



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

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

#### *Agenda item 9: Digital Government*

Findings from recent surveys and studies implemented within the framework of cooperation between the International Labour Office in Geneva and the Sheffield University Management School demonstrate a range of benefits and challenges associated with ICT uptake in the labour administration field.

Specific benefits include the potential improvement of institutional communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing. Survey results reveal a particular benefit in terms of information flows between officials at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, facilitated by easier collection, presentation and provision of work-related information. ITC has also considerably facilitated inter-institutional communication, which is one of the preconditions for effective administration of labour matters, including prevention of work-related risks and enforcement of labour laws and regulations through cooperation between labour inspection, social security administration, tax authorities and the judicial system. The ability of labour administration to communicate with workers and employers has also increased as a result of ICT advances, linked in particular to the use of websites, emails and social media.

In general, the fields of labour administration that have benefited most from the introduction of ICT are labour inspection (easier access to labour law through technology, introduction of integrated computerized inspection management systems, use of mobile applications and devices by labour inspectors, development of digitalized cooperation schemes, facilitation of social control and prevention of labour law violation) and public employment services (provision of labour market information, intermediary employment services and overall digitalization of job centres).

However, while awareness of the potential benefits of ICT are widespread, the extent to which ICT is used in labour administration varies between countries. The diffusion of new technologies in developed countries is both profound and continuing at a rapid pace; developing countries do appear to be catching up and are also making progress, albeit at a slower rate. Technology has been widely used as basis for wage protection in many developing countries, particularly in the Arab Gulf states. These wage protection schemes (WPS) have been established in, for example, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman and Qatar, where these measures proved to be very effective in preventing the exploitation of low-paid and uneducated workers, especially among the migrant workforce. Whilst protecting the rights of guest workers, the longer term objective of these schemes is to encourage more locals to consider work in the private sector, e.g. by improving wage security.

Among the greatest challenges to ICT use in labour administration are issues pertaining to staffing (especially insufficient ICT training and low uptake on emails, file sharing options and social tools solutions, but also work intensification and cybersecurity threats), transfer of information on a multi- and cross-institutional basis (insufficient ICT tool interoperability, ICT tools' obsolescence, risks of data loss etc.), issues of transparency and decision-making and managing external technology acquisitions.

Recent studies have also shown that the use of ICT has – in the field of labour administration – a very positive impact on the practical operationalization of the principles of effective governance. Examples include the principles of effectiveness through better planning and smart allocation of labour administration tasks, monitoring of working conditions, introduction of integrated labour inspection schemes and electronic self-reporting and the principle of inclusiveness through horizontal and vertical electronic communication among institutions and the staff, creation of electronic registers for migrant workers, electronic facilitation of job seekers' access to information on vacancies, electronic dissemination of information to labour market participants, provision of confidential advice and consultation online and provision of online spaces for conflict resolution.