



EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION
EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND ORGANISATION
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April 20th, 2021

To,

**Shri Hemant Jain, ICAS,
FA & CAO,
Employees' Provident Fund Organisation,
Bhavishya Nidhi Bhawan,
NEW DELHI 110066**

Subject: Targets in times of pandemic - regarding

Sir,

Many of the field offices have received an email dated 16.04.2021 titled as "Number of claims pending as on 15/04/2021" from RPF-C-I (F&A), Head Office, wherein it has been conveyed that the FA&CAO is concerned about the number of claims pending for over 10 days in the concerned RO. It has been requested to take steps to resolve the pending cases.

2. Sir, while the concern shown by your goodself over claim pendency of over 10 days is certainly appreciable under normal circumstances, in the present scenario it is felt that the same may be somewhat misplaced & misguided. The reasons for such an assertion are placed before you, in detail, as below:

A. Target of 10 days claims settlement

As per the EPF Scheme, EPS & EDLI Scheme, the target for settling duly complete claims is 20-days from date of its receipt. You might be aware that this 20-days target was prescribed in the schemes from the earlier target of 30-days in the year 2015. The new 10-days target being insisted upon by HO has no legal sanctity except the same having been placed in the EPFO Citizen's Charter. It has not been declared anywhere as to what type of work study or broad discussion, if any, may have resulted in determining this 10-days target figure.

Even allowing for that above 10-days target has been fixed by the management without any study and same may not even be needed to be explained to any of the stakeholders, it does require to be said that the workload as on date has increased substantially as compared to earlier, while staff position has not kept pace. A simple analysis of claims settled shows that the total claims settled in 2019-2020 were 2,09,39,799, which increased by about 56% to 3,25,89,058 in 2020-2021. No one can argue that we have increased our staff strength also by a similar percentage during above period. Therefore, even though we are settling more claims now with almost same (or perhaps lesser work force), there is no concern being depicted for rectifying this mismatch.

B. Auto-settlement of claims

An argument may be made by certain quarters that auto-settlement of claims has been initiated in year 2020 and thus old work-targets and workloads have lost their meaning today. However, data shows that the percentage of auto-settled claims to total settled claims during 2020-21 was barely 20%. The EPFOA had requested last year to increase the number of claims being settled through auto mode, unfortunately, except few types of advance claims, remaining all claims are still on manual mode. In view of increased receipt & settlement of claims in 2020-21, the auto settlement mode has not been able to help in even maintaining the same per-capita workload in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20.

C. Increased workload due to Concurrent Audit

All KYC updation of EPF members being done by Field Offices in accordance with directions issued by Finance Division, is required by CAC to be cross-verified, even where there maybe no financial liability due to the change. If all major KYC updations is under-suspect then what purpose is served by delegating the responsibility to RPFC-I? The Concurrent Audit should be done intelligently

rather than in a bull-headed manner for better workload management. The process of Joint Declaration approvals, a humongous task in itself, is not a factor in workload assessment & corresponding staff sanctions. All claims settled through auto-mode are manually required to be verified for purposes of Concurrent Audit and every office is receiving about 500 to 1000 CAC paras on a monthly basis. This has defeated the very purpose of auto-misation. Furthermore, there is no additional sanction of staff for verifying these CAC paras which has put additional pressure on the existing office staff.

D. Regressive move from digitalisation towards physical mode

The Finance Division, HO circular dated 12.02.2021 has prescribed submission of physical documents for member's profile correction. In today's day & age when the Govt. is pushing for maximum use of technology and digitalisation, the above circular prescribes for calling for physical papers and then asks for preserving the same for audit at a later stage. It is not understood why the requisite documents could not be asked to be uploaded online and moved through digital mode which would have been more secure than a paper trail. It is requested to kindly consider as to how this regressive step moves EPFO away from a goal of a paper-less office. It also requested to consider that when Govt. is focusing on self-certification and concepts like Digilocker, the above step of physical submission of documents goes against all stated policies. Furthermore, in COVID-19 pandemic times when many private offices and establishments are closed and many states under curfew, how a member will get his documents certified by employer and visit EPFO office to physically submit them is beyond imagination.

E. COVID-19 Pandemic

Sir, even though the first point in this letter should have been the COVID-19 pandemic, we have purposely placed it lower as it is not our intention to give excuses or hide behind the pandemic. However, please appreciate that as on date we have already lost a number of our colleagues to the pandemic and many more are severely ill. But unfortunately, we have learnt almost nothing from last year's first wave and have frittered away any gains. Instead of following the PM's advise of आपदा से अवसर where we could have moved towards more and more auto-settlement, digitalisation and Work-from-Home (WFH), we have moved towards manual verifications and physical documentation. Many of our ROs are barely functional, our officers & staff hospitalised and we are still calling for daily manual reports through emails / Google sheets and fixing 10-days claim targets.

F. Essential Service

EPFO was declared essential service last year due to efforts taken by HO with the appropriate authorities. Our staff & officers attended office during lockdowns and curfews and ensured timely claim settlement & pension disbursement. Still when it came to grant benefits due to the front-line workers such as insurance benefit of Rs.50 lakh or early vaccination, no such efforts were visible. It was left to the devices of local RPFC to approach local state authorities and manage vaccination for their staff, if possible. Even now when the second wave has devastated many field offices, instead of providing any substantial assistance such as granting power to RPFCs to allow treatment in any private hospital for COVID-19 positive staff & their families we are engaged in mere lip service.

3. Sir, EPFO officers and staff have willingly gone beyond the normal call of duty and ensured that services to stakeholders are not hampered under any circumstances. However, it is regretted that instead of facilitating the field offices we are engaging in creating road blocks. When many officers are engaged in trying to provide hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, plasma & medicines to their staff & family, they are being directed to ensure that claims are settled within an arbitrarily created targets. Many offices are totally crippled, with a number of staff sick & quarantined. Please consider that if we can't help them in saving lives, the least we could do is not bother them for some time and once again leave them to their devices.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,

A. Swami

**[Saurabh Swami]
Secretary-General**

Copy to:

Central P.F. Commissioner, EPFO, New Delhi for kind information and with request for urgent intervention please.