

Workers are battling to collect unemployment benefits despite new technology

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14 Dec 2023

UIF app and phone-in system launched in September.



Queues of people trying to claim UIF and get help for other issues are almost a permanent feature outside the labour department offices in Cape Town. Photo: Qaqamba Falithenjwa

- Briefing Parliament in September last year, Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) Commissioner Teboho Maruping promised a new app would make claiming from the fund much easier.
- He said unemployment benefits should take 15 days to process.
- The app and a free phone-in system were launched on 4 September.
- But claimants GroundUp spoke to said they were still struggling to access their benefits.

People who have lost their jobs or are on maternity leave are struggling to access money owed to them by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) which they were compelled to contribute to while employed.

Those claiming UIF have been frustrated by the Department of Employment and Labour's online registration system through which UIF is claimed. The system often reflects incorrect information or does not allow people to register as claimants.

In September last year UIF commissioner Teboho Maruping [told](#) Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) that a new UIF app allowing people to lodge claims online would reduce the lines at labour centres. He said unemployment benefits should take 15 days to process "if everything required was in place".

The app and a new phone-in system (USS) were [launched](#) on 4 September. Maruping said then that this would "promote greater self-service for clients, reduce long queues in the labour centres and alleviate pressure on officials".

“We are moving with the times to create a better, more capable UIF that leverages technology to respond to challenges on the ground and changes in the external environment,” he said.

But people interviewed by *GroundUp* queuing outside the labour department’s office in Plein Street, Cape Town on 7 December still said they were struggling to obtain their UIF benefits.



UIF launches app and USSD service to speed up operations

5 Sep 2023



Sandisa Mtshula, a welder from Delft, said she had submitted her UIF claim in October, when she went into the department’s office and had her documents scanned.

Mtshula said a month later she had received an SMS stating “the system” had no record of her documents. She had returned in person “four or five times” to sort matters out, but because of long queues she had not been able to get inside again. On 7 December she expected to once again go home empty-handed. “Come back at five, I’ll still be here, I won’t be inside,” she said.

She said she didn’t know what she was supposed to do.

Alitta Twesi, who had travelled to the city centre from Khayelitsha, said she had been unemployed for five months after working for a cleaning company.

“I have been coming to the offices about four to five times and they keep telling me I must apply online, but the online system doesn’t work,” said Twesi. “Every time I try submitting an application online it always refuses to click ‘register’.”

As a result, she said, she was trying to get in-person service.

It was about 11am when *GroundUp* spoke to her, and she said she had been waiting outside the department’s office since 7.30am without getting inside.

There were about 40 other people waiting to get into the building to receive assistance.

Business Unity South Africa (Busa) and trade union federation Cosatu, among others, have called for the UIF to be placed under administration.

“The systemic dysfunction has also resulted in lengthy delays in application processes, including via online systems, receiving incorrect information, or constant changes in requirements,” wrote Busa in a [public statement](#).

“Payments, when finally processed, are typically received long after the period of lost earnings, providing little financial support when needed most,” stated Busa.

The UIF media office asked for multiple extensions when GroundUp requested information. Nearly a week after initially emailing them, no response has been received.

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