At a glance

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, rent concessions have been granted to lessees. Such concessions might take a variety of forms, including payment holidays and deferral of lease payments. On 28 May 2020, the IASB published an amendment to IFRS 16 that provides an optional practical expedient for lessees from assessing whether a rent concession related to COVID-19 is a lease modification. Lessees can elect to account for such rent concessions in the same way as they would if they were not lease modifications. In many cases, this will result in accounting for the concession as variable lease payments in the period(s) in which the event or condition that triggers the reduced payment occurs.

What is the issue?

In many territories, rent concessions have been, or are expected to be, provided to lessees as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such concessions might take a variety of forms, including payment holidays and deferral of lease payments for a period of time, sometimes followed by increased rent payments in future periods. IFRS 16 contains requirements that apply to such rent concessions. The IASB has noted, however, that applying those requirements to a potentially large volume of rent concessions related to COVID-19 could be complex – particularly in the light of the many other challenges that stakeholders face during the pandemic.

As a result, the IASB has provided lessees (but not lessors) with relief in the form of an optional exemption from assessing whether a rent concession related to COVID-19 is a lease modification. Lessees can elect to account for rent concessions in the same way as they would if they were not lease modifications. In many cases, this will result in accounting for the concession as a variable lease payment.

The practical expedient only applies to rent concessions occurring as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and only if all of the following conditions are met:

a. the change in lease payments results in revised consideration for the lease that is substantially the same as, or less than, the consideration for the lease immediately preceding the change;
b. any reduction in lease payments affects only payments due on or before 30 June 2021; and
c. there is no substantive change to other terms and conditions of the lease.
Lessees that apply the exemption will need to disclose that fact, as well as the amount recognised in profit or loss arising from COVID-19-related rent concessions. If a lessee chooses to apply the practical expedient to a lease, it would apply the practical expedient consistently to all lease contracts with similar characteristics and in similar circumstances. The amendment is to be applied retrospectively in accordance with IAS 8, but lessees are not required to restate prior period figures or to provide the disclosure under paragraph 28(f) of IAS 8.

What is the impact and for whom?

Given the pervasiveness of the pandemic and the measures taken by many governments on social distancing, it is likely that many lessees will have been granted a rent concession of some form, and so these amendments would be applicable. The amendments, however, do not make any changes to lessor accounting.

When does it apply?

The amendments are mandatory for annual reporting periods beginning on or after 1 June 2020. Earlier application is permitted, including in interim or year end financial statements not yet authorised for issue at 28 May 2020, to permit application of the relief as soon as possible, subject to any endorsement process.

Where do I get more details?

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