

EPFO settles 36.02 lakh claims during lockdown

More than 74% beneficiaries are low wage earners

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To enhance the ease of living experience of its members during the challenging times of COVID -19 lockdown, Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), a statutory body under Union Ministry of Labour & Employment, has left no stone unturned in ensuring timely and effective delivery of services to its members. Despite the lockdown restrictions EPFO settled a staggering 36.02 lakh claims thereby disbursing Rs. 11,540 crore to its members during the last two months of April and May 2020. Out of this, 15.54 lakh claims, disbursing Rs. 4580 crore to claimants, were related to the recently introduced COVID-19 advance under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY).

The COVID-19 advance has been a great help to EPFO's members during these difficult times, especially for the members with monthly wages of less than Rs 15,000. Receiving the COVID-19 advance to the extent of basic wages and DA for three months or up to 75% of the amount standing to member's credit in the EPF account, whichever is less, has provided timely relief to many workers, preventing them from falling into indebtedness.

A look at wage slab-wise data points out that more than 74 % of total claimants during the lockdown period belonged to slab of less than Rs.15,000 wage. The high income category with wages more than Rs. 50,000 accounted for a mere 2% of the claimants. Approximately 24% of claims were made by the members with wages falling in the Rs.15,000 to less than Rs.50,000 category.

Respecting the social distancing norms at work place, EPFO worked with less than 50% staff during the lockdown. Notwithstanding the shortage of manpower, EPFO significantly brought down the claim settlement period from around 10 days to roughly 3 days for COVID-19 advances. Moreover, against 33.75 lakh claims settled in April-May 2019, a total of 36.02 lakh claims were settled in April-May 2020, with less than 50% staff being able to attend work, which is more than 100% increase in productivity of workforce. Apart from commitment of staff, use of artificial intelligence played a big role in achieving new benchmarks in claim settlement.

As EPFO offices operated with skeletal staff, an out of the box innovation was needed to meet the expectations of its members. Turning adversity into advantage, EPFO launched its first fully automatic claim settlement system in a record time of just five days. Almost 54% of the COVID 19 claims are now being settled through the auto mode. This system is expected to drastically cut down claim settlement time for EPFO in future.

With automation and dedicated workforce, EPFO is settling more than 80,000 claims every working day amounting to about Rs. 270 crore, ensuring social security support for its members in times of crisis.

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