



## **21<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration**

### **Written statement by Sheffield University Management School**

*Agenda item 8: Public Service Workforce Matters.*

Recent developments related to COVID-19 confirmed once again that sound policy-making, policy implementation and service delivery by labour administration depend to a large extent on the quality and quantity of labour administration staff. From joint research executed over the last decade by the Sheffield University Management School and the International Labour Office (ILO) it is obvious that many labour administrations, especially in developed countries are seriously understaffed. This is a result of a more general tendency in many countries to consider labour administration as a non-essential component of government. In many developing countries, the budgetary allowances to ministries of labour are less than 1 per cent of the state budget. In some countries, this understaffing is a legacy of structural adjustment policies enacted some 30 years ago. Wide discrepancies continue to exist between regions.

However, understaffing is not the only major problem. Most labour administration employees are civil servants, despite the tendency to increase the number of contract and temporary workers, and their recruitment, selection and remuneration are mostly regulated by civil service statutes. The conditions of service offered by labour administration institutions are often not attractive to qualified workers and highly trained technical specialists. Even in many industrialized countries, a lack of IT specialists is a major impediment to the digitalization of labour administration matters. As a consequence, these type of jobs and services are often outsourced, creating an additional budgetary burden and leading to an unhealthy dependency of ministries of labour on external service providers. Moreover, many countries lack a systematic training policy or any centralized training institutions, and training is not often based on a systematic assessment of gaps in competence. This situation may arise through a reliance on local bodies providing incoherent ad hoc training, or through dependence on donor funds.

Many countries also suffer from instability of management and other senior staff of ministries of labour as a result of political change. While some countries (e.g. India) have adopted

legislation drawing a clear dividing line between political and administrative appointments of senior civil servants, in other contexts senior managers may change when the government changes, which may interrupt the continuity of policy initiatives. This is a particular problem for the conception and implementation of long term reforms, for example in the field of pension schemes. Especially in countries with weak governance systems, and in the absence of adequate selection criteria, the politicization of the civil service poses a serious risk that senior officials may be appointed who lack the competencies necessary to carry out their functions. In the field of labour administration, particular attention should be paid to the status of official who have enforcement competencies, especially labour and health and safety inspectors. In order to ensure the integrity of labour inspection (an activity crucially important for good governance of employment conditions), conditions of service for labour inspectors should ensure gender equality and facilitate employment stability and personal security in the exercise of their functions, underpinned by an appropriate regulatory framework. Labour inspectors should be granted stability of employment and be independent of changes of government and improper external influences.

Finally, modern methods of staff management should be considered. Improving the performance of public administration has been a focus for many governments, but in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian crises resulting from armed conflicts, this objective has recently acquired a new urgency. These developments have led to a dramatic increase in demand for labour administration's services in areas such as the provision of traditional labour market and social protection measures and assistance and help for war victims and refugees. Institutional and individual performance management schemes should be part of these efforts. To enable this type of initiative, it is essential to include staff representatives in their conception and implementation. As shown by recent research on reforms and innovation in labour administration, a lack of this type of social dialogue may seriously delay or hamper the implementation of reforms.