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## Broad-based schemes in place to help families hit by pandemic: MSF

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The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) has said it recognises that the pandemic has affected the lives of many Singaporeans and that those with less resources are affected more.

It said this in response to a large-scale study which found that lower-income families with young children have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

The Government has introduced broad-based support schemes to help families cope with the pan-

demical financial impact and to support the hiring of the local workforce, a ministry spokesman said.

These include the Solidarity Payment where all adult Singaporeans received a one-time payout of \$600 and the Jobs Support Scheme, which gives subsidies to companies to cover the wages of their local workers.

Households living in one- and two-room Housing Board flats received grocery vouchers.

The Government also offered more targeted financial aid for those who lost their jobs or saw their income fall substantially during the pandemic through schemes such as the Covid-19 Recovery Grant and the Temporary Relief Fund.

The Covid-19 Recovery Grant lets lower- to middle-income workers who lost their jobs, were placed on no-pay leave or suffered income loss to apply for temporary financial help. Applications

for the grant remain open till Dec 31.

The number of families on ComCare's Short-To-Medium-Term Assistance (SMTA) rose by about 24 per cent to about 35,700 households in the ministry's last financial year, which ended in March.

The sums given out under the scheme increased by about 77 per cent to about \$183 million in the same period.

The increase in the number of

families assisted under the scheme reflected the impact of the pandemic, the ministry said.

The spokesman added that the ministry has improved its referral protocols to help ComCare recipients access additional digital support, financial aid and other forms of help.

For example, eligible ComCare beneficiaries will qualify for the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Financial Assistance Scheme and the subsidised broadband plans

under the Infocomm Media Development Authority's Home Access Scheme without the need for further means-testing or additional supporting documents.

The ministry has also been working with its partners in the Charity Food Workgroup to develop a food database and directory, which will be launched next year.

The directory will consolidate a list of food support organisations, allowing the public to search for help based on location or dietary requirements and connect with the relevant organisation.

**Theresa Tan**