



UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**Contribution to the
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Council (ECOSOC)
Integration Segment**

Contribution by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to the 2015 ECOSOC Integration Segment with the theme of “Achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all”

Chairperson’s summary, Ms. Margaret Saner, 27 February 2015

Introduction

In December 2014, the President of the Economic and Social Council invited the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies to provide inputs to the 2015 Integration Segment on achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all, with recommendations and technical guidance on how ECOSOC can integrate these inputs into the larger picture of sustainable development. This note reflects contributions from members of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

Governance and institutional framework issues are likely to be relevant to successful progress in many of the questions raised in the concept note of 30 October 2014. Briefly, from a governance perspective, the key challenges are to avoid discrimination, promote transparency and deliver fair and reasonable opportunities for citizens. Policies should ensure that education, training, professional development and employment support sustainable development in the context of a country’s particular goals. Capable institutions within legal and other frameworks provide the context which will enable effective governance, policy development and decision making.

Public sector as employer

As employers, public institutions are often seen as role models and are obliged to offer civil servants a decent, secure source of employment, so as to ensure the population’s public service needs are met effectively, efficiently and transparently, in compliance with regulations. Where there is discrimination against employing certain groups in the civil service or in the treatment of certain groups by civil servants this damages trust with potentially harmful impact and does not engender the necessary level of engagement and acceptance of changes, including, for example, new regulations that may be required to achieve the SDGs. Public administration has to be run demonstrably consistently with espoused goals.

This is also important because civil servants account for a high percentage of jobs in many countries (20 to 25 per cent in some cases). As such, job security would provide economic stability and promote social cohesion and sustainable practice among civil servants and their families.

The employment package should include decent wages and pensions as well as opportunities for growth via ongoing training programmes geared towards innovation, new technologies and the acquisition of skills that can be adapted to new realities. It is in the interest of the administration to have effective, competent public servants to implement government decisions. This would also foster more consistent communication between civil servants and the communities they serve, in turn, promoting greater trust between society and government.

Regulatory reform

Governments are responsible for the regulatory environment and in this context need to ensure a regulatory framework that promotes sustainable economic growth and development including job creation, the aim being to preserve productivity and guarantee services such as healthcare, education,

housing, recreational and cultural activities, which in turn contribute to improved public safety and social cohesion, environmental protection, and sustainability in cities and rural areas. While the specific challenges will vary from country to country and area to area, they include demographic changes which lead to high levels of youth unemployment in some areas, growth in the elderly population in others, and the exclusion of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups from employment. In many cases people can find themselves in double jeopardy, for example, women in rural areas who are without legal and property rights.

There is a long list of constitutional, legal, regulatory and administrative standards that need to be reviewed and updated to promote decent work for all. New ideas and policies are likely to be needed in some cases, for example to build institutions capable of developing a green economy, the adaptation of technology to these ends and the observance of legislation to formalize and guarantee decent work for all.

Public-private partnerships are being widely promoted, *inter alia*, by outsourcing activities that could be undertaken by the private sector and civil society actors, such as construction of administrative buildings and structures, catering and accommodation, liquid and solid sanitation, transport, maintenance of green areas, security of premises, printing, audit, evaluation, etc. To comply with the principles of effective governance it is essential that the management of public procurement, including commissioning, contracting and accountability, should be based on internationally accepted standards, including those of the World Bank, and carefully monitored.

Skills development

Public administration and social reforms are needed to attract young people to positions where creative activity is required, for example by offering decent wages. As was stated in the ILO's recently released Economic and Social Outlook, the private sector and service economy will be key engines of job creation for the next five years. But business leaders face the ongoing challenge of finding the right people with right skills to drive success in the marketplace despite high levels of unemployment. This paradox may be the result of a "talent mismatch", where the skills available do not align with the skills needed.

Moreover, the changing demographics of today's workforce mean that organizations need to adapt to new ideas of what a career path includes. Today's generation of job seekers is more mobile than ever. Many sociological polls testify to the fact that career and material remuneration are predominant concerns. At the same time, according to the international recruiting agency, Kelly Services, attitudes of the younger generation towards work are quite different from previous generations inasmuch as they are "lighter". Younger workers are not afraid of making mistakes, and often not afraid to lose their jobs.

Inequality

The problem of social inequality is a drag on the whole society. There is solid evidence, for example from the International Monetary Fund, that high inequality is a drag on growth, and that redistribution can be good for the economy. This view was recently supported by Standard & Poor's rating agency. Indeed, lower levels of inequality are associated with faster growth. Political perspectives vary on the impact of taxation with some taking the view that taxing the rich and helping the poor may reduce incentives to make money; but incentives are not the only contributor to economic growth. Opportunity is also crucial. Inability to enter the employment market and/or extreme inequality deprives many people of the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Among OECD countries with a very high level of inequality, education in poor families is worse than in countries with greater equality. According to the OECD,

economic growth is hampered in cases where there are a large number of people with insufficient professional qualifications. It is the task of governments to assure that children from poor families have proper education, and to support the unemployed. In the United Kingdom, for example, schools receive additional funding to support the education of children from disadvantaged families.

Response to demographic changes

In the current turbulent period, characterized by insecurity and an uncertain future, it is essential to assist those searching for new roles for those leaving the workplace on retirement. With people living longer, countries are delaying pension age, and older people have a huge reserve of experience, knowledge and professional skills, not least in the sphere of state administration. Many wish to continue to work or to be active in the community in some way and greater flexibility and acceptance of late age change of employment would be beneficial in terms of the economy and health costs.

There appears to be resurrection of interest in workers' skills, which should be supported by numerous state or state sponsored educational programmes and expanded infrastructure. The World Skills International movement is playing a very positive role. The German model of a dual education in 350 professions is also relevant, and is being tested in ten regions of the Russian Federation. Apprenticeship schemes have been reintroduced in the United Kingdom and employers incentivised to take on trainees.

Employment regulation and conditions of service

There are established differences of view between those who believe in minimal regulation in order to reduce burdens on employers and employment, and those who seek greater protection for individuals in employment in order to avoid exploitation of employees. The SDGs encourage us to look towards at least a basis of 'decent work for all' which, from a governance perspective suggests a fair wage, reasonable hours and safe working environment. This requires regulation, however 'light', and choices to be made about whether for example to pay a 'living wage' as is being called for in the United Kingdom which already has a 'minimum wage' (lower than the called for 'living wage'). Employers have responded to the downturn by introducing many more part time jobs or zero hours contracts meaning that technically people are in employment but their income may have substantially reduced or they work insufficient hours to qualify for normal employment protection.

Balancing the financial imperatives of business with the concept of decent work for all will require innovation and in some cases a fundamental change of approach in the enabling framework for employment.

The management and retention of a skilled workforce is crucial for every organization. Therefore, it is essential that the business and workforce strategies are aligned. The efficient and effective recruitment, deployment and management of new employees are important to drive employee engagement and productivity. As a potential first step which could subsequently be broadened into the community, recruitment and retention of public sector employees would be strengthened through public sector reforms that:

- Improve the process of identifying the human resource needs of public administration;
- Base public service recruitment on principles of good governance, transparency, equal opportunity and ethics;
- Include fair conditions of employment in the public sector through non-discrimination in wages and compensation systems, incentives, career prospects, pensions and social protection;

- Address inequalities in recruitment and career development where found;
- Realize and monitor the implementation of principles of gender equality, including the parity principle in the public sector, both at national and local levels;
- Recognize the equality of women in public administration, including the promotion of women in leadership positions, through such measures as affirmative action, provision of child care and family care, flex-time, and awareness and elimination of sexual harassment.

Labour relations

In considering decent work for all, it is important to consider engaging employees in the way they are managed by the firms that hire them. Employers generally prefer that staff work as long and as effectively as possible. To achieve this, employers have to ensure that sufficient of employees' interests are met in the workplace. This can range from the increasingly popular 'masterclass marathon' to a full range of amenities close to the office.

Small companies are a major source of innovation. According to an analysis by the firm Booz & Company, firms have been paying between \$1 and \$10 million to consultants on innovations since 2012. Moreover, according to Insync Surveys, there is a direct link between employee satisfaction and the financial returns of employers.

To support good labour relations, public sector reforms usually aim to:

- Educate, train and build the capacity of trade unions and staff associations;
- Provide a legal framework for the right to take action, the right to organize, and assure minimum conditions of service;
- Raise awareness among different stakeholders (employers, unions and workers) on aspects of sustainable development, diversity, gender, risk and resilience;
- Establish optimal conditions for constructive social dialogue undertaken in good faith between employers, unions and staff representatives.

Some countries may also wish to encourage co-ownership or cooperative movements in which employees are also owners of the business or groups of individual businesses working together in cooperation whilst retaining a degree of self-determination.

Performance of labour ministries

The role and capability of the government department responsible for labour/employment will be critical to ensuring that the SDG can be further defined internationally and met in the local context. It will require working closely with those responsible for education, for productivity and the economy, as well as effective negotiating for funding and the introduction of enabling legislation. Staff performance needs to focus on innovation and problem solving. As is often the case resolving one issue may lead to benefits in other areas. But there can be unintended consequences, so liaison and collaboration across Ministries and with non governmental stakeholders is vital.

The performance of labour ministries could be further strengthened by:

- Ensuring the resources allocated to departments in charge of public sector employment are sufficient to meet the agreed goals;
- Enhancing the role of employment and labour ministries in overseeing international labour instruments, including legal conventions;

- Training and building the capacity of those responsible for enforcing labour regulations and providing them with the means to accomplish their mission.

As an illustration, the Russian Labour Ministry plans to introduce an innovation with the aim to enhance the effectiveness of executive bodies of the Russian Federation at the regional level in the area of employment and state services. The Ministry has developed methods for appraising the effectiveness of the regional employment centres, on the basis of such criteria as the number of interviews conducted via the Internet, time spent by the unemployed in queues, and the number of people who apply for employment with government multifunctional centres. The plan, entitled “Appraisal of quality and accessibility of state services in the sphere of employment promotion for population”, will require regional employment centres to transmit the data collected to the Labour Ministry. To further support labour, the government has announced plans to earmark 52 billion rubles (\$800 million) in support of the unemployed as the economy is affected by current circumstances.

Summary and recommendations

- **Actions required to enable this SDG will vary according to current practice and standards;**
- **Approaches must be based on effective analysis and evidence gathering in the country concerned;**
- **From a governance perspective, regulatory frameworks should as a minimum, be free from unfair discrimination and remove barriers to employment whilst protecting workers from exploitation;**
- **Known challenges should be addressed through policies to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to work safely and legally for a reasonable payment;**
- **Effective public administrations can be an exemplar for the SDG and competent, motivated public servants will be needed to implement the policies and frameworks to achieve the SDG in the wider community;**
- **Looking beyond the minimum ‘safety net’ innovative approaches will be required to fully reach the potential and aims of the SDG including a greater emphasis on education and training, removal of barriers such as lack of transport, access to e-solutions and opportunities to access funding for personal and organisational development in support of achieving decent work for all;**
- **Recognising the cross-cutting nature of the challenges in enhancing institutions to mitigate governance risks and enable policies and approaches that support the SDG, collaboration and informal exchange of ideas and expertise within the United Nations system will be vital.**