

Taxi Relief Fund applications open

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Transport Minister, Fikile Mbalula, officially opened the application process of the R1.1 billion fund on Tuesday.

At the launch, the Minister reflected on the impact that the pandemic has had on the transport industry, which he said left many unemployed and facing serious financial troubles.

“The loss of revenue during the lockdown for the various transport modes presented an economic challenge, as transport operators experienced an unexpected shortfall in their finances. The taxi industry was no exception to this reality.

“Almost 20% or more of the taxi industry experienced total loss of income, particularly the long-distance and cross-border operators as a result of the closure of international borders and the prohibition of inter-provincial travel,” he said.

According to Mbalula, at least 227 000 operators are expected to receive an estimated R5 000 in once-off relief.

"We believe that the disbursement process we are launching today is a stepping-stone towards the transformation and formalisation of the taxi industry. While this is a once-off ex gratia payment, it is a demonstration of the seriousness with which we take the role of the taxi industry in the broader public transport value chain," Mbalula said.

The R1.1bn relief fund was allocated by Parliament as early as July 2020. However, disagreements with the industry led to a delay in its disbursement, which have now been resolved.

"The disbursement... will be done through the National Empowerment Fund (NEF). We have appointed the NEF as the implementing agent of this process and they have worked tirelessly to put systems in place to enable the release of funds to thousands of eligible operators," Mbalula said.

The following conditions for a successful application apply:

- An applicant must be a South African citizen or a permanent resident.
- They must be in possession of a valid Operating Licence or a receipt as proof of renewal issued on or before the date of the declaration of the national state of disaster. This is applicable only in instances where the Operating Licence has not been subsequently issued by the relevant Provincial Regulatory Entity (PRE).
- The applicant must be registered with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) as a taxpayer.

"The application process of the relief fund is premised on a web-based system, which will be accessed via the [Transport] department's website. Applications will be completed online by the operator or via the assistance of a call centre agent.

"The call centre is reachable via a toll-free number and operators will be able to either call in or send an SMS with their identification number, and a call centre agent will call the operator to assist telephonically with the online application," Mbalula said.

Taxi operators can begin the application process by:

- Visiting <http://transport.gov.za>
- Contacting the call centre toll free on 0800 201 971
- Or sending an SMS to 45864

The application period is expected to be concluded by March this year.

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