



**EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION**  
**EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND ORGANISATION**  
**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT, GOVT. OF INDIA**  
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April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To,

**Shri Sunil Barthwal, IAS  
Central Provident Fund Commissioner,  
Employees Provident Fund Organisation,  
NEW DELHI 110 066**

**Subject: Settlement of all COVID-19 claims through auto mode only- without manual intervention in accounts and without creating any health hazard in the office- Reg.**

Respected Sir,

I am writing this letter to you in keeping with your advice that I should bring urgent and important issues directly to your notice.

2. As you may recall the EPF Officers' Association had assured you of our public commitment and support during these trying times vide EPFOA letter dated 28.03.2020. It was indeed heartening for all of us that you had also responded very positively to us.

3. Sir, as you are aware, the auto settlement of COVID-19 claims has proven to be far from satisfactory. As per report dated 09.04.2020, about 4 Lakh COVID-19 advance claims have been received and only about 1.37 Lakh have been settled through auto mode. The remaining claims have been pushed to ROs with directions to settle them through manual mode. To add to this, even the claims that have been settled in auto mode are required to be thoroughly verified by field offices now, as the responsibility for correct auto settlement seems to have been shifted to field

offices. Thus, in effect field offices are required to verify 100% of COVID-19 advance claims whether settled through the auto mode or through manual mode.

4. Although it has been indicated that these remaining COVID-19 advance claims have not been settled as of yet through the auto-mode due to certain KYC issues, but, it may be considered that as all these claims are online claims, therefore, they must have been KYC compliant or else they would not have been accepted. The reason for non-auto settlement of these pending COVID-19 claims seems to have been some arbitrary pre-conditions that have been formulated for auto-settlement of claims. For instance, in cases where transfer-in credit, VDR special operation, Appendix E, etc. have been approved by field offices or where the claim amount is over Rs.45,000, the claims have been pushed to manual mode. I refer to these pre-conditions for auto-settlement of claims as arbitrary since it is baffling that we have decided to not trust the field offices that have approved the specified transactions for such PF accounts in the past. If the thinking is that a PF account with a transaction such as Appendix-E is suspect, then due administrative action should be initiated, and guilty party must be duly punished. Similarly, there is simply no logic to arbitrarily decide any monetary limit for auto settlement of COVID-19 claims. If any fraud or over-payment amounting to even Rs.5/- occurs then due action is warranted. However, by randomly fixing an upper monetary limit are we not signaling that we do not trust the auto-settlement software? And if that is indeed the case then the entire ISD exercise of past few days has been pointless, and we should have engaged some reputed software agency to develop the software program.

5. Sir, as you are well aware, the entire nation is currently facing an unprecedented situation and it is only because of the decisive steps taken by the Government of India that our national situation has not yet spiraled out of control. In fact, as per a study by researchers at the University of Oxford (published in Hindustan Times on 10.04.2020), India has scored highest, i.e. 100 (strictest) on the Government Response Stringency Index in terms of Government's handling of the current medical crises.

6. We at EPFO are well aware of our duty to the nation and that is why we have extended our support in settling COVID-19 claims. However, it need not be mentioned that even the Central Government realizes that EPFO needs to function with only bare minimum staff and has ordered accordingly. With bare minimum staff, we are not in a position to manually settle remaining 60% of COVID-19 advance claims as well as non-COVID claims in time. Therefore, during such emergency situation, it will be more appropriate to accept only COVID-19 claims and death claims so that our bare minimum work-force can focus on the most urgent tasks exclusively. Remaining claims can be accepted as and when the situation improves. If we do so and deliver the goods on time in terms of timely settlement COVID-19 and death claims, our subscribers will also appreciate our focused approach.

7. Sir, at this time when we are already short-staffed, we have been engaged in the issue pertaining to migrant workers, which is not related to our statutorily assigned

duties. As you are aware, EPFO does not maintain any records related to migrant workers, and more importantly, our officers and staff are already busy in settling the COVID-19 advance claims. Therefore, at such crucial time, when due to the pandemic, we have not been able to adequately address our statutory duty of timely settlement of claims, the appointment of our officers as nodal officers for tracking migrant workers is beyond comprehension. Just like during the PM-SYM days, once again we are out doing others' job, while our own suffers.

8. It is submitted that the current situation warrants that we should attempt to call only bare minimum staff to office. After all, while we are responsible to our subscribers, we are also responsible to our own officials, and your good-self had also issued similar instructions on the subject. If we start focusing on regular work during this emergency and require more and more staff to attend office, we are playing with their and their family's health. Kindly consider that even if a person is young and fit, it does not mean he shall not contract COVID-19 and not spread it to his aged parents or other family members.

9. In light of above, I sincerely request you to revisit your earlier assurance to focus on digital delivery for all the COVID-19 claims, and further request you that at least for the present, we may not continue with *business as usual* policy by pursuing other non-COVID19 related goals & issues, but rather strictly follow the Government policy to deal with this crisis.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,



**[Saurabh Swami]**  
**Secretary-General**