

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Support Program for Coping with the effects of COVID-19, announced by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance**

### **Special Sick Leave Allowance**

#### **1. Who are the Beneficiaries of the Special Sick Leave Allowance?**

Within the framework of emergency support measures, a Special Sick Leave Allowance will be paid to:

- Employees who have particular health problems and fall within the **List** published by the Ministry of Health, who must be absent from work for the purposes of protecting their health and not deteriorating it. A certificate by their personal physician is required.
- Cases of compulsory absence from work by persons instructed or ordered by the Authorities (Category I [compulsory isolation under medical supervision (quarantine)] and Category II [self- isolation under telephone surveillance]), provided that the isolated employees hold a certificate issued by the Ministry of Health.
- Persons over the age of 63 up to the age of 65, who do not receive statutory retirement and continue to work and fall into Categories I and II, as categorized by the Ministry of Health, provided that the isolated employees hold a certificate issued by the Ministry of Health.

#### **2. Do self-employed workers qualify for Special Sick Leave Allowance?**

Self-employed persons qualify for Special Sick Leave Allowance provided that they fulfill the above conditions. It is noted that for their own support, they will be paid as will employees, from day four.

#### **3. How many days of Special Sick Leave Allowance do I qualify for?**

Special Sick Leave Allowance will be paid for as many days as the applicant falls under the categories of beneficiaries, namely, a) Employees who have particular health problems, b) Cases of compulsory absence from work and c) Persons over the age of 63 up to the age of 65. The Special Sick Leave Allowance coverage period ends on 30 April 2020.

#### **4. Are the procedures to be followed for paying Special Sick Leave Allowance the same as those of the Social Insurance Services?**

The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance will follow simplified procedures for the payment of the Special Sick Leave Allowance in all beneficiary categories (Employees who have particular health problems, cases of compulsory absence from work and persons over the age of 63 up to the age of 65). The Special Sick Leave Allowance will be paid to all beneficiaries, wage earners and self-employed, from day four.

#### **5. Is it necessary for the doctor's certificate to include the dates of absence from work?**

The doctor's certificate should state the relevant medical reasons, that are included in the Health Ministry's announcement for granting sick leave to vulnerable groups, included on [www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus](http://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus). The application to be submitted should indicate the period of absence from work for sick leave purposes.

### **Special Leave of Absence**

#### **6. What is the Special Leave of Absence?**

Special Leave of Absence applies to parents who work in the Private or Public / Wider Public Sector for the care of children up to 15 years of age (up to third year of Gymnasium), due to the suspension of school attendance in public and private schools, nursery and kindergartens.

It should be noted that parents of persons with disabilities are entitled to Special Leave of Absence independent of the child's age, provided that no child care allowance is granted.

The period of Special Leave of Absence shall be considered as a period of equivalent insurance.

### **7. What is the duration of the Special Leave of Absence and what percentage of the salary does it cover?**

The period of Special Leave of Absence may be as long as four weeks, at the time being and does not include holidays. Parents with a monthly salary of up to €2.500 (gross) shall be granted an allowance as follows:

For the first €1.000 of the parent's salary, a Special Leave of Absence Allowance shall be granted, equal to 60% of the salary and for the next €1.000 of the salary, 40% of the salary shall be granted. It is noted that in cases of single parents, the corresponding percentages are 70% and 50%, respectively.

The Special Leave of Absence Allowance coverage period ends on 30 April 2020.

### **8. What are the requirements to qualify for the Special Leave of Absence?**

The Special Leave of Absence is granted to parents with a monthly salary of up to €2.500 (gross). Persons with a salary higher than €2.500 (gross) are not allowed the Special Leave of Absence.

The Special Leave of Absence is granted to one of the parents, and if one parent is granted the said Leave, then the other parent may not receive it at the same time.

In addition, if one parent is working or receives unemployment benefit or participates in a Suspension Plan and the other parent is not, the working parent is not allowed the Special Leave of Absence, unless the parent who is not working falls ill from COVID 19, or is hospitalized or is a person with a disability or is a person in compulsory isolation.

It is stressed that the said Leave shall be granted provided that the nature of the work does not allow for teleworking or working from home or working with a flexible schedule and that there is no in-house help. The Leave shall be granted in consultation with the employer, and a relevant application must be submitted.

### **9. Will the employer pay the rest of the amount for the Special Leave of Absence?**

The employer will not pay the rest of the salary.

Any employee may also use part of his/her Annual Leave of Absence.

### **10. May the Special Leave of Absence only be taken continuously?**

The Special Leave of Absence shall be granted for a period of up to four weeks and it may be taken either continuously or in part, in consultation with the employer. The parent must apply separately for each period that he or she wishes to use it.

### **11. May I take the Special Leave of Absence to care for a spouse / parent in a vulnerable group (e.g. a pregnant spouse)?**

The Special Leave of Absence shall be granted only for the care of children up to the age of 15. In cases of persons with disabilities the Special Leave of Absence is granted independent of the age of the child.

However, if no care is available for a parent/spouse in a vulnerable group, as designated by the Ministry of Health, an application may be made on the basis of its particular characteristics. The same applies in cases of pregnant spouses.

**12. Does the Special Leave of Absence only apply in cases of full-time employment?**

The Special Leave of Absence is applicable for full-time, part-time as well as shift work, in the private, public or wider public sector. It is not applicable for self-employment.

**Business Suspension Plan**

**13. What is the Business Suspension Plan?**

For those businesses about which it has been decided to suspend their operations and for those businesses that continue to operate but suffer a turnover of more than 25%, a Business Suspension Plan is in place, to avoid layoffs and affected employees will receive unemployment benefit, for as long as the business is suspended.

In order for the Business Suspension Plan to apply to a business, an application must be submitted to the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Insurance, stating the terms and conditions for participation in the Plan.

Businesses that make any redundancies will not be able to participate in the Plan.

**14. Will those who were recently hired and do not qualify for insurance receive an unemployment benefit under a Suspension Plan?**

No, these cases do not qualify for the unemployment benefit. The affected persons can apply, and each application will be examined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the particular characteristics of each case.

**15. How can a business prove a 25% turnover decrease?**

A standardized certification will be submitted by the company's certified auditors who, after studying the data for the respective period of the previous year and based on all available data on the applicable status and type and activity of the business, will certify the estimated and / or existing turnover decline for March and April 2020.

In the cases of companies that were not active during the corresponding period of the previous year, the basis for comparison will be the immediately preceding months.

**16. I work in a company that is under compulsory suspended operation(kindergarten, tutoring). May I participate in a Suspension Plan?**

The Business Suspension Plan may apply to both suspended businesses, as listed in the Decrees of the Minister of Health, posted at [www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus](http://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus), as well as to businesses that will suffer significantly reduced turnover (beyond 25%), which do not fall under the economic activities included in the relevant Decrees of the Minister of Health.

**17. As regards companies that will participate in a Suspension Plan which employ third-country nationals or seasonal workers, are these employees entitled to unemployment benefit?**

Third-country nationals and seasonal workers are entitled to unemployment benefit, provided that they hold relevant residence and work permits in the Republic of Cyprus and fulfill the insurance requirements.

**18. Will rent also be covered for companies under compulsory suspension?**

The Suspension Plan covers employees' salaries and not operating expenses, therefore, it does not cover rent.

**General questions**

**19. What is the procedure to be followed for the granting of the abovementioned allowances?**

The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance will announce shortly, within the next few days, the procedure for the submission of the relevant applications, which will be electronic, straightforward and comprehensive, so that all allowances are granted as soon as possible. It is pointed out that for all of the above support measures, applications will be submitted **electronically**.

**20. Will the duration of the unemployment benefit be extended, due to the state of emergency?**

For the time being, all assessments and all measures taken apply for the period up to the 30th of April 2020. The situation will be monitored and if needed, the measures will be reevaluated.

**21. Do the support measures include a measure to provide for an extension in the repayment of due contributions (current, overdue, arrears) to the Social Insurance Fund?**

There is no provision for extension in the repayment of due social insurance contributions.

**22. Is there a measure for the support of the Self-Employed?**

The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social insurance is currently considering ways to support self-employed persons that fall into specific categories of economic activity. Relevant Announcements will follow shortly.

**23. What is the deadline for the submission of objections by self-employed persons to the Social Insurance Services?**

The deadline for the submission of objections to the Social Insurance Services by self-employed persons is extended for one month, i.e. up until the 30th of April 2020 (instead of the 31st of March 2020).

**24. How can I be informed as to which economic activities are compulsorily suspended?**

All economic activities that suspend compulsorily their operations are listed in a Decree issued by the competent Minister of Health, found at [www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus](http://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus)

**25. Complaints with regard to possible violations of the measures:**

Depending on the issue, all citizens may submit their complaints as follows:

- Complaints with regard to a violation of the Decree issued by the Minister of Health, must be submitted to the Police.
- Complaints with regard to the violation of rights of the employees, as these emerge from the measures officially announced, must be submitted to the Department of Labour Relations (Lefkosia: 22803100 / 22803127, Lemesos: 25819440 / 22819820, Larnaka: 24817800 / 24817801 and Pafos: 26822614 / 26826640 and email: [info@dlr.mlsi.gov.cy](mailto:info@dlr.mlsi.gov.cy)) and to the Unified Labour Inspection Service (tel.: 77778577 and email: [aapostolou@dlr.mlsi.gov.cy](mailto:aapostolou@dlr.mlsi.gov.cy)).

