

# ASSA

ASEAN Social Security Association

2020

Volume No. 33



Special Feature:  
Initiatives during  
COVID-19

Expanding Social  
Security Coverage



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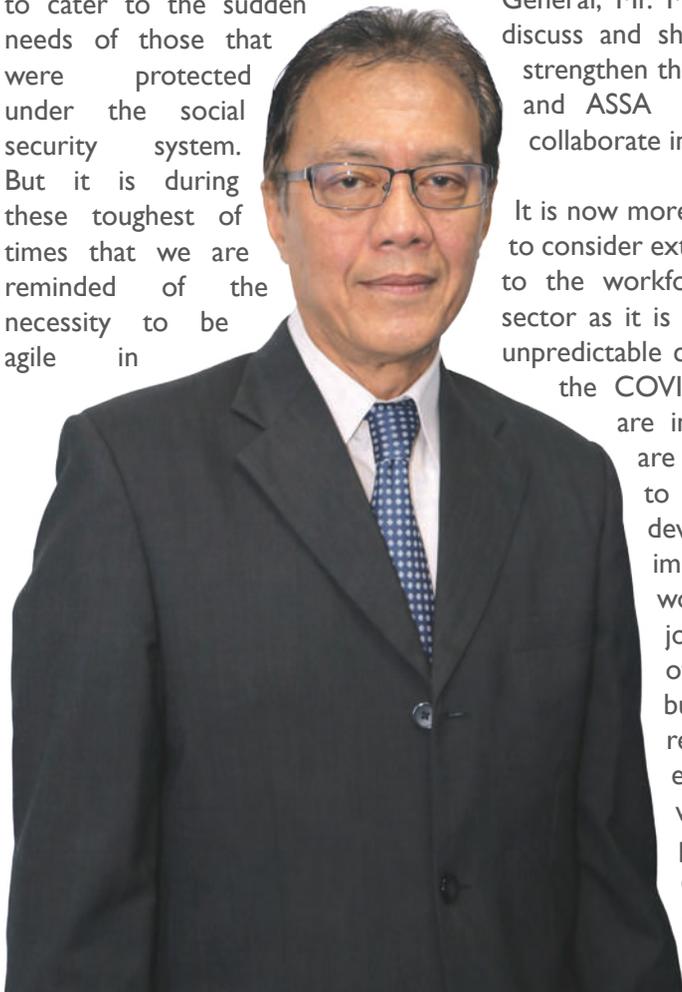
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**Dear ASSA Colleagues,**

What a year it has been since our last Board Meeting in Brunei Darussalam! All of us are currently in the midst of unprecedented times in which none of us has probably experienced before. It has truly been a challenge for us all and I am very sure we have had our hands full for the past few months.

Most of us had to quickly reroute our priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic occurring all over the world. Some of us were forced to shut physically while some of us had to cater to the sudden needs of those that were protected under the social security system. But it is during these toughest of times that we are reminded of the necessity to be agile in



order to overcome any challenges that has been thrown at us. Some organizations were forced into the realms of conducting services remotely and many of us had to think outside the box in order for us to ensure the continuity of our businesses.

That being said, it did not dampen our spirits nor our adaptability to persevere through these tough times. Viet Nam Social Security (VSS), through its dedication, promoted and enhanced the network between ASSA and ISSA by hosting a Round Table meeting with ISSA Secretary General, Mr. Marcelo Abi-Ramia, to discuss and share ideas to further strengthen the bond between ISSA and ASSA and to potentially collaborate in the future.

It is now more important than ever to consider extending social security to the workforce in the informal sector as it is apparent that due to unpredictable circumstances such as the COVID-19 outbreak, they are indeed the ones that are most vulnerable due to the economic devastation that has impacted the whole world. We saw plenty of job losses and closures of big and small businesses and it is our responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of our people is taken care of. We need to be prepared for future unforeseen events such as what

we have endured in recent months.

Lastly, I wish all ASSA members the very best and I look forward to our upcoming meeting.

Best regards

**Mr. Omar Mohd Dali**  
ASSA Chairman  
Managing Director  
Employee Trust Fund  
Brunei Darussalam

**One year has passed since the 36th ASSA Board Meeting in Brunei Darussalam**, and since then so much has changed. The world is currently grieving and every country is facing a universal challenge brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. No sector is free from its impact.

On behalf of the Employee Trust Fund Brunei, we would like to express our deepest thoughts, prayers and well-wishes to everyone affected during these challenging times and also to acknowledge and commend all front liners.

The past plenary dialogues including last year's theme "ICT: Empowering Innovative Social Security" has demonstrated relevance during this global pandemic outbreak situation. During lockdown and interruption of operations, organizations had to immediately activate their Business Continuity Plan (BCP). One of the strategies was to accelerate the digital transformation and to quickly shift towards technology reliance as to enable employees to work from home safely while enforcing social distancing. This technological transition has shown a huge requirement for computing devices and video conferencing platforms. The new norm is certainly here to stay in which the world is embracing the full scale of digitalization and enabling more innovation through the use of smart technologies.

We would like to acknowledge and give praise to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), Cambodia for

their dedication in accommodating and giving assurances that our ASSA event must continue to go on even during these difficult times. I very am honored that this year we will still have the opportunity to continue our ASSA tradition even though it will be done virtually. It is important that we too evolve digitally, as an association, to continue the ASSA spirit of achieving cooperation from all ASSA member through persistent efforts of sharing knowledge as well as good practices.

We have included a special edition topic in this newsletter regarding information on measures taken by ASSA member organization in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. While the world is still racing to formulate the vaccine; there is so much to learn from one another on how each country deals with this pandemic. To ensure the continuity of services, fiscal packages to support businesses, protecting jobs, temporary benefits for vulnerable groups and many more will be part of the items that is being shared within this newsletter.

Moving forward, we should continue to identify the emerging issues of social security and develop knowledge sharing efforts encompassing around the possible key challenges by foreseeing disruption indications ahead of us.

Finally, I would like to thank all for their support and enormous patience in

the unexpected coming months. Stay strong together in enduring this difficult time and stay safe.



**Mr. Md Adfarul Maz Adanan**  
ASSA Secretary-General  
Senior Manager of Operations  
Employee Trust Fund  
Brunei Darussalam





ETF's Chairman, YB Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Orang Kaya Saiful Mulok Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, and guests from Ministry of Finance and Economy as well as from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports with ASSA Board Members, and Board representatives.



YB Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Orang Kaya Saiful Mulok Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports presenting his opening speech.



Mr Omar bin Mohd Dali, Deputy Managing Director of ETF Brunei represented ETF to receive a Recognition Award from ASSA Chairperson, Dr. Nguyen Thi Minh.



Mr Markus Ruck presented his topic of The Future of Work and Social Protection during the Plenary Session.



YB Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Awang Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Orang Kaya Saiful Mulok Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports presented a token of appreciation to Dr. Nguyen Thi Minh.



ETF Chairman takes a look at a booth by Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam as well as Dynamik Technologies.



Representative of ETF Brunei presenting her topic for Good Practices session.





36th ASSA Board Members and Board representatives takes a photo opportunity



Dr. Nguyen Thi Minh, Vice Minister and Director General of Viet Nam Social Security handing over the ASSA emblem to the newly appointed Chairwoman, Mrs. Hajah Chairani binti Haji Sulaiman, Acting Managing Director of Employee Trust Fund Brunei



Mr. Dao Viet Anh, Deputy Director General of Viet Nam Social Security handing over the ASSA emblem to the newly appointed Secretary General, Mr. Omar bin Mohd Dali, Deputy Managing Director of Employee Trust Fund Brunei



Dr. Nguyen Thi Minh nominated Mr. Ouk Samvithya, Executive Director General of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), Cambodia as the next ASSA Vice Chairman.







## ETF responding to COVID-19

**The World Health Organization (WHO)** declared the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January 2020 before it was announced as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. Brunei Darussalam was not exempted from the COVID-19 outbreak when the first imported case was detected on 9th March 2020.

Following the first case in Brunei Darussalam and the WHO announcement, the Employee Trust Fund (ETF) immediately activated its Business Continuity Plan (BCP) on 12th March 2020 where the workforce was divided into several teams and stationed to the BCP office as well as other branches. As the number of reported active cases increased, the management of ETF took an additional step by assigning 50% of the workforce to work from home, effective from 16th March 2020, in order to mitigate the spread of the infection.

Subsequently, ETF took another step to safeguard its members, employers and staff by temporarily closing all its branches to minimize physical contact. All counter transaction processes were converted to online procedures. Those who prefer the traditional method of branch services were still able to send physical applications such as withdrawal applications to any of our drop-off boxes that were made available outside ETF branches.

With the temporary closure of our counters, members and employers were still able to perform normal transactions via our ETF online platform, e-Amanah. To assist the public when using the platform, a more user-friendly e-Amanah 2.0 beta version was launched where

contribution payment processes were simplified and communication made easier using the on-line messaging features.

To create awareness of these new changes, ETF has utilized all of its communication channels to disseminate the latest information. All related developments were made available online through ETF's website, official Facebook page and Instagram account, as well as the local media.

### Fiscal Stimulus Packages

During the pandemic, the Government of Brunei Darussalam introduced measures to address the impact of COVID-19 in Brunei Darussalam. This was carried out with a "Whole of Nation Approach"- united in addressing the impact and challenges arising from the spread of COVID-19 in Brunei. The steps undertaken are focused on 3 main components, namely, maintaining the well-being of the public, protecting jobs and providing support for individuals as well as supporting and assisting businesses.

In relation to this economic stimulus packages were introduced with the main focus to assist businesses as well as providing support for individuals. ETF was entrusted to assist the Ministry of Finance and Economy, Brunei to process the fiscal stimulus applications and pay-outs.

Some of the stimulus packages that were introduced, effective 1st April 2020, was a six -month deferment of mandatory contributions to the Employee Trust Fund (TAP) and Supplementary Contributory Pension (SCP) for local employees earning less than BND\$1,500.00 per month in all sectors

under the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with less than 100 employees.

In addition to this, another stimulus package was also introduced that provided 25% salary subsidies for local employees in MSMEs with less than 100 employees for a period of three months. This package was introduced to ease the financial burden as well as to enhance the cash flow of businesses as a result of the business slowdown. Additionally, the fiscal stimulus packages were also extended to individuals who are self-employed under the SCP scheme, whereby the Government provided full SCP contributions for self-employed individuals for a period of 6 months.

### ETF Workforce Deal with Precautionary Measures

The strict precautionary measures under the directive of the Ministry of Health that were practiced throughout the nation has helped to flatten the COVID-19 cases curve in Brunei. Brunei started to slowly lift restrictions in phases. This allowed ETF to resume its counter operations in all branches on 2nd June 2020 and the whole workforce were allowed to return to work as normal in their office premises.



**BruHealth.**



To mitigate against the future spread of the virus, the workforce is reminded to oblige with the new safety measures such as maintaining general social distancing, compulsory body temperature checks when entering and leaving the office premises, and the provision of hand sanitizers and face masks for all staff.

In addition to the above measures, anyone entering ETF premises are required to scan their QR Code using the contact tracing mobile application developed by the Government of Brunei called BruHealth Application. This application was designed to help the Ministry of Health, Brunei with contact tracing in the case of any outbreak.

Although the situation in Brunei is currently under control, ETF will continue to monitor the extent and the impact of COVID-19 and will act appropriately and swiftly to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of its staff and members are being looked after.





## Health Insurance Cards Delivery for Cambodian Veterans

Since the end of 2019 to the early of 2020, NFV has been working devotedly with NSSF to deliver the Health Insurance Cards for Cambodian retired armies, police officers and their dependents.

This marks a new milestone for the veterans in Cambodia where they now can enjoy a long-awaited health insurance scheme. The establishment of the new scheme is in line with the government strategies of Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025 which aspires to lower out-of-pocket payment and thusly alleviate the poverty within the scope of veterans.

NFV is the main operator of social security scheme for Veterans in Cambodia; however, the implementation of the health insurance scheme is done by NSSF who is the sole operator for the nationwide social health insurance. Consequently, this effort would not be achievable without NSSF as the main actor of administering and overseeing the overall scheme. The cards are both issued and maintained under NSSF, while NFV provides the data of our beneficiaries and proposed for the cards' issuance.

There are 2 types of card handed over to the beneficiaries. The Health Insurance Card (HIC) provided to the retirees, invalidities and disabilities, while the Health Equity Card (HEC) provided to the dependents of the deceased (one for each family). Up to now, we have delivered 63,695 of HIC and 33,296 of HEC respectively.

HIC is to be contributed 50% by individual in the future; however, currently there is no contribution made as both of the schemes provided for the



veterans are 100% subsidized by the government. This is done with the motive of our Royal Government of Cambodia to incentivize and uphold the roles of veterans to be worthy of the good deeds they had done for the cause of the nation.



## Cambodia will launch Pension Scheme for Persons defined by the Provisions of the Labour Law including Personnel Serving in the Air and Maritime Transportation as well as Domestic Workers



Pension Scheme, Chapter V on Conditions and Formalities and Procedures of Benefit Claim and Provision of Compulsory Pension Scheme, Chapter VI on Voluntary Pension Scheme, Chapter VII on Co-Regulations, and Chapter VIII on Penalties. Part III states Transitional Provisions including Chapter IX with 3 articles (from article 38 to article 40). Part IV states Final Provisions including Chapter X with 1 article (article 41).

The main goal of this meeting aims to collect more key inputs in a bid to determine the broad, comprehensive conditions before submitted it to the National Social Protection Council and the Royal Government for check and decision.

**Cambodia promulgated the sub-decree** concerning Launch of Retirement Pension Scheme and Invalidity Pension for Civil Servants of the Kingdom of Cambodia, dated 06 October 1997. In a bid to ensure equity and social solidarity and promote the welfare and livelihood of all citizens, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) of Cambodia is preparing and will launch Pension Scheme for Persons Defined by the Provisions of the Labour Law including Personnel Serving in the Air and Maritime Transportation as well as Domestic Workers in 2020 in line with the new law on Social Security Scheme adopted in 2019.

On 12 February 2020, NSSF convened the tripartite meeting on the Draft Sub-Decree concerning “Social Security Scheme on Pension for Persons Defined by the Provisions of the Labour Law including Personnel Serving in the Air and Maritime Transportation as well as Domestic Workers” joined by representatives of the Royal Government, employers, and trade unions and presided over by H.E. Ouk Samvithya, Delegate of the Royal

Government in charge as Director of the National Social Security Fund of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training.

The main goal of this meeting aims to collect more key inputs in a bid to determine the broad, comprehensive conditions before submitted it to the National Social Protection Council and the Royal Government for check and decision.

This draft sub-decree on Social Security Scheme on Pension consists of 10 chapters with 41 articles and 04 main parts. Part I states General Provisions including Chapter I with 04 articles (from article 1 to article 4) that enumerate purpose, objective, scope, and definition. Part II states Implementation Provisions including 07 chapters (from Chapter II to Chapter VIII) with 33 main articles (from article 5 to article 37)—Chapter II on Competent Institution, Chapter III on Formalities and Procedures of the Registration for Compulsory Pension Scheme, Chapter IV on Contribution Rate and Formalities and Procedures of Contribution Payment of Compulsory



## NSSFC: Pensioner ATM Utilizing Inspection

**ATM gives plenty of advantages.** For the beneficiaries of NSSFC, they can access the service round the clock and feel convenience. Especially, they can access the bank from anywhere. But the majority of beneficiaries of NSSFC are aging. It is risky for the entity that allows them to access ATM.

issue on time, prevent the risk, and many kinds of fraudulence. Today, there are about 25% of NSSFC's pensioners (around 15,000 pensioners) who utilize the ATM card. With the sturdy prevention and protection system, there are less than 50 cases related to the ATM utilizing are occurred each year.

In early 2012, the NSSFC launched its pension payroll initiative through banking services. At the same time, the ATM transaction was also approved for utilizing. But, NSSFC confronts many issues that emerged from the ATM utilizing. Under the issues, the Board of Directors urgently halted the ATM utilizing.

Dozens of the solutions presented by the technical working group, with the strategic commitment to curb the risks of ATM utilizing, The ATM utilizing was re-consented to access by early 2016. Coinciding, the ATM Utilizer Inspection Program was also formed and implement. With the ATM Utilizer Inspection Program, we can effectively resolve the





## Anticipating the spike in lay off, BPJAMSOSTEK provides the Express Service

**Jakarta, June 30th 2020.** A negative impact for business in the Indonesian Economy due to Covid-19 that turned into a Global Pandemic resulted in massive layoffs in many business sectors. It pushed every business to terminate work contract establishments for their workers. As a result, it will also increase the number of claim applications for provident fund benefit (Jaminan Hari Tua/JHT) organized by BPJAMSOSTEK (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan).

President Director of BPJAMSOSTEK, Agus Susanto, revealed that at the end of June 2020, the claim application already reached 1,12 million applications nationwide with a nominal value of IDR 14.34 Trillion and and still rising. Compared only in June 2020, the number of claims processes has reached 283 thousand cases with a nominal value of IDR 3.5 trillion, and there was an increase of 129% in terms of cases and nominal compared to June 2019. He expressed that the institution he is running has been prepared to face the situation, even with a massive wave of lay off by providing several application channels.

He is talking about The Lapak Asik Protocol, the Physical Contactless Services Protocol, that provides three different ways of submitting the application: online, offline, and collective application submission system.

Since it was introduced in March 2020 and can be accessed via the internet at [antrian.bpjsketenagakerjaan.go.id](http://antrian.bpjsketenagakerjaan.go.id), The Lapak Asik protocol has been through some improvement. Recently, one who has difficulties in accessing the site can directly come to the branch office nearby to get the offline service. The



BPJAMSOSTEK branch office still provides the offline services but keep on referring to the safety and health protocol stated by the government.

Agus stated that this offline service would remain a contactless service. In the branch office, the applicant will be sent to a chamber with a video conferencing system connected to the officer in charge to begin the application process, such as data verification and authentication.

This service is called a One to Many methods, where a Customer service officer could minister 4 to 6 people at



the same time. This method increases the ability to collect claim applications up to five-time as much and obedient to the physical distancing regulation at the same time. It is already implemented in all branch offices nationwide with adequate space availability. For branch offices with insufficient space availability, we conduct the One to One method with physical distancing regulation applied.

Furthermore, there is one more scheme that could be done for submitting the application, namely Lapak Asik Collective. The scheme is only applicable for medium to the large scale of the corporation that recently undertook a massive lay off from a minimum of 30% of their total numbers of employees. Using this scheme, the corporation could accommodate its employees to submit the claim application through a dedicated person in the corporate office.



## Roundtable Meeting to increase social security coverage

**National Social Security Organization** cooperated with ILO held meeting on 5 May 2020 to discuss strategies to increase social security coverage among private sector workers in Lao PDR. Co Chair by Excellency Mr. Padeumphone Sonthany Vice Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and Kristina Kurths Project Technical Advisor, ILO. There are Representatives from the government, employers, workers and civil society.

Participants shared ideas and experiences on how to improve access to health care and income security, particularly in cases of work injury and occupational diseases. The workshop was organised by the ILO project “Occupational Safety and Health in Lao PDR’s Supply Chains”, funded by the EU, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National Social Security Fund.

“A substantial number of private sector employees are currently not covered by social security. This leaves them unprotected against the consequences of work accidents and diseases, which can cause long-term financial burden to them and their families. The Lao PDR Government is committed to address this situation in a strategic effort by working closely with other line ministries, social partners and other organisations as relevant”, says His Excellency Mr. Padermphone Sonthany, Vice Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao PDR.

While the private business sector in Lao PDR plays an increasing role in the country’s economic growth, only 2,287 private businesses are currently paying contributions into the fund, covering 117,509 employees, according to the



National Social Security Fund.

“As LNNCI, it is our obligation to encourage our members to pay contributions into social security. We welcome this workshop as an opportunity to agree among government, employers and workers on a way forward to improve the level of social security coverage in Lao PDR” explains Mr. Rasphone Xaybandith, Vice President, Employers’ Committee, LNCCI.

In addition to improved stakeholder cooperation and coordination, participants emphasized that law enforcement and awareness raising were critical to address the challenge of social security coverage in the private sector.

“Workers in private businesses need to understand better their right to be covered by social security and the benefits they are entitled to. LFTU is ready to contribute to information campaigns and other initiatives that highlight the importance and benefits of

social security fund membership” says Mr. Thongphim Vongrapha, Vice Director, Social Protection Department, LFTU.

Highlighting the importance of knowledge sharing, participants also developed a joint action plan to improve social security registration and payment of contributions, as well as data collection.

The workshop was funded by the Vision Zero Fund (VZF), a G 7 multi-donor initiative, which is administered by the ILO. The aim of the VZF is to reduce work-related accidents, injuries and diseases and improve access to employment injury insurance in global supply chains. The Vision Zero Fund in Lao PDR is currently funded through a contribution from the EU.



## During & Post-Movement Control Order – The EPF Experience

**The Employees Provident Fund (EPF)** is the federal statutory body which is in charge of a mandatory savings scheme for employees in Malaysia, assuming the role as custodian of the citizens' retirement savings. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Malaysian government implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020 as a preventive measure to curtail the spread of the virus in the country. The EPF, with the majority of our members and stakeholders greatly affected by these ramifications, has had a unique experience in coordinating, managing and implementing initiatives as part of the institution's rapid response and contribution to the country's efforts.

Prior to the MCO, the EPF had already introduced a reduction in the statutory contribution rate of members from 11% to 7%, with an opt-out option for employees to remain at 11% by informing the EPF through their employers. This initiative was intended to inject more cash into the consumer economy in view of the slowing growth rate of the national economy due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This is not a new measure as the government and EPF had previously resorted to this method in 2001, 2003, 2009 and 2016. Essentially, it is a short term cash boon at the expense of long-term welfare.

The EPF abided by the MCO and closed the organisation's non-essential services throughout the period. Nevertheless, the vulnerability of the citizens' wellbeing brought to light new needs and opportunities which were met with a slew of initiatives from the EPF.

(i) Firstly, the i-Lestari programme was launched just 2 weeks

into the MCO at the beginning of April, allowing members to withdraw RM500 per month (or less if desired) for 12 months from their EPF Account 2 which caters for specific withdrawal.

(ii) Following that, the EPF Members Investment Scheme (MIS) saw a reduction in upfront fees and service fees starting 1 May 2020 for a period of 12 months, to enable members to diversify their retirement portfolio at a lower cost with the current market outlook being an opportune time to make strategic investments.

(iii) Employers, from multi-national corporations to small-medium enterprises, were not forgotten as well with the EPF providing an extension for employers' mandatory contribution payments from the 15th to the 30th day of each month for May to July 2020. This extension hopes to alleviate the cash flow of businesses and allow a certain degree of flexibility for employers to manage their finances during the economic recovery process.



Photo credit: myMetro

(iv) As a complementary policy for employers, SMEs with 200 employees or less are also eligible for the Employer COVID-19 Assistance Programme (e-CAP) which allows a deferment and restructuring of the employer's share of EPF contributions for the months of April to June 2020 for

a maximum of three months respectively, to the period of July to November 2020.

Plans for the future of EPF and its members centres around the social wellbeing and livelihood of Malaysians. With the pandemic hitting the most vulnerable parties the hardest, EPF's initiatives hope to achieve their intended objectives and help alleviate the monetary pressure on employees, employers and the government alike.

Approach towards the post MCO period will be daunting and uncertain, hence the EPF strives to be dynamic in response to the upcoming recovery period which will be crucial to all stakeholders. This includes relying on public feedback, evidence-based policymaking and designing needs-focused programmes to smoothen the transition to the new normal in all our business practices.



## Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic: SOCSO's proactive measures

### Considering the scale and graveness of the COVID-19 pandemic,

the Government of Malaysia, through its ministries and agencies including Social Security Organisation (SOCSO), has implemented proactive measures to soften the impact of the pandemic on the nation. As a background, the Government announced the Movement Control Order from 18th March to 12th May 2020 and followed by the Conditional Movement Control Order starting from 13th May 2020 to 9th June 2020. Since the start of the pandemic, SOCSO has improved the existing Employment Insurance System (EIS) benefits, introduced the Employment Retention Programme (ERP), Wage Subsidy Programme (WSP), and Prihatin Screening Programme (PSP). In addition to that, SOCSO has also revised its contribution and benefit payment schedule to assist employers and beneficiaries who are in financial difficulties during the MCO.

As part of the Economic Stimulus Package 2020 “Bolstering Confidence, Stimulating Growth & Protecting Jobs” announced on the 27th of February 2020, SOCSO increased the rate of benefits under the Employment Insurance System (EIS) for insured persons who experience loss of employment. As part of the EIS, eligible insured person may receive Training Fee and Training Allowance under the Employment Services benefits. The Training Fee was increased from RM4,000 to RM6,000 while Training Allowance was increased from RM10 to RM30 per day. In addition, SOCSO has also introduced the SIP Plus 600 which is a temporary financial incentive worth RM600 a month for a maximum of 3 months to insured persons who

experienced loss of employment but did not meet the Contributing Qualifying Conditions (CQC) set for the EIS.

On 16th of March 2020, the Government announced the Employment Retention Programme (ERP), administered by SOCSO. The ERP provides immediate financial assistance for employees who are instructed to take no-pay leave by employers who have been economically affected by the pandemic. All private sector employees with monthly salary of RM4,000 and below, who are on no-pay leave for a minimum of 30 days are eligible for ERP. The period of assistance ranges from 1 to 6 months, depending on the no-pay leave notice issued. This involves an initial allocation of RM120 million and was later increased to RM240 million, as applications exceeded the estimated employees targeted to receive the ERP benefits. As of 31st May 2020, SOCSO received 37,009 applications for the ERP, involving 332,513 affected employees.

Under the Prihatin Rakyat Economic Stimulus Package (PRIHATIN) announced on 23rd March 2020, the Government introduced the Wage Subsidy Programme (WSP) that aims to help companies continue their operations and avoid employees being laid off. On 6th April, the WSP was expanded with an increase in budget to RM13.8 billion. This subsidy is given for a period of 3 months for local employees earning RM4,000 and below, for a maximum of 200 employees. The rate of WSP consists of three tiers (RM1,200, RM800 and RM600) depending on the workforce size of an enterprise. Employers who receive WSP benefits are subject to the condition of retaining their employees for at least 6 months. As of 31st May 2020, SOCSO received a total

of 305,503 Wage Subsidy applications for 2.47 million employees. SOCSO's data shows that the majority of employers who applied for the Wage Subsidy are those with less than 75 workers, in line with the Government's aim to assist the micro and small enterprises. Among the challenges faced by employers include the inability to operate during the Movement Control Order (MCO), reduction of sales and demand, as well as high administration cost.

To further assist SOCSO's beneficiaries, SOCSO has revised its benefit payment schedule and announced advanced benefit payments for the month of March until August. Additionally, SOCSO has extended the final date of contribution payment for employers, from the 15th of each month to the end of the month, starting from the month of April to September.

SOCSO has also adapted its internal operations to align with the Movement Control Order announced by the government starting from 18th March 2020. A Pandemic Management Committee was established to discuss and decide on issues related to the pandemic. In SOCSO's offices across the country, specific measures are put in place such as social distancing, document dropboxes, and limited function counters. SOCSO employees carrying out essential operations are divided into two teams (Team A and Team B) that are rotated weekly with a full sanitation process carried out in the office after each rotation, whereas employees who are categorised as non-essential are requested to work from home. At the same time, meetings are carried out online using applications such as Webex and Microsoft Teams.

In addition to the mentioned initiatives, SOCSO has also conducted multiple

CSR programmes for different target groups during the Movement Control Order period. SOCSO provided multiple meals a day to 338 policemen, army members and volunteer corps, as well as delivered staple groceries to 485 families of SOCSO's beneficiaries. Simpang Renggam, a district that was placed under the Enhanced Movement Control Order (EMCO) due to high reported cases of COVID-19 was delivered staple groceries, benefitting 130 residents who were not allowed out of their homes. Members of SOCSO Rehabilitation Centre also produced 510 PPE for health officials. As a sign of solidarity, 1,571 SOCSO employees agreed to donate a percentage of their salary for a social security donations fund which will be used for upcoming CSR programmes.

In conclusion, we are only experiencing the first of multiple waves COVID-19 impacts. Social Security Organisations across the region need to prepare themselves beyond COVID-19 to reduce the impact of the upcoming economic recession. Active Labour Market approaches especially, need to be adopted to prevent the possibility of the largest tsunami no one desires, an economic depression. These are difficult times, but Social Security Organisations play an imperative role in supporting the government and our people the best as we can.



Photo credit: Berita Harian



## Measures taken by Social Security Board, Myanmar to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic



Issuing social assistance benefit to employees from Myanmar Brilliant Sky, Hlaing Tharyar Township, Yangon Region on 21st May, 2020.



Issuing social assistance benefit to employees from Marga Manufacturer, Yangon Region on 25th May, 2020.

**The Union Government,** according to the Notifications No. (23/2020) issued by the State President Office on dealing with COVID-19, the Central Committee for 2019 Novel Coronavirus was formed with (27) members and chaired by Union Minister for the Ministry of International Cooperation. The National Central Committee for COVID-19 was also formed with (22) members and chaired by The State Counsellor according to the Notification No. (45/2020) on 13 March 2020. The Committee for Controlling and Emergency Response to COVID-19 was also formed with (11) members and chaired by Deputy President (1) according to the Notification No. (53/2020) issued on 30 March 2020. The policies and measures are being undertaken to prevent, control and respond to COVID-19 pandemic with the cooperation of respective Ministries.

Under the theme of 'Overcoming as One,' the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan with (7) goals was implemented with the cooperation of respective Ministry on 27 April 2020.

### Reducing the time limitation for paying contributions of employers and employees

Employers and employees shall pay their contributions not later than 3 months after the end of respective month instead of paying contributions within 15 days after the end of the respective month under the notification No. (63/2020) issued by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population on 20 March 2020.

### Allowing Benefits during the Unemployment period

During the unemployment period, the insured worker will be allowed to enjoy benefits under the health and social care Insurance System which are the right to take medical treatment not exceeding six months, cash benefits for sickness, benefits relating to maternity, benefits for funeral expenses and the right to receive medical costs and travel expenses for admission not exceeding six months under the Directive No. (1/2020) issued by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population on 20 March 2020.

If the unemployment period exceeds six months, the insured worker who becomes unemployed due to COVID-19 outbreak will be allowed to enjoy medical care for one year and medical costs and travel expenses for admission for one year starting from the day of being unemployed under the notification No. (64/2020) issued by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population on 20 March 2020.

### Measures for the economic impact relating to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak

Under the Announcement No. (1/2020) issued by the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry on 18 March 2020. The CMP business groups, hotel and travel agency groups and small and medium enterprises groups will be defined as the priority sector groups to save because these business groups were mostly hit by economic impact due to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Fund has been established with (50) billion Kyats from the State Revolving Fund and (50) billion

Kyats from the Social Security Fund. The total of (100) billion Kyats has been deposited at Myanmar Economic bank.

Our Social Security Board has withdrawn 50 billion kyats from Social Security Account CS-009477 and transferred to Myanmar Economic Bank at Naypyitaw on COVID – 19 Fund Account OA-013379 by the approval of Cabinet Meeting No. (7/2020).

With this Fund, the Myanmar citizens-owned CMP business groups, hotels and travel agency groups and small and medium enterprises groups who were mostly hit by economic impact due to COVID-19 may get the loan for one year with 1% interest rate. The interest rate and loan period will be reviewed depending on the situation of economic crisis.

**Allowance of medical leave and giving cash benefits during medical leave period**

The insured pregnant woman will be allowed to enjoy the medical leave with medical certificate and enjoy the cash benefit for this period under the Directive No. (9/2020) issued on 3 March 2020 and the Order No. (594/2020) issued on 6 April 2020 by the Social

Security Board. The insured workers who are being quarantined under the direction by the Ministry of Health and Sports will be allowed to enjoy the medical leave with medical certificate and enjoy the cash benefit for this period under the Directive No. (10/2020) and the Directive No. (11/2020) by the Social Security Board, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

**Supporting the insured workers with social security assistance**

Under the Notification No (83/2020) issued by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population on 28 April 2020:

(a) Factories and establishments will be inspected under the instructions by the Ministry of Health and Sports from 20 April to 15 May ,2020 and they will be allowed to reopen their operations if only terms and conditions are met.

(b) For this reason, factories and establishments will be shut down temporarily to be inspected and the insured workers from these will be allowed to enjoy the 40 percent of their wages which is payable contribution as the social assistance benefit for their off days period.

In conclusion, we need to cooperate in sharing information, sharing experiences and good practices on policies and procedures for enterprises and worker regarding the actual condition and information on COVID-19, standing continuously economic among member countries: no less income and employment, occupational safety and health, continuously implementing coordination process beyond the COVID-19 crisis.



Issuing social assistance benefit to employees from Bellmart Myanmar Garment Co.,Ltd, Bago Region on 28th May, 2020.



Issuing social assistance benefit to employees from Myanmar Wise Pacific Co.,Ltd, Bago Region on 21st May, 2020.



## ECC expands coverage to land-based OFWs and self-employed SSS members

**The Employees' Compensation Commission (ECC)** has expanded the coverage of the Employees' Compensation Program (ECP) to the land-based Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and self-employed members of the Social Security System (SSS).

The coverage under the ECP covers all SSS-registered land-based OFWs and self-employed compulsory members not over 60 years of age.

An OFW, as defined under R.A. 10022 or Migrant Workers & Overseas Filipinos Act of 2009, refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he/she is not a citizen or on-board a vessel navigating the foreign sea other than a government ship used for military or non-commercial purposes or on an installation located offshore or on the high seas.

ECC Executive Director Stella Zipagan Banawis said that sea-based OFWs or seafarers have long been covered under the EC Program. But, it is only now that we have included the land-based OFWs under the EC Program.

On the other hand, the ECC considered as self-employed workers those professionals who have their own business offices; partners, single proprietors of businesses, and directors or trustees of the Board of corporations duly registered with appropriate government agencies.

Likewise, actors, directors, scriptwriters, and news correspondents who do not fall within the definition of the term 'employee' in Section 8(D) of the SS Law; professional athletes, coaches, trainers,

jockeys, individual farmers, and fisher folks; workers in the informal sector such as market and ambulant vendors, transport workers, and those similarly situated; contractual and job order personnel engaged by the government through a Contract of Service and who are not covered under the GSIS Law; and, any other self-employed as determined by the Social Security Commission is subject for compulsory coverage.

In the board resolutions issued by the ECC, both the land-based OFWs and self-employed workers can also claim the benefits under the ECP which include loss of income benefits, medical benefits, rehabilitation services, death and funeral benefits and cash assistance should they suffer from work-related contingencies such as sickness, injury, and/or death. These EC benefits are filed at the SSS, except for cash assistance which is filed directly at the ECC.

As of September 2019, there are about 37.79 million covered members under the SSS. About 7 percent of the covered members of the SSS or 2.6 million are self-employed workers. While, 3 percent or 1.2 million are OFWs. Meanwhile, according to a survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2019, there are estimated 2.2 million documented OFWs including both sea-based and land-based workers.

The guidelines for the implementation of the inclusion of the land-based OFWs and self-employed workers are currently being prepared by the ECC in coordination with the SSS.

ECC Chairperson and Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said, "This move by the Commission to include the land-based OFWs and self-employed compulsory members of the SSS under the

Employees' Compensation Program is a show of our support and recognition of their significant contribution to our workforce."

For her part, Director Banawis expressed that, "We are happy that our land-based OFWs as well as the self-employed compulsory members of the SSS who suffer from work-related contingencies such as sickness, injury and/or death are now covered under the EC Program. This way, we can protect and promote their welfare."

Reporting by Carlo Katigbak



## GSIS at 83: Responding to the Times, Transitioning to the New Normal



**May 31, 2020 marks the 83rd anniversary** of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) in the Philippines. The 83rd year of the state pension fund takes place in the face of an unprecedented world health emergency that has changed the landscape of delivering public service. At the onset of the crisis, GSIS President and General Manager Rolando Ledesma Macasaet has identified the thrusts of GSIS in serving its clients against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis: Migration to digital technology; contactless and flexible transactions; and sensitivity to the needs of members and pensioners. Allow us to share our story with you.

### Digital Loan Application

To serve the urgent financial needs of GSIS members and pensioners during the crisis, we swiftly switched from manual to digital filing of loans right after the government imposed quarantine measures in March. It was initially available to borrowers of Conso-Loan, policy loan and pension loan and was

later extended to cover the COVID-19 Emergency Loan. The pension fund has so far disbursed a total of Php10.12 billion in loans to more than 200,000 members and pensioners this year.

### Contactless Transactions

After successfully shifting to digital filing of loans, GSIS is now moving to contactless methods of accepting application for claims and benefits when the quarantine measures have been relaxed starting June 1.

Under contactless transactions, members, pensioners and other clients may apply for benefits through postal mail or delivery courier; drop boxes located in GSIS branch offices nationwide; or email. These methods are applicable for the following benefits: retirement; life insurance (maturity or cash surrender regular or optional policies); survivorship; death; funeral; employees compensation; pre-need and pension accrual.

### #WeGotYourBack

Understanding the financial needs of its members and pensioners during the crisis, GSIS raised the credit limit of the COVID-19 Emergency Loan to Php40,000 from Php20,000 to enable more members and pensioners to renew their previous emergency loan. It also relaxed the terms and conditions of the program to qualify more borrowers to avail of the loan.

To help borrowers reserve their limited resources for urgent needs, the pension fund granted a three-month moratorium on all loan payments (including housing loan) for the months of March, April and May. The payment break will not incur penalty or additional interest. All loan term, as a result of the moratorium will be effectively extended by three months. GSIS also granted payment relief to other clients. The three-month loan moratorium was extended to inactive members (already out of government service) who availed of the Program for Restructuring and Repayment of Debts and housing loan borrowers. In the same manner, GSIS granted lessees of its properties a 30-day grace period from the lifting of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) to pay their accrued GSIS rentals (during ECQ) without interests, penalties, and other fees.

### Keeping Pensioners Safe

Safeguarding the well-being of its elderly pensioners who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 is one of GSIS's priorities. Thus, the pension fund granted their April and May 2020 pensions ahead of the usual eighth-of-the month release and will do so again in the coming months; began accepting pension loan and emergency loan applications via

email; granted them a three-month loan moratorium; extended the deadline for the physical appearance requirement or Annual Pensioners' Information Revalidation (APIR) until 30 June for pensioners whose birthday fall on March, April, and May and allowed those who were not able to comply before March 2020 to undergo online APIR.

Pension is life for many retirees. As the country shifts into the 'new normal', GSIS is set to allow submission of application for the commencement of their pension via email. This provides them an easier and safer alternative than going to a GSIS office since they have a high risk of getting infected with the virus. Retirees under Presidential Decree 1146, Republic Act 8291 (GSIS Act of 1997), and Republic Act 7699 (Portability Law) who will start receiving their monthly pension may benefit from this new method of filing. Also covered by the new guidelines are surviving spouse or guardian of the children of deceased GSIS retirees, members, or pensioners.



### Honoring Fallen Public Frontliners

Government frontliners providing healthcare service or assistance to COVID-19 patients are now automatically covered by an additional Php500,000 life insurance under the Bayanihan Fund for Frontliners (BFF) in recognition of their heroism and self-less dedication to government service. GSIS is set to release P12.9 million in life insurance benefits to the beneficiaries of eight government health workers who recently succumbed to the COVID-19 virus.

### Kindness Campaign

The COVID-19 sparked an outpouring of kindness in the GSIS community. Executives and employees reached out to those at the forefront of the battle against the virus and the disadvantaged – healthcare workers, janitors, security guards, stranded construction workers, colleagues, and neighbors.



Food, face masks, alcohol, hygiene kits, cash to fund the purchase of ventilators and other forms of assistance were extended to them by GSIS employees through organizations such as the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, hospitals, health centers, and barangay offices.

### Adopting COVID-19 Shelters

The Philippines needs all the help it can get to curb the spread of COVID-19. GSIS will be refocusing its corporate social responsibility initiatives by extending financial support to Local Isolation and General Treatment Areas for COVID-19 cases (LIGTAS COVID) Centers. These are community isolation units) within a barangay, municipality, city, or province that serves as a temporary shelter to COVID-19 cases who will require quarantine or isolation.

### Transitioning to the New Normal

As GSIS transitions to the new normal, its priority remains to promote the safety and health of its customers and

employees. Thus, it has installed handwashing facilities, disinfecting foot baths, sanitation tents, directional signages, and physical barriers in its frontline counters and booths. It also implements regular disinfection activities, transport biosecurity, and strict ingress and egress protocols in its building facilities. These social distancing and biosecurity measures are all geared at preventing the spread of the virus.

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## Pag-IBIG Fund launches Virtual Pag-IBIG to provide 24/7 online service to members

### In celebration of its 39th Anniversary last 12 December 2019,

Pag-IBIG Fund launched the Virtual Pag-IBIG -- an online portal that allows its members to access their services anytime, anywhere. Providing the basic services of a physical branch, the Virtual Pag-IBIG serves as a personal online branch for the members where they can access their accounts, view their records, track the status of their loans, and pay their loan amortizations or remit their savings.

The launch, which was held at the Philippine International Convention Center, was led by Pag-IBIG Chief Executive Officer Acmad Rizaldy P. Moti and Secretary Eduardo D. del Rosario, who heads both the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), and the 11-member Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees.

"Pag-IBIG Fund is celebrating its 39th anniversary this month with the theme 'Serving the Nation with Excellence and Innovation.' And what better way to mark our 39th year than with the unveiling of one of the most innovative services in our history, the Virtual Pag-IBIG. With this new service, it's like having your own personal Pag-IBIG Fund branch at your fingertips. With just a smartphone and an internet connection, our members can now do their transactions with Pag-IBIG Fund online, anytime, wherever they are," Moti said.

### Virtual Pag-IBIG Services

By logging into the Virtual Pag-IBIG, Moti said that one can immediately enjoy the agency's services such as securing a Pag-IBIG Fund Membership ID (MID) number, taking the initial step to enroll

for an MP2 Savings account, and monitoring their loan application status. Members may access even more services by creating their own Virtual Pag-IBIG accounts. With an account, members can have access to their savings records, view their loan balances and get the latest news and updates about Pag-IBIG Fund.

### Personalized access

Virtual Pag-IBIG makes use of Pag-IBIG Fund's Loyalty Card Plus as a primary access to creating an online account. Initially packaged as a discount and reward membership card, wherein Pag-IBIG members and card holders can avail of rebates and benefits from partner establishments, the Loyalty Card Plus has partnered with international commercial banks to upgrade their functionality akin to atm cards or debit cards. Through the Virtual Pag-IBIG, members can also monitor and view the last ten transactions made with their Pag-IBIG Fund Loyalty Card Plus.

The Virtual Pag-IBIG also features an online payment facility that allows members to pay for their loans and remit their monthly savings through PayMaya or with their Visa, Mastercard, or JCB credit cards. It also has a real-time chat facility that allows members to talk to a Pag-IBIG Fund service personnel to address any concern.

### Other ways to access Virtual Pag-IBIG

Pag-IBIG Fund members who do not have a Loyalty Card Plus can still create their Virtual Pag-IBIG account but will have to visit the nearest Pag-IBIG Fund to validate their biometrics and account details. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), on the other hand, has a

specially designed activation process, which they can access through Pag-IBIG Fund's online chat facility.

The Virtual Pag-IBIG may be access via the Pag-IBIG Fund website at <https://www.pagibigfundservices.com/virtualpagibig/>.



## Social security in the time of COVID-19

**"Providing meaningful social security protection** to its members and their beneficiaries, especially in times of financial difficulties, has always been at the core of the services of the Social Security System (SSS)," said SSS President and CEO Aurora C. Ignacio.

"When the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) hit the Philippines earlier this year, our priority was clear: we must ensure the uninterrupted delivery of our services," she added.

The SSS, a state-run social security institution for the country's private-sector workers, provides its members with benefit programs for sickness, maternity, disability, retirement, death, funeral, and unemployment. It also provides salary, calamity, housing, educational assistance, and pension loans.

Recognizing the health and socio-economic impact of the pandemic, the SSS is even more motivated to extend its services to its members and pensioners.

### Adapting to the pandemic

The threat of COVID-19 has necessitated the practice of public health measures such as physical distancing, wearing of masks, limiting mass gatherings, and movement restrictions.

Since March, a community quarantine is implemented in the Philippines to prevent the virus from spreading.

These events have caused challenges for members and pensioners intending to avail of SSS benefits. With that in mind, the SSS implemented temporary modifications to its programs.

These modifications include the suspension of its Annual Confirmation of Pensioners Program; the extension of filing periods for sickness notifications, sickness benefit claims, and unemployment benefit claims; the moratorium on short-term and housing loan payments; and the extension of contribution payment deadlines.

Back when community quarantine restrictions were stricter, the SSS installed drop boxes in its branches to continuously accommodate member transactions and it has made more services available online.

As of June 27, the SSS' tentative data showed that from January to May this year, its benefit disbursements to over 3.04 million members and pensioners reached P79.94 billion. It also showed that for the same period, it has released P10.15 billion loans to around 472,000 members while its pension loan releases to 32,807 pensioners hit P1.46 billion.

On June 15, 2020, the SSS also opened its COVID-19 Calamity Loan Assistance Program wherein just 10 days from its implementation, nearly P585.5 million calamity loans were already released to 35,264 members.

### Intensifying digital transformation

"The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of using digital technologies for transactions," said Ignacio. "It is a good thing that a few years back, we have already started to digitalize our services."

Before the pandemic, SSS members may already view their records, submit salary loan applications, submit maternity notifications (for self-employed, voluntary, and Overseas Filipino Worker members), inquire about the status of their benefit claims, update their contact information, generate payment reference numbers and so forth, using the My.SSS web portal and SSS Mobile App.



Photo credit: Business Mirror

Intensifying its digital transformation efforts amid the current crisis, the SSS has added online facilities for sickness benefit reimbursement applications of its covered employers, unemployment benefit and calamity loan applications of its members, and the bank enrollment module.

The SSS has a total of 321 local and 27 foreign offices. Its digital presence has significantly helped in extending its services to its nearly 38.44 million covered members.

### **Going the extra mile**

Aside from supporting its members through benefit and loan programs, the SSS was also tapped by the Department of Finance for its Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS) program.

The program, funded by the national government, aims to provide wage subsidies to employees of small businesses who were affected by the impact of the community quarantine which slowed down and even halted economic activities in the country.

A large number of the beneficiaries for the program were conveniently identified through the databases of the SSS and Bureau of Internal Revenue.

The SSS has further contributed to the implementation of the SBWS by developing an online facility on its website for applications for the program. Almost 160,000 employers have submitted SBWS applications for their employees. As of mid-May this year, applications for around 2.94 million employees have been approved according to the program's criteria.

The SSS also facilitated the two tranches of wage subsidy payouts which are equivalent to P5,000 to P8,000 per tranche and qualified worker, depending on the minimum wage in his/her region.

Beneficiaries efficiently received the said wage subsidies through their bank accounts, PayMaya accounts, or through cash remittance via MLhuillier Financial Services.

Beyond the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSS will continue to work towards fulfilling its mandate of providing meaningful social security protection to its members and their beneficiaries.



## The CPF Nomination Scheme

**A common question** among CPF members is what would happen to their CPF savings upon their demise.

As CPF savings are excluded from a member's estate, this means that CPF savings cannot be covered under a will and members must make a CPF nomination if they wish to decide how their CPF savings will be distributed upon their demise under the CPF Nomination Scheme. This helps to protect the member's CPF savings from any creditor claims, ensuring that the CPF savings will be fully distributed to their nominees.

### What happens if a CPF Nomination is not made?

If a CPF nomination had not been made, the beneficiaries will be determined by Singapore's Public Trustee's Office (PTO) based on the Intestacy or the Muslim Inheritance laws. Under these laws, the recipients of the CPF savings and the portion that they receive is fixed. This intestate distribution process requires more time and effort as the PTO will need to determine who are the beneficiaries based on information provided by the next-of-kin of the deceased member. Furthermore, the beneficiaries would incur an

administrative fee and the entire process may take as long as 6 months, leading to these CPF savings being left unclaimed in worst cases.

### Challenges the CPF Board faced in encouraging making of nominations

For many years up till 2020, the rate of nomination stagnated despite the Board's best efforts to encourage nomination-making. On average, 1 in 4 CPF members passed away without a nomination and this rate did not improve over the years. One of the reasons that the team identified that caused the stagnating rate was the manual nomination process which required the member to arrange for two witnesses to witness the signing of his nomination form. While members could also visit the Board's Service Centres and get the Board's Customer Service Executives to act as their witnesses, this meant that the member would need to take time to visit to the Service Centre, which posed a degree of inconvenience.

Thus, the Board embarked on an ambitious plan to transform the existing nomination process into a fully digital service – the Online Nomination Service (ONS).

### Brainstorming and changing norms

The key challenge for the Board was to transform the existing physical witnessing process into a digital one, especially where there was no precedence in the industry, such as in the making of wills. To achieve this, the Board first examined the witnesses' roles and their responsibilities, and they are:

A. To ensure that a person was indeed



the member making the nomination; and

B. To ensure that the member was doing so with the intention to make a nomination.

With the witnesses' responsibilities clarified, the team set out to find a digitalised solution that can replace the existing physical witnessing, and yet still fulfil the responsibilities the witnesses carry.

Using the national authentication system - SingPass\*, the responsibility of witnesses to ensure a person is indeed the CPF member, could be relieved without needing their physical presence with the member when he signs the nomination form. To affirm a CPF member's intention to make a CPF nomination, witnesses are required to log into our online service with their own Singpass and declare how they were informed by the member to act as his witnesses.

Besides convenience, making a CPF nomination online provides better protection for members' personal information. Under the hardcopy process, nomination details such as the identities of nominees may inadvertently be seen by the witnesses. Under the new online nomination mode, these details will not be revealed to witnesses and it safeguards the CPF member's privacy.

### The value of digitalising

In January 2020, the ONS was launched. Since its launch, the Board saw an increase in total nominations in Q1 2020 by 13% compared to the same period in 2019. CPF members have also quickly caught on to this new mode of making their nomination and to date, almost half of all nominations are being made online. Within the Board itself, the copious amount of mundane work to check and perform data entry for the nomination details were also eliminated and taken over by digital automation. This has

*Just a note of thanks and appreciation for converting the previously hardcopy nomination process to a **very convenient and streamlined** online process. I was particularly impressed by the witnessing by SMS — **great innovation!***

*...this new service is **much more convenient** as compared to the hardcopy process which I used six months ago*

*It's definitely much easier than doing hardcopy! It's **convenient, easy to use.***

*Comments from CPF Members*

resulted in an improved productivity of up to 90%, which means that the nomination team can now focus on higher value work that requires stronger skillsets, which would in turn, expand and develop the team's capabilities.

The radical adoption of a fully digitalised nomination making process paves a more sustainable route, minimising our waste and environmental footprint. Furthermore, by achieving a paperless-based operation, it reduces the demand for secured physical storage spaces to store hardcopy nomination documents. In the long run, the CPF Board expects to achieve savings of close to SGD \$100,000 a year with the elimination of physical forms.



The team behind the Online Nomination Service

\* SingPass is a Government-issued account that secures Singapore residents' access to various government eServices.



## COVID-19 highlights the importance of UHC to cope with crisis



**In March and April**, Thailand experienced the hike of the pandemic with more than 100 new confirmed cases a day. Our health resources were overwhelming with thousands of suspected cases. Shortage of personal protective equipment, including surgical mask and hazmat suits, were reported in many hospitals.

But we have managed to get through the most difficult time so far, though the pandemic unlikely ends soon. The decline of daily confirmed cases is the result of the Thai government's social distancing measures that restrict people's movement and public gathering activities, reducing the risk of Thai populations exposing to the disease.

Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC) is another key mechanism that helps we combat Covid-19 effectively.

Tax-funded UHC covers healthcare access for more than 49 million Thais, while other social welfare schemes

insure the rest of the population—Social Security Scheme and Civil Servant Healthcare Benefits.

These three schemes provide 99% of the Thai population access to free Covid-19 testing and treatment. Therefore, everyone is encouraged to visit hospitals or request testing from health workers if they have travel history to high-risk countries, contact with Covid-19 patients, or show symptoms such as fever, sore throats, dry cough, loss of taste or smell.

The sooner people get testing, the quicker health workers identify suspected cases and place them in treatment. Foreigners can also get free Covid-19 treatment provided by the government. By 21 May, total 3,037 infectious cases and 56 deaths were reported in Thailand despite having nearly 70 million populations and 40 million international visitors a year.

We would not be able to handle the pandemic effectively like this before the

Thai government introduced UHC in 2002.

Without health insurance in the pre-UHC period, most of the patients, especially the poor, felt hesitant when visiting hospitals as they concerned about unaffordable medical fees. They often saw doctors when they were in a coma or a severe stage of illness. This did not just reduce their chance of survival. It also jeopardized their whole communities if the unprecedented epidemic or pandemic of communicable diseases, such as Covid-19, occurred.

Moreover, UHC allows us to mobilize funding for the emergency response to unpredictable crises.

During the peak of Covid-19 pandemic, National Health Security Office (NHSO), the Thai government's independent organization operating UHC, diverted over 4.28 billion baht of UHC budget to fight Covid-19.

The funding covers the cost of testing, tracing, treating patients, and the compensations for the state hospitals' health staff who work for long hours at the frontlines of the pandemic. The availability of funding is one of the reasons that our health system was not too overstressed.

When hospital operators are assured that their Covid-19-relevant expenses backing up by UHC, they will provide health services as much as necessary—with their full efforts and without concern of the hospital bankruptcy by the overwhelming patients and suspected cases.

Health workers and volunteers in the provinces are encouraged to perform "active case finding" by visiting local

communities to monitor people's health status and follow up the suspected cases under quarantines. The UHC and local administration budget provide allowances for health worker and volunteers doing this task.

If they contract the disease, they can request compensation for their absence from work while under quarantine or treatment. Here is another benefit of health financing under UHC that gives incentives to health workers and volunteers to fight Covid-19 on the ground.

We've learned a lesson. Covid-19 shows how UHC is a vital foundation to cope with crises and absorb shocks. Health financing for UHC makes sure that we can take any immediate actions concerning healthcare services to save the life of the people and provide them health security.

The ongoing pandemic is the wakeup call for world leaders to accelerate their effort into introducing UHC, one of the targets within the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to achieve by 2030.

Sooner or later, we will likely face the next crises—either the pandemic again, the health impact of climate change, or even economic crises that reduce people's ability to purchase health services. Our commitment to UHC must be more substantial. We can create health resilience for everyone in the world of rising uncertainty.

Sakchai Kanjanawatana, MD  
Secretary-General, NHSO ,Thailand





## Thailand Social Security measures and initiatives against COVID-19

**In light of COVID-19 Pandemic**, every sectors are affected by health and economic crisis. Many enterprises are temporarily closed by government orders trying to prevent the spread of the virus. The number of employees who lose their jobs continues to increase. The Social Security Office of Thailand (SSO) is one of the government agencies directly responsible for providing protection against the impacts arising from the pandemic as there are more than 400,000 enterprises and 16 million insured persons registered under the social security scheme. With the aims to relieve the effects from COVID-19 of all social partners related, the SSO provides several measures and initiatives to deal with the situation as follows:

### 1. Medical services measure

One of the most urgent measures against COVID-19 is the health care that all employees must be protected. The SSO improves medical treatment by increasing the payment for hospitals to cover COVID-19 treatments, e.g., testing, rooms for the quarantine/treatment, antivirus or specific medicine for COVID-19, laboratory diagnosis, etc. This measure comes into force as from 2 March 2020.

### 2. Contribution measures

#### 2.1 Reduction in Social Security Fund contribution rates.

The SSO provides measures to relieve employers and insured persons by reducing contribution rates for 3 months (March-May 2020). Before the pandemic, contribution rates for employers and employees were 5% each and for insured persons under section 39 (the former compulsorily insured persons who



voluntarily continue to participate in the scheme) were flat-rate 432 baht per month. To survive the economic breakdown, the contribution rates of March to May 2020 for employers and employees were reduced to 4% and 1% respectively, while the insured persons under section 39 pay contributions amounting 86 Baht per month.

#### 2.2 Extending the deadline for contributions payment.

The reduction of contribution rates is accompanied with the extension of the deadline for contribution payment. Normally the payment shall be made by the 15th of the following month. With this measure the monthly contributions of March, April, and May have been deferred for three months as follows:

- For the wage of March 2020 the contribution shall be made by 15 July 2020.
- For the wage of April 2020 the contribution shall be made by 15 August 2020.

- For the wage of May 2020 the contribution shall be made by 15 September 2020.

#### 2.3 Increase in unemployment benefits.

The SSO realizes the impact arising from COVID-19 is far beyond the costs from social security contributions. Therefore, reducing and deferring social security contributions payment as mentioned above might not be the only ways for the relief. We study and come up with increasing unemployment benefits to better support employees affected to better survive amidst the crisis. The benefits have been improved in two conditions:

#### In case of economic impacts

- If employees resign from work, they will receive 45% of daily wage for up to 90 days (employees previously received 30% of daily wage, for up to 90 days.);
- If employees are laid-off, they will

receive 70% of daily wage for up to 200 days. (employees previously received 50% of daily wage for up to 180 days.)

#### **In case of force majeure**

Employees will receive loss of income compensation for 62% of their daily wage for up to 90 days in case that they are not allowed by the employer to work or 14-days quarantine due to close contact with COVID-19 infected people. This also includes the case that the employees need to leave without pay due to suspension of business by employer's decision or by government order.

### **3. Establishment of the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration.**

In addition to the services provided in social security offices across the country, the SSO has established the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration at the SSO Headquarters. The Center acts as the main supporting point for claiming the unemployment benefits, for example receiving claim, checking claim status, appeal or advising claim procedures, etc. It also monitors and responds to relevant issues. More than 40,000 employees were approved for unemployment benefits through the Center.

### **4. Loan Programme to retain and support employment.**

The SSO makes more active role than the benefit and contribution aspects. The Social Security Committee has decided to launch loan programme starting at 3% interest for 3 years for the SSO-registered entrepreneurs within the budget of 30,000 million Baht to help retain employment.

### **5. Promoting Electronic Systems.**

Apart from the relief measures, the SSO makes greater use of IT system for better access to social security benefits and other normal services and also to reduce people come to contact at offices

to prevent them from infections. The SSO provides several electronic channels for employers, employees and self-employed to receive our services such as:

- Unemployment claims - Applicants can complete and submit unemployment claims via SSO's website at [www.sso.go.th](http://www.sso.go.th). Also for all inquiries, they can make the requests via email or contact hotline 1506.

- Employer Registration - This electronic system supports employers who would like to register in our database through the Biz Portal channel website that they can apply and upload required documents for registration. If the submitted documents are complete, the SSO will electronically record data, issue contributions invoice, and submit all documents to the responsible units to record in the Employers' Electronic Filing System.

- Payments and wage declarations - Contributions payment and filing the wage declaration forms have been developed to support transactions via digital services named "E-Payment" and "E-Service". In response to the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic employers can make payment and file wage declaration online.



## Viet Nam Social Security – A journey for social security cause

**Viet Nam Social Security (VSS)** have gained a lot of encouraging achievements over a quarter of the century. In spite of limited resources and many difficulties, the coverage of participants and beneficiaries of social insurance (SI) and health insurance (HI) have been gradually expanded, contributing to ensure the social security in Viet Nam.

In Viet Nam, SI and HI policies play a very important role and are effective instruments to help the State regulates society; towards contributing the stable lives of citizens, employees, and their faith in the future.

In the early years of establishment, responsibilities put VSS under a lot of pressure. If it hadn't been for the patience, courage and resilience of the staff and officials, VSS would have been unable to develop like it is now.

1995 was a major turning point for the social security cause with the unified implementation of compulsory SI for employees in all economic sector and the establishment of VSS system. One of the biggest challenges at that time was the implementation of SI policies based on the contributory principle, resulting in a more concerned propaganda campaign.

The Party and the State of Viet Nam always focus on the achievement of social security goals, strengthening social progress and justice. These are both objectives and driving force for the sustainable development of the country. SI and HI policies, with their pivotal role, have continuously been supplemented, completed, developed and internationally integrated.

Through many ups and downs, challenges of those early days, currently, VSS have established a stable organization, effectively implemented the SI and HI policies under new mechanism, gradually expanded SI and HI coverage to every



employee of all economic and social areas.

Notably, the SI policy system is synchronous and in line with international practices, including the compulsory and voluntary SI, unemployment insurance with the benefits of sickness, maternity, work injuries – occupational diseases, pension and survivor. Moreover, the policy has covered both people with and without employment relationship; both formal and informal economic sector.

Under the direction of the Party and the State of Viet Nam, the related Ministries and all localities have actively cooperated with VSS to increase the number of SI and HI participants. The practical and meaningful SI and HI objectives are also important political mission to ensure the social security for country.

VSS's pioneering reform of administrative procedures has made great contribution to the development of E-Government, such as: building up the national social security database; connecting, sharing information and supervising the SI, HI payment.

As the goal set to June 2021, the number of voluntary SI participants is more than 670,000, increased 116.9% compared to 2019. The objectives for VSS are including: 35% of labor force participating in SI; 28% of labor force in the age of group participating in unemployment insurance; 45% of people after retirement age can enjoy the monthly pension and social pension benefit; the ratio of e-transaction reaches 100%; implementing the online public services at level 4; the index evaluating satisfaction of SI participants reaches about 80%.

To achieve those above-mentioned goals, VSS continues to synchronously implement measures to expand SI coverage, towards the objective of universal coverage and ensure the

long-term balanced fund. These are not only the orientating goals, but also important duties that all the political system in general and VSS in particular must make the best effort for implementation.



## Promoting ASSA – ISSA Networking

**Together with the successful accomplishment of the Chairmanship** of ASEAN Social Security Association (ASSA) for 2018 – 2019, Viet Nam Social Security (VSS) – as a proactive and responsible member of ASSA and International Social Security Association (ISSA), has played a leading role to promote and develop the networking between the two associations.

Throughout its 22 years of ASSA membership, VSS has always been actively participating in all activities of the Association. Under the ASSA Chairmanship for 2018 – 2019, VSS has brought the Association's cooperation activities in a deeper, more substantive manner and matched with the potentials and strengths of ASSA members. Being a new member of ISSA since 2015, VSS - as the only and official ISSA's member from Viet Nam has confirmed its increasingly important role in the biggest social security forum.

At the 35th ASSA Board Meeting held in Viet Nam in September 2018 themed “The challenges and opportunities of ASEAN social security institutions in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution and free flow of labor”, accepting the invitation of VSS - the host agency of the event, ISSA representative participated and presented at the Pre - ASSA Board Meeting Seminar with the topic “Challenges and Opportunities for social security globally”.

Implementing the ASSA Action Plan for 2018 – 2019, the International Conference on “Good governance for better services” was successfully held in Ho Chi Minh City in July 2019 with the participation of delegates from ASSA members. The ISSA social security specialist also participated and shared



new approaches and management methods of the international social security system to adapt to the context and conditions of Industry Revolution 4.0, contribute to improve the efficiency and quality of the social security services for people in the region.

In February 2020, on the occasion of his first visit to Viet Nam, ISSA Secretary General – Mr. Marcelo Abi-Ramia Caetano participated the Roundtable Meeting: ASSA – ISSA Networking in Ha Noi. In this meeting, ISSA Secretary General, National Social Security Fund Cambodia – ASSA Vice Chairman for 2019-2020 and VSS discussed cooperative orientation between two associations in experience sharing, capacity building to implement social security policies by holding technical workshops, conferences in the future; ISSA policy to encourage and facilitate ASSA members to become ISSA members; and the consideration the possibility to sign an official cooperative

document between ASSA and ISSA to develop the legal framework for future cooperative activities.

VSS' initiatives, activeness and efforts to promote ASSA – ISSA cooperation over the past years have gradually developed a close linkage, enhancing cooperation and experience sharing between the two associations. The ASSA role and position in the ISSA forum have been increasing day by day, ASSA's activities are becoming more and more practical and efficient. VSS has been promoting the leading role in the ASSA activities; creating positive, connecting transition from regional multilateral cooperation to international multilateral one, contributing to realizing the prosperous, progressive, civilized and developing ASEAN Community in the spirit of the ASEAN Vision 2025, cohesion and proactive adaptation in the context of complex and growing uncertainties in the world.

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