

16.3 PASSAGE BENEFIT SCHEME

- 16.3.1 The Passage Benefit Scheme, an important component of Conditions of Service of public officers, was introduced in the colonial days for the purpose of assisting expatriates in travelling from Mauritius to their home country. It has, over time, undergone fundamental changes and the scheme, as it stands today, is opened to all public officers employed on permanent and pensionable terms subject to satisfying certain conditions. Its usage is not limited to travel or travel-related expenses, but has been enlarged to accommodate certain needs of the beneficiaries.
- 16.3.2 For this Report, proposals were made by Federations to allow officers to use their Passage Benefit even when the accumulated balance is less than Rs 10000 and to review the eligibility criteria and accrual rate of Passage Benefit, among others. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) on its side, requested for a review of the Passage Benefit Scheme in view of its incidence on public finance.
- 16.3.3 At present, officers eligible for Passage Benefit are allowed to make use of their accumulated balance for the following purposes:
- (i) for travel purposes for themselves and the immediate members of their family;
 - (ii) to cover expenses during travel other than for their air tickets or cash wholly/partly the balance of their accumulated Passage Benefit at the time of travel;
 - (iii) for medical treatment either locally or abroad, for themselves or the immediate members of their family;
 - (iv) for the purpose of renovation/construction of their primary residence;
 - (v) to pay the fees in connection with School Certificate/Higher School Certificate examinations; or vocational training for their wards as well as for the payment of university fees for themselves and their wards, either locally or abroad; and
 - (vi) for expenses incurred in relation to vacation spent at hotels/inland recreational resorts upon production of documentary evidence. This is also applicable to officers serving in our mission.
- 16.3.4 For any other purpose other than those mentioned in the preceding paragraph at (i) – (vi), officers are allowed to cash up to 90% of their accumulated Passage Benefit.

- 16.3.5 Officers are allowed to use their accumulated Passage Benefit provided that the balance standing to their credit is Rs 10000 or more, except for the payment of examination/university fees, where officers may encash their balance of Passage Benefit, though it is less than Rs 10000.
- 16.3.6 Furthermore, if both spouses are public officers, they should be allowed to use their Passage Benefit jointly provided their aggregate accumulated balance is not less than Rs 20000.

Proposal of Ministry of Finance

- 16.3.7 For this Report, the MoF apprised the Bureau that in recent years, expenditure with respect to the payment of Passage Benefit has increased substantially. According to the Ministry, as at date, 97% of the amount allocated for financial year 2025/2026 has already been disbursed and it was observed that the over abundant applications were mostly in respect of non-travel purposes. The MoF views that these uses of Passage Benefit do not align with the original intent of the Scheme and are consequently exerting heavy pressure on public finances.
- 16.3.8 Request has therefore been made for a review of the Scheme so as to ensure its long-term sustainability and avoid pressure on the National Budget.
- 16.3.9 After carefully examining the proposal and taking into account the precarious state of the economy and the rapid depletion of the funds appropriated for passages due to the encashment of this benefit, we consider that, some sort of safeguard, as a temporary and time bound measure, may be effective in addressing the situation until the state of public finances improves. We are, therefore, revisiting the Passage Benefit Scheme.

Earning Rate of Passage Benefit

Recommendation 1

16.3.10 We recommend that:

- (a) officers on permanent and pensionable establishment drawing a minimum monthly salary of Rs 37290 or reckoning at least five years' service should earn Passage Benefit at the rate of 5% of the gross salaries annually; and
- (b) officers should not earn Passage Benefit during probationary period, vacation leave, vacation leave taken as casual leave or reckoned for late arrivals or taken at a stretch or on and off in case of demise of a near relative, sick leave in excess of 21 working days in any calendar year, maternity leave, adoption leave, paternity leave, study leave with or without pay, injury leave, interdiction period, accumulated sick leave taken prior to retirement and leave without pay.

Usage of Passage Benefit

Recommendation 2

- 16.3.11** We recommend that eligible officers should be allowed to make use of their accumulated Passage Benefit as provided at paragraphs 16.3.3, 16.3.5 and 16.3.6.
- 16.3.12** We further recommend that, as a temporary measure, up till January 2028:
- (i) officers may encash part or whole amount of their Passage Benefit for travel/travel expenses, medical treatment and educational fees; and
 - (ii) a maximum of 50% of the accumulated balance of Passage Benefit may be encashed for renovation/construction of their house; vacation at hotels/inland recreational resorts AND for any other purpose.
- 16.3.13** For the purpose of implementation, the term “immediate members of the family” is deemed to mean the officer’s spouse, children, parents, brother, sister, father-in-law and mother-in-law.

Payment of Passage Benefit in Specific Cases

Recommendation 3

- 16.3.14** We recommend that:
- (i) officers working during their pre-retirement leave should be allowed to earn Passage Benefit at the same rate as per recommendation at paragraph 16.3.10 (a);
 - (ii) officers who resign from the Public Service should be paid *in toto* the accumulated Passage Benefit standing to their credit;
 - (iii) officers should be paid the full amount of the Passage Benefit standing to their credit at the time of retirement; and
 - (iv) on the demise of a beneficiary, the outstanding accumulated Passage Benefit should be paid *in toto* to the heirs.

