

Greece offers more aid to inflation-hit pensioners

ATHENS — Greece's conservative government has announced more financial aid for pensioners, farmers and businesses hurt by inflation and costly energy bills, launching the latest measures months before a national election.

The government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has spent more than €40 billion since 2020 on subsidies to support households and businesses struggling to cope with fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war.

Last month, it implemented an 8% payment rise for pensioners, the first since a 2010-2018 financial crisis which forced Greece to slash pensions in turn for about €260 billion in bailouts.

However, nearly half of the country's pensioners did not benefit from the rise because they did not meet the original criteria. The new aid package, which will have a cost of about €800 million, includes a lump sum payment of between €200 and €300 for about one million pensioners by April, Finance Minister Christos Staikouras said in televised comments.

Mr. Staikouras added that a temporary reduction in sales tax for transport, coffee and non-alcoholic beverages would be extended for six months until the end of the year.

"The measure aims to support businesses, as those sectors, have been particularly hit by the financial impact of the pandemic and have still had increased operating costs, due to the energy crisis," he said. — **Reuters**

PHL companies seen investing more in digital skills development

MORE companies in the Philippines are investing in equipping their employees with digital skills for the modern workplace, according to professional networking platform LinkedIn.

In a report on Southeast Asia, LinkedIn said companies are prioritizing learning and development to boost employee retention.

"An overwhelming majority (94%) of organizations in the region are concerned about employee retention, and 6 in 10 are providing learning opportunities to improve employee retention," it said.

The platform said firms value soft skills and seek to help employees navigate complex work situations and boost overall productivity.

Investing in learning and development can also help develop digital literacy, entrepreneurship and innovation among firms in the Philippines, LinkedIn said.

Customer service orientation topped its list of in-demand skills in the Philippines, followed by management and communication skills.

Other sought-after skills listed include sales, critical thinking, project management, leadership, English, research and marketing.

The platform said hard skills such as research and marketing can help workers stand out and thrive in changing work environments.

LinkedIn is offering free courses on these skills on its website until March 15.

The Philippine unemployment rate eased to a three-year low of 5.4% in 2022, which is the lowest since the 5.1% posted in 2019, or before the coronavirus pandemic.

Job quality was also at a three-year low as underemployment, a measure of workers who are seeking more work, stood at 14.2%, against the 14% recorded in 2019.

"Amidst an uncertain economic climate, more companies in Southeast Asia (SEA), including in the Philippines, are investing in learning and development to stay agile and ensure their workforce is ready to optimize opportunities," it said. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

OPINION

Manager refuses to delegate key tasks

I'm a longtime supervisor in our company's operations department. Aside from me, there are other three junior supervisors who report directly to the operations manager, a 57-year-old pioneer in our company. My problem is the continuing "refusal" of my boss to delegate key tasks to me and other supervisors. We feel like we're being treated like glorified clerks who are reduced to doing only routine administrative work, like monitoring the workers' performance. The human resource (HR) manager, citing our succession plan, told me that I'm next in line to replace our department manager in case of his retirement, death or incapacity. However, it appears that he's not interested in readying me to do his job. What can we do? — Rainbow Connection.

Oh, no! The HR manager should not be doing that. A succession plan is confidential. It's only the HR manager, the department head and the chief executive officer (CEO) who should be privy to that information. That's because its contents are not set in stone and could change anytime, depending on the result of one's performance appraisal and related factors.

Even if your name continues to be on top of the list, it's imperative for management to

keep it a secret to avoid encouraging false expectations.

It's also important to understand that it's only your boss who can make a recommendation as to his successor. In the absence of your boss's endorsement for some reason, a management committee composed of other department managers (including the HR manager) may do the vetting process before they look for external candidates.

However, that's not the major issue here. With or without your name in the succession plan, your concern is how to enrich your work experience so that you're prepared to assume the post of operations manager in your organization or elsewhere when the time comes.

INITIATIVE

How is your relationship with your boss? Is it possible that the succession plan that contains your name was prepared only to comply with certain procedures, like filling up a pro-forma template? Many organizations do that to update

the succession plan in accordance with the instructions of HR. How serious is your boss in recommending you to take his post if necessary?

The answer to these questions will depend on your performance. How decent is your performance rating, at least for the past three years? I mean, you should have an "above average" and not merely "average" rating. It's the best clue available.

IN THE WORKPLACE REY ELBO

ELBONOMICS: Work with people with extraordinary talent and learn from them.

I've worked with bosses before and I don't remember asking them to give me important assignments. Of course, at times, they give me difficult projects. That's all. Instead, what I did was to volunteer myself for many key

tasks that were not part of my daily routine or tasks that could have been done by external consultants. Even when I was the HR department head, I volunteered to organize best-practices tours with dynamic companies, conduct focus group discussions on salary and benefits, tap volunteer resource speakers on certain leadership topics, create impactful sports and social activities for employees, research methods to raise employee engagement and retention, among other things.

but to your department and the whole organization. Be visible by doing all projects that could make top management take notice. You could run the risk of being viewed as someone who's out to get the boss's job.

Therefore, be careful. Disloyalty is a fast track to career failure. Be sensitive to your boss's needs and wants. Give credit to him every step of the way.

In conclusion, don't wait for opportunities to happen. Your name may be in the succession plan, but if you don't have the right skill and depth of managerial experience, you'll soon be dismissed as incompetent. This is the worst thing that could happen, even if you do get the promotion.

Learn as many things as possible about performing the job of operations manager, even without his assistance. Volunteer to do many things and make it easy for your boss to do his job.

Learn from REY ELBO's "Superior Subordinate Supervision" program to help train your line supervisors and managers. Or chat with him on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or e-mail elbonomics@gmail.com or via <https://reyelbo.com>



Avian flu spreads to new countries, threatens non-stop 'war' on poultry

CHICAGO — Avian flu has reached new corners of the globe and become endemic for the first time in some wild birds that transmit the virus to poultry, according to veterinarians and disease experts, who warn it is now a year-round problem.

Reuters spoke to more than 20 experts and farmers on four continents who said the prevalence of the virus in the wild signals that record outbreaks will not abate soon on poultry farms, ramping up threats to the world's food supply. They warned that farmers must view the disease as a serious risk all year, instead of focusing prevention efforts during spring migration seasons for wild birds.

Outbreaks of the virus have widened in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa, undefeated by summer heat or winter cold snaps, since a strain arrived in the United States in early 2022 that was genetically similar to cases in Europe and Asia.

On Wednesday, Argentina and Uruguay each declared national sanitary emergencies after officials confirmed the countries' first infections. Argentina found the virus in wild birds, while dead swans in Uruguay tested positive.

Egg prices set records after the disease last year wiped out tens of millions of laying hens, putting a staple source of cheap protein out of reach to some of the world's poorest at a time the global economy is reeling from high inflation.

Wild birds are primarily responsible for spreading the virus, according to experts. Waterfowl like ducks can carry the disease without dying and introduce it to poultry through contaminated feces, saliva and other means.

Farmers' best efforts to protect flocks are falling short. In the United States, Rose Acre Farms, the country's second-largest egg producer, lost about 1.5 million hens at a Guthrie County, Iowa, production site last year, even though anyone who entered barns was required to shower first to remove any trace of the virus, Chief Executive Marcus Rust said.

A company farm in Weld County, Colorado, was infected twice within about six months, killing more than three million chickens, Mr. Rust said. He thinks wind blew the virus in from nearby fields where geese defecated. "We got nailed," Mr. Rust said. "You just pull your hair out."

The United States, Britain, France and Japan are among countries that have suffered record losses of poultry over the past year, leaving some farmers feeling helpless.

"Avian flu is occurring even in a new poultry farm with modern equipment and no windows, so all we could do now is ask God to avoid an outbreak," said Shigeo Inaba, who raises chickens for meat in Ibaraki prefecture near Tokyo.

Poultry in the Northern Hemisphere were previously considered to be most at risk when wild birds are active during spring migration. Soaring levels of the virus in a broad range of waterfowl and other wild birds mean poultry now face high risks year round, experts said.

"It's a new war," said Bret Marsh, the state veterinarian in the US state of Indiana. "It's basically a 12-month vigil."

In a sign the threat is expected to persist, Mr. Marsh is seeking funds from Indiana's lawmakers to hire an

additional poultry veterinarian and poultry health-specialist. Indiana lost more than 200,000 turkeys and other birds over the past year, while total US deaths top 58 million birds, according to US government data, surpassing the previous 2015 record.

The virus is usually deadly to poultry, and entire flocks are culled when even one bird tests positive.

Vaccinations are not a simple solution: they may reduce but not eliminate the threat from the virus, making it harder to detect its presence among a flock. Still, Mexico and the EU are among those vaccinating or considering shots.

GLOBAL PROBLEM

Wild birds have spread the disease farther and wider around the world than ever before, likely carrying record amounts of the virus, said Gregorio Torres, the head of the science department at the Paris-based World Organization for Animal Health, an intergovernmental group and global authority on animal diseases. The virus changed from previous outbreaks to a form that is probably more transmissible, he told Reuters.

"The disease is here to stay at least in the short term," Mr. Torres said.

Mr. Torres could not confirm the virus is endemic in wild birds worldwide, though other experts said it is endemic in certain birds in places like the United States.

While the virus can infect people, usually those who have contact with infected birds, the World Health Organization says the risk to humans is low.

The form of the virus circulating is infecting a broader range of wild birds than previous versions, including those that do not migrate long distances, said David Suarez, acting laboratory director of the US government's Southeast Poultry Research Laboratory in Georgia.

Such infections of "resident" birds are helping the virus to persist throughout the year when it didn't previously, he said.

Black vultures, which inhabit the southern United States and previously avoided infections, are now among the species suffering, said David Stallknecht, director of the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study at the University of Georgia.

The virus has also infected mammals like foxes, bears and seals.

"We all have to believe in miracles," Mr. Stallknecht said, "but I really can't see a scenario where it's going to disappear."

CROSSING BORDERS

High virus levels in birds like blue-winged teal, ducks that migrate long distances, helped spread the virus to new parts of South America, Mr. Stallknecht said.

Countries including Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia in recent months reported their first cases. — **Reuters**

FULL



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