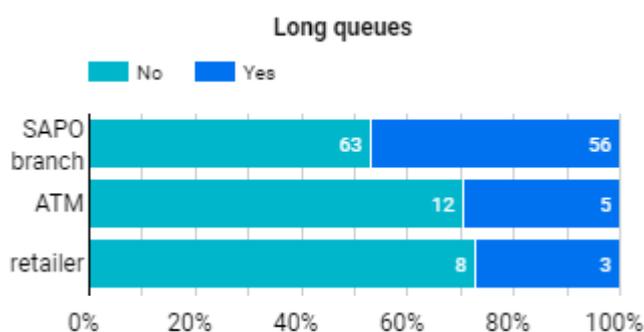


4. Payments and Recourse



Reasons for payment delays:





5. Other Issues Raised by Monitors:

- Beneficiaries are adapting well to the staggered payments of grants – including that OAP beneficiaries sometimes waiting for the day CSGs are released because the queues are often shorter on the third day of a grant payment cycle.
- Poor connectivity continues to hamper efficient service delivery to grant beneficiaries – resulting in problems that have been reported regularly since 2019: long queues, extra travel costs, delays in issuing replacement / new SASSA cards, and sometimes short-payment of grants.
- Despite systemic challenges, and the stresses of Covid, monitors regularly report on examples of officials, security guards and other pay channel staff doing their utmost to deliver services in the midst of systemic challenges such as lack of equipment, procurement challenges, and lack of connectivity.
- SAPO officials have limited capacity to deal with recourse or short-payment cases, and yet face the stress of being the people on the front line who face frustrated, hungry and desperate beneficiaries.
- Since lockdown, SASSA seems to have stopped travelling to rural towns to provide support and run Help Desk facilities. This is creating enormous pressure for beneficiaries, who have to find the time and resources to travel long distances to the nearest town that has a SASSA office.