

24th session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written statement by Public Services International

Agenda item 8: Strategies for changing mindsets in the public sector, retaining talent and attracting younger workers.

Public Services International thanks the Committee's paper and wishes to contribute to the discussions with the following inputs:

Section II, point D – Potential benefits of using artificial intelligence in public sector human resources management.

In this respect, in addition to the challenges and ethical concerns raised by the incorporation of artificial intelligence in the public administration, there are some worrying trends worth examining as well. For instance, an article published in *The Guardian* (“AI Should Replace Some Work of Civil Servants, Starmer to Announce”, 12 March 2025) details plans to integrate artificial intelligence into government operations, aiming to save billions. The article reports that while the policy includes a directive that “no person’s substantive time should be spent on a task where digital or AI can do it better, quicker, and to the same high quality”, it also aims to cut over 10,000 civil service jobs. Unquestionably, artificial intelligence and – in general – the digitalization of the public administration has the potential to improve tasks and saves time when it supports workers – handling physically demanding work, cutting delays, and boosting output – ultimately benefiting the public in general. However, the line blurs when “efficiency” masks the intent of replacement and job cut behind the jargon, and shifts to morale loss when it is intended to eliminate roles outright, leaving workers insecure and undervalued. The divide rests on whether artificial intelligence is a tool for people or a substitute for them, with execution determining the human toll. Accordingly, issues such as the adoption of artificial intelligence and digitalization of the public administration should also be included within the social dialogue between employees and management. PSI Digital Bargaining Hub provides real-world examples of how such discussions are taking place in the public administration and how they are being shaped in the form of collective agreements and clauses that can be adapted for use at the negotiation table.

Section III, point A – Strategies for attracting and retaining younger workers

Public Services International approach to attract and retain young workers in the public administration centres on empowering young workers through its Young Workers Network, launched to amplify their voices and address their workplace challenges. Key efforts include advocating for decent working conditions – like fair pay and job security – and their right to organize and negotiate, which appeal to younger generations seeking meaningful careers. Campaigns such as quality public services and anti-privatization align with youth values of social impact, positioning public administration as a purposeful career choice. The PSI Youth Policy adopted in 2023 promotes training, leadership opportunities, and inclusion in union decision-making to retain and develop young talent. These initiatives aim to make public administration roles attractive and sustainable for the next generation.

Section IV – Promoting social dialogue that leaves no one behind

Collective bargaining or its functional equivalent are key elements of sound labour relations and vital to authoritative and effective outcomes resulting of decision-making processes. Consultation between public administration workers or their elected representatives and the

administration is therefore a decisive factor in achieving the strengthening of public sector capacities and legitimacy for managerial decisions. Collective bargaining is a fundamental principle and right enshrined in ILO Convention 98, which are further developed and tailored for the public sector in ILO Conventions 151 and 154. Convention 151 recognizes public sector constraints (e.g., budget limits, sovereignty) and offers flexibility by allowing to choose between collective bargaining or “other methods” (e.g., consultation) to determine working conditions, based on national laws or practices. This gives managers wiggle room to adapt processes to budget constraints or public sector priorities (e.g., avoiding rigid wage negotiations during fiscal crises). As a bonus, it includes dispute resolution (omitted in Convention 98) – vital for public sector workers facing hierarchical or legal barriers to bargaining. Convention 154 enhances this by mandating states to promote bargaining universally and facilitating voluntary negotiations.

Despite their benefits, ILO Conventions 151 and 154 have garnered remarkably few ratifications – 59 and 51, respectively – relative to the International Labour Organization’s 187 member States. A clear regional divide exists: Europe accounts for most ratifying countries, whereas Asia, for example, has only one (the Philippines). This pattern, with few exceptions, reflects the broader reality that social dialogue in the public administration is well-established and robust in some regions, yet faces significant obstacles and deficiencies in others. Many governments remain reluctant to fully engage in or commit to dialogue and negotiations with workers in the public administration, leading to poor labour relations in detriment to the public.

Importance of social dialogue at the subnational level

The Committee’s paper highlights several barriers to effective social dialogue at the subnational level, such as unclear power transfers, lack of understanding, and absent frameworks. The findings of the paper “Access to quality local public services for all: a precondition to beat inequality” (Daria Cibrario and Vera Wegmann. GOLD VI Working Paper Series #02, November 2021) aligns with this by emphasizing that local governance structures often lack the capacity or authority to implement participatory processes effectively, and suggests that for social dialogue to succeed, subnational governments need clearer mandates and resources. Without these, social dialogue risks being a hollow concept at this level.

The Committee asserts that social dialogue at the subnational level is important because it is the level at which democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms can be exercised by different population groups and communities, which need to be empowered to play a key role in social stability and cohesion, economic growth and sustainable development. In effect, social dialogue at the subnational level is also important because the local and regional governments are the main entry points for access to key public services such as education, health, security and a wide array of emergency services. As stated before, poor labour relations between workers in these areas and the administration also reflect in the public.

With reference to the Committee’s call for empowering local governments with whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, the Cibrario and Wegmann paper also offer examples where local authorities, when they are empowered to provide equitable access to public services and keep them under public ownership and control can better address territorial inequalities, community needs, and generate decent work opportunities. Its case studies (though not detailed here) often highlight participatory or co-design processes, which could be practical methods for social dialogue, ensuring policies reflect community input and ownership. The example of the 2022 memorandum between Public Services International and United Cities and Local Governments in Africa is a concrete illustration of the partnerships

the Committee advocates for. The Cibrario and Wegmann paper similarly emphasizes knowledge-sharing and regional cooperation as critical for scaling up successful local initiatives. It points to networks of local governments to disseminate best practices, showing how subnational social dialogue can be bolstered through global and regional collaboration.