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**Strategies for changing mindsets in the public sector,
retaining talent and attracting younger workers**

Strategies for attracting and retaining a qualified public sector workforce and leaving no one behind

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Rolf Alter and Alketa Peci in collaboration with fellow Committee members Ronald Mendoza, Soonae Park, Sherifa Sherif and Najat Zarrouk.

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Strategies for attracting and retaining a qualified public sector workforce and leaving no one behind

Summary

Rapidly changing global circumstances and the pressure to address multiple crises at once have led to higher demand for strong, effective, inclusive and innovative public institutions. That in turn calls for attracting and retaining a dedicated and highly qualified public sector workforce that leaves no one behind, including by providing adequate opportunities for young people.

In the present paper, the authors examine the ways in which governments can build and manage such a public sector workforce by, inter alia, modernizing human resources strategies and continuously monitoring and improving them. They emphasize rightsizing as a main objective in determining workforce numbers, in particular in the face of calls to simply downsize in response to financial pressures. Well-crafted human resources strategies, together with a clear sense of the scope of what is needed, can help to attract and retain qualified workers and talent, which can in turn lead to improved service delivery and increase public trust.

The authors consider the merits of various human resources strategies, such as competitive compensation and benefits packages, merit-based recruitment, investment in skills and career development, and succession planning. They discuss the particular needs and aspirations of both entry- and senior-level employees, providing examples of ways to attract and retain individuals of all working ages. They also note the potential benefits of using artificial intelligence in public sector human resources management.

The authors address the question of social dialogue and the need to promote it as an aspect of workforce development that can strengthen the responsiveness of the public sector to the needs of society and help to deliver sustainable development. They argue that the benefits of social dialogue can best be realized through active support and an enabling environment, especially at the subnational level.

Lastly, the authors put forward for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration a set of recommendations on how to build, manage and retain a qualified public sector workforce while leaving no one behind.

I. Background

1. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed to building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and noted that all countries stand to benefit from having a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society. In the Pact for the Future, Member States reiterated the commitment to improving opportunities for decent work for all and to creating decent jobs and livelihoods for youth, especially in developing countries.¹

2. In its resolution 79/224 on human resources development, the General Assembly called upon the international community to develop short-, medium- and long-term strategies to effectively enhance human resources capacities, as educated, skilled, healthy, capable, productive and adaptable workforces were the foundation for achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and development. The Assembly also encouraged Member States to adopt and implement comprehensive human resources development strategies premised on national development objectives.

3. The present paper is focused on strategies for attracting, managing and retaining a qualified public sector workforce, including young workers, while leaving no one behind and builds upon previous work undertaken by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. At its twenty-third session, for example, the Committee noted that there was a need to sustain the momentum of innovation in the public sector prompted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and echoed the call to develop comprehensive human resources development strategies premised on national development objectives, as well as a change of mindsets in the public sector, raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting public sector workforce diversity and building the human resources capacities of subnational authorities. The Committee also emphasized that investing and building public sector capabilities in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence could encourage young professionals to join the sector and motivate and retain them once hired.

4. Rapidly changing global circumstances and the pressure to address multiple crises and challenges such as inequalities have underscored the need for strong, inclusive, effective and innovative public institutions. That in turn calls for building and retaining a highly qualified public sector workforce, including by providing opportunities for young people. In addition, effective social dialogue is required, especially at the subnational level, which can encourage and anchor inclusiveness and participation with the goal of leaving no one behind.

II. Building and managing a capable public sector workforce

5. Governments have different roles and responsibilities with regard to regulating and managing the public sector workforce, including attracting and retaining talent, promoting diversity, upskilling employees through training and education, enforcing international labour standards, and collecting and analysing data relating to the public sector workforce.

6. Beyond skills and competences, the performance of policymaking and public service delivery depends on the commitment of public sector employees to and their attitude towards the creation of public value. In well-functioning government machinery, political leaders are responsible for showing appreciation for the public value created by the public sector. The COVID-19 pandemic led to valuable insights into the importance of acknowledging and rewarding public sector front-line staff,

¹ General Assembly resolution 79/1.

which can serve as useful guidance for political leaders and entice them to apply similar practices on a more regular basis.

7. Governments have the central role in the implementation of the Goals and in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.² However, in many countries, institutions at all levels of government are suffering from a lack of public trust due in part to disregard for the role of government in the delivery of sustainable development. Considerable effort to promote the virtues, principles and value of public service will be needed to counter these trends. This includes demonstrating a commitment to ethical conduct, transparency, accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs, which can in turn help to increase trust in public institutions.

A. Providing employment and educational opportunities

8. Policies are required that create both employment and educational opportunities. Such policies should include consideration of the needs of the labour market and encouragement of tertiary educational institutions, technical colleges and vocational training schools to align course offerings and enrolment priorities with public and private sector requirements.

9. Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship can create new employment opportunities. Governments can support start-ups and small businesses through grants, loans and mentorship programmes. By fostering a culture of innovation, governments can stimulate job creation and economic diversification. When based on transformative leadership and a strong and sound framework for decentralization and effective local governance, local and regional governments can contribute to the creation of job opportunities, in particular for young talent. They need, however, to be empowered to promote local economic development that can attract talent and create employment opportunities. Effective policies that promote fair wages and decent working conditions are also required.

10. Understanding labour market trends is crucial for effective skills development. Governments need to conduct regular labour market analyses to identify emerging industries, job roles and the skill sets needed. Those data can inform the development of targeted training programmes that equip workers with the skills needed for future jobs. Therefore, labour market analysis, forecasting and data collection are important for skills development.

11. Collaboration between the public and private sectors can lead to successful skill-building initiatives, especially when it comes to fostering digital skills. Governments can also facilitate partnerships with educational institutions and non-profit organizations to develop customized training programmes that meet the needs of public institutions. Effective policies that support employee training and vocational training programmes are required. This may call for allocation of additional resources, where budgets allow, to build and maintain state-of-the-art training facilities, provide scholarships and financial aid to students, and ensure access to quality education for all.

B. Rightsizing the public sector workforce

12. Governments perform a wide range of functions and services and decide upon and implement public policies, making a dedicated and skilled public sector

² Economic and Social Council resolution [2017/23](#), para. 4.

workforce a necessity. Some public services are provided directly by public entities, while others are delivered through partnerships or outsourced to third parties, such as private sector or non-profit organizations. Therefore, the size and responsibilities of the public sector workforce depend on the arrangements in place, which can vary from one country to another and from one policy area to another. For example, in some countries, most healthcare providers, teachers and emergency workers are employed directly by the government, while in others, individuals in these occupational groups are employed mainly by private sector or non-profit organizations.

Alternatives to public sector downsizing

13. In view of the scale of public sector employment, its status as a potential target of budgetary savings is not surprising. In most countries, public employee compensation represents approximately 30 per cent of public expenditure, with the public sector wage bill having important fiscal and expenditure efficiency implications.³ In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the compensation of public employees averages about 20 per cent of general government budget expenditure, representing the second largest expenditure category.⁴ In addition, globally, public employment accounts for just over 11 per cent of the total labour market, with variations from one region to another and increasing with the level of national income. In high-income countries, the share of employed persons working in the public sector is about 16 per cent compared with 7 per cent in low-income countries.⁵ In OECD countries, public employment accounts for 18 per cent of total employment on average, reaching more than 30 per cent in a few of them.⁶

14. As fiscal pressures are increasing nearly everywhere, many governments are reviewing public sector workforce expenditure in search of savings, primarily through reductions in the size of the public workforce, as well as by scaling back benefits and modifying the terms of employment. Consideration of public sector downsizing as a potential buffer in times of tight budgets is not new. In fact, cyclical adjustments of the number of public employees have been tried before, independently of more structural arguments for employment reductions, such as, for example, those in favour of “small government”.

Relevance and value of the public sector downsizing approach under current circumstances

15. First, considerations of downsizing the public sector workforce, like other proposals for public expenditure reduction, need to be accompanied by cost-benefit analyses or similar impact assessments. This will greatly improve the chances of quality decision-making relating to public employment. After all, identifying the priorities and targets of public sector reduction requires precise analysis of and insights into changes in employment in specific sectors, ministries and agencies with regard to positions and qualifications of staff, age structures, gender balance and many other parameters. In addition, issues relating to allocating the modifications across different levels of government will need to be specified and addressed. A comprehensive assessment will also allow for a better understanding of appropriate implementation strategies for public sector downsizing in terms of range, depth and

³ World Bank, *Public Sector Employment and Compensation: An Assessment Framework* (Washington, D.C., 2021).

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Government at a Glance 2019* (Paris, 2019).

⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO), “Who powers the public sector?”, 18 July 2024.

⁶ OECD, *Government at a Glance*.

time frames, as well as of the expected savings in the short or medium term, when it is most needed.

16. Second, in view of the urgency to achieve the Goals by 2030, strong public institutions, including a competent public sector workforce, have been identified as one of the key drivers of acceleration. Reduction of the public sector workforce will, therefore, most likely hamper progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

17. Third, the size, as well as the compensation and other benefits received by the public sector workforce, is undoubtedly subject to public expenditure scrutiny. In times of fiscal stress, possible savings through the modification of one or more of these parameters needs to be explored. At the same time, evidence-informed assessments are necessary to calibrate downsizing measures in an effective, efficient, fair and transparent way. This includes paying attention to the ongoing serious delays in achieving the Goals and the low level of trust in government while recognizing the important role of the public sector in overcoming the challenges of adverse developments in many public policy areas.

18. While political leaders need to be able to rely on agile, committed and effective government machinery, they are also responsible and accountable for providing and maintaining adequate employment conditions for the public sector workforce. A forward-looking approach leading to continuous rightsizing of a capable public sector workforce would be best suited to avoiding ad hoc crisis management decisions, which are likely to be costly in more than just financial terms.

19. The correct size of the public sector workforce has to be determined strategically, and not only for fiscal reasons; the right balance also has to be found between the public and private sector workforce, taking into account the implication of the chosen path in its multiple dimensions. An adequate assessment of the wage bill is important in understanding its impact on public finances, as well as the allocation of labour between the public and private sectors.

C. Designing effective human resources strategies

20. Modernizing human resources strategies can result in attracting and retaining qualified workers and lead to the establishment of a strong public sector workforce. By fostering a culture of innovation, equipping public servants with the tools that they need to succeed, and creating an environment in which employees feel valued and empowered, governments can serve more efficiently and effectively. However, often, outdated human resources management practices, such as rigid hiring procedures and a lack of diversity in recruitment, as well as fiscal crises, tend to obfuscate the important role of strategies for recruiting and retaining a qualified public sector workforce.

21. Human resources strategies in the public sector need to, therefore, be continuously assessed, adapted and improved to attract and retain the best public employees and ensure that they remain engaged and their skills remain current. That is especially important because such strategies can be seen as a crucial investment in people, can support the strengthening of public trust and social cohesion, can help to avoid discrimination and can foster the inclusion of a younger generation in the public sector workforce, in line with the commitments and actions in the Pact for the Future.⁷

22. However, the absence of a central human resources function and the lack of data in many countries hinder the improvement of human resources policies and management. There is, therefore, a need to increase the collection of data and evidence through regular human resources assessments, allowing for the tracking of

⁷ See, for example, the Pact for the Future, action 34 and annex II.

key indicators to continuously monitor progress and make informed adjustments as needed. In addition, although governments increasingly administer public sector workforce surveys using similar concepts, the questions asked and the methodologies followed can vary substantially, which has hindered comparisons among countries. The World Bank has introduced the Global Survey of Public Servants as a tool to achieve harmonization.⁸

23. The public sector workforce faces advantages and disadvantages relating to the specificities of employment. On the one hand, public employees tend to enjoy greater employment stability compared with those employed by the private sector, which may entice some people to join the public sector workforce. On the other hand, public sector employees sometimes face relatively slower salary growth and lower levels of discretion in decision-making compared with employees in the private sector. In the public sector, decisions are typically handled through highly formalized and hierarchical processes compared with more flat and agile decision structures in the private sector.

24. In addition, with a few exceptions, there are rarely centralized or unified systems for managing the public sector workforce, with public sector personnel being employed and managed separately by central and subnational governments. The resulting lack of unified information hinders the refinement of human resources strategies across the government. Any assessment would need to be applied to a sufficient number of administrative divisions to provide a reliable picture of public sector employment and compensation practices and their impacts. This may call for a far-reaching change in approach to human resources management in terms of attracting, recruiting, developing, retaining, promoting and moving employees through different entities of the public sector.⁹

Attracting and retaining qualified public sector employees

25. Effective recruitment procedures are one ingredient in the establishment of a professional public sector workforce; they need to be accompanied by other human resources management instruments, such as adequate remuneration, vocational training and development, performance evaluation, measures to ensure integrity and disciplinary procedures. These instruments are best deployed so as to attract qualified individuals to the public sector while motivating and helping to retain them once they are hired, in particular when it comes to top talent that is not easily replaced.

26. Recruitment takes place within particular national and local contexts, and well-crafted strategies will reflect these different conditions. In developed countries, for example, younger generations might be more enticed by opportunities in the private sector, which suggests a competitive dynamic, while, in developing countries, with skilled workers pursuing opportunities abroad, brain drain and a thinning of the ranks can be a major concern. Given their reach, public sector employment policies can also have a major impact on the domestic labour market as a whole, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where the government may be the largest employer in the formal sector.

27. Among the most common motivational determinants for attracting and maintaining a qualified public sector workforce are remuneration, available resources and working conditions. Competitive compensation and benefits packages can go a long way towards attracting and retaining a qualified public sector workforce, which

⁸ Ayesha Khurshid and Christian Schuster, "Surveys of public servants: the global landscape", in *The Government Analytics Handbook: Leveraging Data to Strengthen Public Administration*, Daniel Rogger and Christian Schuster, eds. (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2023).

⁹ Suk Kim Pan, "How to attract and retain the best in government", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, vol. 74, No. 4 (2008).

can in turn lead to higher productivity and increased quality of government service delivery.¹⁰ Other determinants are dependent on the characteristics of a specific policy area (e.g. for health workers, the frequency of contact and interaction with patients),¹¹ which need to be considered strategically from a policy perspective.

28. Recruitment procedures themselves are a challenge, as complicated rules and methods tend to make it difficult and time-consuming to hire qualified candidates when needed. For example, some human resources practices are focused on the legal aspects of the selection process while lacking mechanisms to evaluate subjective traits, such as public service ethos and motivation or socio-psychological skills. Governments, however, need to select people with not only the adequate knowledge, skills and abilities for the function that they will perform but also with a sense of public affairs, public service motivation and shared public values. This is particularly crucial in countries with lingering governance reform agendas and relatively weak institutional systems. In other cases, recruitment practices may lack transparency. Another challenge is that most governments use varied recruiting systems across different departments or functions without applying a holistic, whole-of-government approach, hindering the improvement and alignment of recruitment strategies.

29. Implementing and localizing Goal 8 (on decent work and economic growth) at the subnational level matters because public institutions can generate economic growth and employment from the bottom up through local economic development strategies that harness unique resources and opportunities across the country. They can act as a model in providing a safe and secure working environment and in guaranteeing equal pay for equal work. Such practices also need to be included as part of the local public procurement criteria when working with the private and third sectors.¹²

30. Attraction to work in the public sector is also dependent on the macro-level conditions of the political environment. New research findings indicate that, in polarized political contexts, people's identity as either coalition or opposition supporters shapes their inclination to apply for work in government ministries.¹³ Such motivational factors are likely to become more salient in contexts characterized by high political polarization, populism and democratic backsliding.

Issues relating to conditions of work

31. Merit-based recruitment strategies, which can contribute to employee retention, need to be integrated into adequate staffing (avoiding overstaffing, understaffing or allocating public employees to positions for which they are not qualified) and performance management, as well as competitive compensation packages and pension benefits.

32. A positive work environment that takes into account employees' contributions and nurtures a supportive organizational culture can become an intangible but highly valued asset for public employees. Delegating authority for decision-making and promoting ownership of projects are motivational factors that can lead to retention, particularly in entities with a highly skilled public sector workforce. In addition, providing employees with dining facilities and paying for public transport are

¹⁰ World Bank, *Public Sector Employment and Compensation*.

¹¹ Alexandre Fernandes, Gonalo Santinha and Teresa Forte, "Public service motivation and determining factors to attract and retain health professionals in the public sector: a systematic review", *Behavioural Sciences*, vol. 12, No. 95 (2022).

¹² United Cities and Local Governments, "The Sustainable Development Goals: what local governments need to know", 2015.

¹³ Sharon Gilad, Raanan Sulitzeanu-Kenan and David Levi-Faur, "A taste for government employment also rests on its political flavour", *Public Administration Review* (early view, 2024).

example of measures that can boost motivation. Offering day-care centres for children can promote women's leadership.

33. Protecting the mental health and promoting the well-being of public employees is another factor in retention. Safe and healthy workplaces reduce stress and conflict and can enhance job satisfaction and work performance.

34. Green human resources practices that are aimed at integrating environmental awareness and responsibility into all human resources practices and processes can also become motivating factors. From recruitment to career development to retention, such practices represent a holistic approach that is aimed at not only minimizing environmental impact but also promoting a sustainable working culture. Employees who feel that their organization takes environmental concerns seriously are more motivated and committed to their work. This can also lead to higher productivity and a positive organizational culture, which can contribute to the long-term success of the organization.

35. Helping public employees to achieve work-life balance is another strategic tool for employee retention. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the adoption of more flexible working arrangements, which were valued greatly by employees, but were dependent on the nature of the work and the policy area. Most public employees experienced flexibility in two ways: by changing their work location to working from home more often and by adjusting their working hours. Governments are currently exploring how to integrate new and recently introduced tools into the broader public sector workforce management agenda, including by offering remote work opportunities and options for flexible working hours.

36. Front-line public employees in areas such as healthcare and policing, however, often cannot benefit from flexible working arrangements due to the nature of their work and its requirement for in-person interactions. At the same time, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence have the potential to reduce the workload of front-line public employees such as teachers through the streamlining of activities, including the correction of homework and the establishment of individualized plans for student improvement.¹⁴

37. Many public employees are passionate about making a difference. Doing meaningful work is usually a motivating factor in choosing a career path in the public sector. Work with a purpose and projects that have a high impact can, therefore, attract candidates seeking meaningful employment and lead to the motivation and retention of existing staff. For example, through a multi-year education project carried out in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, the state's teaching and learning process indicator was increased by 19.8 per cent between 2023 and 2024 through investment in digital platforms and educator training. More than 648 schools, including urban, Indigenous and military schools, attended by 330,000 students, have been supported by a network of 24,000 professors trained by and involved in the programme, working with clear performance indicators.¹⁵

38. The reputation of public institutions can also help to attract and retain the most qualified employees. Organizational branding to establish a government entity as a prestigious organization can be a useful strategy. The image of public institutions in transitional economies, for example, is often not positive, so their brand identity needs to be improved to attract and retain the best employees. The same can be said of rapidly modernizing middle-income countries that seek to overcome the middle-

¹⁴ See, for example, Diretoria de Desenvolvimento da Gestão Pública e Políticas Educacionais da Fundação Getúlio Vargas, "Sistema estruturado de ensino do Mato Grosso", 2024.

¹⁵ Directorate for Development of Public Management and Educational Policies at Getúlio Vargas Foundation.

income trap by overhauling and trimming their public sector workforce, but experience challenges similar to those of countries with economies in transition.

Skill and career development opportunities within the public sector

39. In addition to attractive compensation and benefits packages, better training and career development programmes can contribute to reducing turnover and retaining qualified public officials and employees. Adequate professional development opportunities, through training, mentorship and career advancement programmes, need to be provided.¹⁶

40. The competencies that public employees need the most are creative and critical thinking, problem-solving and communication. Innovation skills, which allow public employees to adapt to change and help them to generate new ideas that create value and improve processes, are also required. Innovation-related skills and capabilities can be increased by creating innovation units within government. Such units can find solutions to challenging problems, including by using new technologies to improve public service delivery. This idea is reflected in the Pact for the Future, in which countries are encouraged to prioritize and set targets for the development of digital competencies of public officials and institutions to enact, develop and implement strategies and policies for inclusive, secure and user-centred digital public services.

41. Complex political, economic and social issues need to be taken into account when human resources systems are shaped strategically. Politicians and high-level public servants, therefore, need to be able to understand different kinds of multidimensional issues while also being made to realize that human resources management is very important for advancing the 2030 Agenda.

42. The review and upgrade of the standards of excellence for public administration education and training undertaken by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, 2024, addressed for the first time the importance and challenges of the 2030 Agenda for public employees. In the standards, governments were strongly encouraged to invest in learning and skills, among others, and to promote a Goal-based mindset among public employees. This is in line with earlier advice from the Committee to take a holistic approach to changing the mindsets of public servants and political leaders to align them with the principles and values of the 2030 Agenda and the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2018.

Succession planning

43. An essential component of a government's strategy for sustainability and unimpeded continuity is effective succession planning. Although the leadership positions of certain bodies might not be susceptible to high turnover, all governments need to consider putting in place short- and long-term succession plans that will facilitate the transfer of responsibilities from current to future leaders. To be successful in filling upcoming talent gaps, succession planning needs to include identification of upcoming vacant leadership positions, an understanding of the current state of the entity, continuous tracking of talent within the entity, initiation of a leadership development process, and the use of available talent data and modern assessment techniques.

¹⁶ See also, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, "Employee turnover and retention", 2024.

D. Potential benefits of using artificial intelligence in public sector human resources management

44. Developing and using generative artificial intelligence as a tool gives governments the ability to become more effective and to streamline service delivery. Generative artificial intelligence also has the potential to improve recruitment processes, learning and development outcomes, employee engagement and retention of talent in the public sector. It can transform how the public sector attracts and selects talent and can support finding the right person for specific jobs or projects, such as through personalized outreach messages. The use of artificial intelligence tools can also promote equal opportunity and transparency during the hiring process, for example by helping to generate personalized onboarding plans adapted to each recruit's role, experience and learning style.

45. In terms of the learning and development of public servants, generative artificial intelligence can efficiently develop personalized courses that are aligned with individual learning goals and needs. On the basis of performance evaluations, it can also assist in identifying thematic and cross-cutting human resources development requirements. By analysing an employee's skills, performance data and career aspirations, generative artificial intelligence can create tailored learning pathways.

46. Artificial intelligence can also support performance management, assess employee engagement and well-being, and facilitate career development and succession planning. It can support employee retention strategies, among others, by developing personalized suggestions for improving work-life balance, mental health and job satisfaction, conducting targeted communication campaigns to boost morale and reinforce company culture, and creating tailored career development plans for employees.¹⁷

47. However, it is important to keep in mind the many challenges and ethical concerns relating to generative artificial intelligence that must be addressed urgently as the technology continues to evolve. It is also important to consider that building or rebuilding and strengthening trust in government critically depends on the effective delivery of public goods and services, especially at the subnational level. While the use of digital technology can lead to productivity gains in public service delivery, responding to the call for inclusiveness and leaving no one behind also means maintaining in-person delivery channels. Based on empirical evidence, the factors influencing trust in government include satisfaction with administrative services, bureaucratic integrity and fair treatment of people by public employees.

III. Making the public sector attractive to everyone

A. Strategies for attracting and retaining younger workers

48. The public sector workforce is increasingly witnessing the entry of younger generations, sometimes referred to as "Generation MZ" (millennials and Generation Z), whose preferences, expectations and work styles differ significantly from those of previous generations. Integrating their unique characteristics into public sector human resources strategies is critical to fostering an adaptive, resilient and dynamic workforce capable of addressing modern governance challenges.

49. Young workers emphasize the importance of work-life balance, often seeking job conditions, such as flexible working arrangements, that are aligned with their quality-of-life aspirations. Studies indicate that their career choices are influenced

¹⁷ See, for example, Hacking HR, "Using generative AI across moments that matter in the entire employee lifecycle", LinkedIn post, 25 August 2024.

heavily by the potential for personal well-being, distinguishing them from earlier generations, who often prioritize job security and stability.¹⁸

50. Competitive salaries and benefits are significant motivators for young employees. In addition, their need for validation and recognition often translates into a strong preference for financial rewards as a tangible measure of their achievements.¹⁹

51. Millennial and Generation Z employees exhibit a strong desire for rapid promotions and immediate career advancement. Given that they value upward mobility, they may demonstrate a propensity to switch jobs if they perceive a lack of growth opportunities or immediate rewards in their current positions.²⁰

52. Beyond monetary rewards, younger generations seek roles that are aligned with their personal values and provide opportunities to make a social impact. They prioritize working for organizations that have a clear sense of purpose and corporate responsibility and where there is potential in their roles for significant influence.²¹

53. The prevailing job-hopping culture of young workers allows for greater flexibility and growth in their career paths, but does not work well in the public sector, which is typically characterized by a more rigid employment structure consisting of longer-term positions. Young employees value opportunities for international exposure and career mobility, as well as dynamic workplace environments. This reflects their desire for continuous learning and professional growth through diverse and challenging experiences. Attracting some of the most talented young workers can therefore be a challenge, especially if capacity-building and development efforts in the public sector are lacking.

54. Despite stereotypes that portray younger generations as less motivated or loyal to organizations, research highlights their collaborative spirit, technological aptitude and openness to innovation. For instance, many millennial and Generation Z workers actively seek to contribute positively to their organizations and prefer open communication with supervisors.²² Moreover, their familiarity with gamified processes and global communication tools positions them as agents of change in evolving workplace cultures.²³

55. By understanding and leveraging the above-mentioned characteristics of younger generations, public sector entities can create inclusive, innovative and adaptive work environments that not only attract top talent but also drive public service excellence in an era of rapid change.

¹⁸ Kimberly S. McDonald and Linda M. Hite, "The next generation of career success: implications for HRD", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, vol. 10, No. 1 (2008).

¹⁹ Eddy S.W. Ng, Linda Schweitzer and Sean T. Lyons, "New Generation, Great Expectations: A Field Study of the Millennial Generation", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 25, No. 2 (June 2010).

²⁰ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York, Atria, 2006).

²¹ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, "Managing tomorrow's people: millennials at work: perspectives from a new generation", 2008.

²² Karen K. Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani, "Millennials in the workplace: a communication perspective on millennials' organizational relationships and performance", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 25, No. 2 (2010).

²³ Zbysław Dobrowolski, Grzegorz Drozdowski and Mirela Panait, "Understanding the impact of Generation Z on risk management: a preliminary views on values, competencies, and ethics of the Generation Z in public administration", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, No. 7 (2022).

B. Strategies for attracting and retaining senior public servants

56. While most of the above-mentioned strategies apply to all the employees, there are additional challenges in attracting and retaining senior public servants. Older public employees are mostly interested in an exciting place to work, with many high-calibre, highly motivated people wanting to do important, meaningful jobs for their country and finding further motivation in creating high public value. The scope of managerial roles and the opportunity to learn and grow might also be attractive to them.

57. However, senior public servants may face organizational and cultural frustrations, as well as financial constraints, that press them to leave. They might become frustrated when consistently faced with the inability to promote change, and they might comment on the physical, mental and emotional impact of trying to bring change to a resistant culture. Such a lack of progress and achievement, combined with below-market pay, may prompt them to leave.²⁴ These challenges will need to be addressed in order to attract and retain more experienced public employees.

58. The experience gained by senior public servants can be used by the public sector to train and capacitate younger generations and support developing countries, for example through capacity-building efforts, peer exchanges and technical assistance.

C. Questions of diversity, equity and inclusion

59. As discussed by the Committee at its twenty-third session, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion is important in order to retain a qualified public sector workforce, particularly in contexts of important inequalities in the composition of the workforce and persistently underrepresented social groups.

60. Although wage equity should be implemented by providing equivalent payment for similar jobs with similar skills and performance, this is often not the case. For example, developing, fragile and conflict-affected countries may have arrangements through which some employees are paid more than others. In Afghanistan, for example, donor-funded staff received higher salaries than public servants. Such inequalities raise equity concerns, provide the wrong incentives to other public sector employees, and hinder human resources planning and the long-term sustainability of wage bill systems.

61. Promoting inclusive workplaces, addressing biases and ensuring equal opportunities are key to retaining motivated employees.²⁵ In its earlier work, the Committee underscored the need to take into account two principles of effective governance for sustainable development under the umbrella of inclusiveness in establishing and managing the public sector workforce: non-discrimination and leaving no one behind.

62. Important worldwide advances have been made in gender equality in the public sector workforce, supported particularly through the explicit endorsement of international and multilateral organizations and the subsequent increasing amount of data and indicators on gender that are integrated into current governance measures. However, more needs to be done to address professional elitism, discrimination based on race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and migration status, and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. For example, Brazil has taken action against discrimination by voluntarily adopting a Sustainable Development Goal 18 to

²⁴ Catherine Baxendale, “How to best attract, induct and retain talent recruited into the senior civil service”, September 2014.

²⁵ OECD, *All Hands In? Making Diversity Work for All* (Paris, 2020).

promote ethnic and racial equality, representing national efforts to combat racism within the scope of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. Promoting a social dialogue that leaves no one behind

63. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between or among representatives of governments, employers, workers and, lately, other civil society groups on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.²⁶ Social dialogue is a process – involving two or more parties, notably governments and a representative of employers’ and workers’ organizations – of setting, changing and applying rules concerning work and work-related issues. Social dialogue refers mainly to formal relations allowing consultation, negotiation or the sharing of information between the employer and agents. It is an essential lever for the proper functioning of public institutions at all levels of governance.

64. The main objective of effective social dialogue is to encourage and anchor inclusiveness and participation, with the goals of leaving no one behind, giving all relevant stakeholders the opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making processes, and promoting a sense of shared ownership of and responsibility for the outcome. The goal is to reach a consensus between employers and workers, whether from the public or the private sector, on issues of shared interest and concern. This can contribute to a peaceful social climate and working environment, which has a positive impact on economic growth and performance, effective governance, and social stability overall while fostering the retention of public employees.

65. Social dialogue also relates to respecting, protecting and strengthening the implementation of the principles and rights of civil servants and employees. The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, for example, is a commitment made by governments, employers and workers’ organizations to upholding basic human values in the workplace. It affirms obligations and commitments that are inherent in the membership of ILO, namely: (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; (b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; (c) the effective abolition of child labour; (d) the elimination of discrimination with respect to employment and occupation; and (e) a safe and healthy working environment.

66. At the international level, social dialogue is guaranteed through a significant range of international commitments and legal instruments. For example, in the Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151) and the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154), as well as their respective recommendations, Nos. 159 and 163, the framework for social dialogue in the public sector is established. Recognition of the importance of social dialogue has continued to evolve over time. For example, the need for social dialogue is embedded in the 2030 Agenda, and Goal 8, is aimed at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

67. There are various types of social dialogue, depending on: (a) whether international law and human rights are being respected and mainstreamed; (b) the national context; (c) the historical background; (d) the existence of national regulations and institutional arrangements; (e) the different existing levels of governance (national, subnational or local); (f) the targeted sector (e.g. education, health, transport, energy and housing); and (g) the issue to be discussed. In general,

²⁶ ILO, *International Labour Conference, 107th Session 2018: Report VI – Social Dialogue and Tripartism*, ILC.107/VI(Rev.) (Geneva, 2018).

however, based on ILO experience, three basic types of social dialogue prevail in most countries (see table below).

Basic types of social dialogue

<i>Types of social dialogue</i>	<i>Key characteristics</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Bipartite social dialogue, or “bilateral process”	Usually involves two principal parties: workers’ organizations and employers’ organizations	• Institution of collective bargaining • Resolution of disputes and strikes • Modes of labour-management cooperation
Tripartite social dialogue, or “three-legged mechanism”	Involves three parties: workers’ organizations, employers’ organizations and the government	• Any type of platform or space in which the government, the worker, and the employer (or their representatives) are included
Multilateral social dialogue, or “tripartite plus” social dialogue	Other interest groups in society are involved, in addition to workers’ unions, employers’ organizations and the government. All of them form the three pillars of social dialogue.	• National Economic Development and Labour Council (most elaborate “tripartite plus” social dialogue mechanism, through which civil society is the fourth partner represented in one of the four policy streams, which handles economic and social development issues).

Source: Mpfariseni Budeli and Theodore Kasongo Kamwimbi, *Diversity of Practices in Social Dialogue in the Public Service in Selected African Countries*, ILO Working Paper, No. 58 (Geneva, 2022).

Importance of social dialogue at the subnational level

68. While the benefits of social dialogue seem to be clear at the national and international levels, they are often less obvious at the subnational level for several reasons, including the lack of concrete transfer of power, responsibilities, competences and resources to local governments (the question of who should lead the social dialogue), a lack of understanding of the rationale behind the need for social dialogue, a lack of ownership and understanding of international legal instruments and regulations, and the absence of structures and methodology to implement it. Nevertheless, social dialogue takes on its full importance and can prove to be a strategic lever for sustainable development in all its dimensions at the subnational level.

69. 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 addition, decent work in line with Goal 8 can be created, encouraged and supported at the subnational level. Furthermore, the principle of participation under the umbrella of inclusiveness can be exercised through a supportive environment that leaves no one and no place behind at the subnational level.

70. Local governments need to be empowered, as they are key actors in promoting a social dialogue on the basis of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. This means taking a coordinated approach across different departments and agencies within their jurisdiction and actively engaging with different stakeholders through participatory methods. This can allow for broader input and collaboration on policies that have a direct impact on communities and ensure their ownership of newly developed policies. Social dialogue can also help to ensure quality local public services, attract and retain employees, including young workers and highly qualified and motivated individuals, and promote decent work. This can foster local and territorial development and allow for the localization of the Goals.

71. Social dialogue is also linked to social protection at the subnational level, with ILO defining social protection as aimed, through government action and constant social dialogue, at ensuring that men and women enjoy working conditions that are not only not harmful but as safe as possible and that respect human dignity, take into account family and social values, allow for adequate compensation in the case of lost or reduced income, permit access to adequate social and medical services, and respect the right to free time and rest.²⁷ Several internationally agreed labour standards need to be mainstreamed at the subnational level to promote sustainable and quality employment.

72. Partnerships are required to better mainstream and implement international and regional labour standards at the subnational level and to empower different stakeholders. The sharing of examples of best practice can foster the successful implementation of social dialogue and decent work at the local and regional levels. As an example, in 2022, the global union federation of workers in public services, Public Services International, and United Cities and Local Governments in Africa signed a memorandum of understanding to promote social dialogue at the subnational level in Africa.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

73. In order for governments to be able to perform a broad spectrum of functions and deliver public services in line with national sustainable development plans and objectives, a dedicated and skilled public sector workforce is required. This in turn calls for effective human resources strategies for attracting and retaining public sector workers of all ages and backgrounds across government and in diverse occupational groups. A variety of factors come into play that can be given different weight, depending on national and local priorities and resources, as well as labour market conditions that vary from place to place and over time.

74. Despite differences, many good practices can be recommended to national planners, civil service commissions, human resources departments and others involved in shaping the public sector workforce and ensuring that public sector capabilities across government are aligned with a country's needs and aspirations, including those of its younger generations. Where feasible, strategies for attracting and retaining a qualified public sector workforce and leaving no one behind should emphasize:

- *Establishing competitive compensation and recognition systems.* Governments need to provide competitive compensation packages and pension benefits. Transparent reward structures are required that combine financial incentives with career growth opportunities and also address the need, particularly of young workers, for validation and motivation. Recognizing and rewarding contributions can foster loyalty and commitment.
- *Enhancing opportunities for work-life balance.* Governments need to implement policies promoting flexibility, such as remote work options and flexible schedules, which can be especially attractive to young workers. Such measures can also improve employee satisfaction and productivity.
- *Creating opportunities for professional growth.* Structured programmes for learning and skills development, mentoring and leadership training are required. Succession planning is also needed to identify and prepare future leaders.

²⁷ Carlien van Empel and Edmundo Werna, "Labour oriented participation in municipalities: How decentralized social dialogue can benefit the urban economy and its sectors", Working Paper, No. 280 (Geneva, ILO, 2010).

Providing clear career pathways to rapid growth and meaningful responsibility is key to retaining highly qualified and motivated individuals, especially young workers and senior public employees.

- *Promoting a purpose-driven workplace culture.* Public sector entities need to emphasize their role in societal improvement and align their missions with the values of public employees, especially young public servants. Highlighting opportunities to contribute to significant societal challenges, such as climate change and social equity, can resonate deeply with their aspirations.
- *Adapting human resources management systems to evolving conditions.* Governments need to continuously modernize and adapt their human resources practices. Unified and data-driven human resources management systems can be highly valuable for better understanding workforce dynamics, which can lead to the creation of new strategies that address, for example, generational differences.
- *Rightsizing the public sector workforce.* Governments need to apply a forward-looking approach, continuously monitoring the size and composition of the public sector workforce and adapting it, if needed, on the basis of cost-benefit analyses or similar impact assessments. This can help to avoid ad hoc crisis management decisions, which are likely to be costly in more than just financial terms.
- *Ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion.* Governments need to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, including inclusive workplaces, addressing biases and ensuring equal opportunities, to motivate and retain qualified public employees.

75. In addition, promoting a wide-ranging social dialogue among all stakeholders can strengthen the responsiveness of the public sector to the needs of society, thereby reinforcing a core motivation of public sector workers and accelerating delivery of the 2030 Agenda. Effective social dialogue, however, requires an investment of effort, as well as the active engagement of workers, employers and government, including entities responsible for national human resources development policies.

76. Given the importance of social dialogue at the subnational level in particular, an enabling environment needs to be put into place that gives subnational governments the authority and resources to institutionalize efforts to promote social dialogue in line with their roles and responsibilities. Success often depends on strong political will at all levels of government, a firm commitment to engaging in social dialogue with workers' representatives, a legal framework that takes the subnational dimension into account, and continuing institutional arrangements, such as a subnational tripartite consultative committee.

77. Other factors include: (a) operationalization of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development as a basis for the social dialogue; (b) sufficient resources to conduct exchanges in a professional and effective manner, through which each party feels welcomed and respected as a key actor in the process; (c) committed and ethical representatives of workers (e.g. associations and unions); and (d) promotion of access to the requisite information and data by all concerned.

78. Lastly, partnerships between subnational governments and ILO, Public Services International and other actors can help to mainstream international labour standards at the subnational level while building subnational capacities. The sharing of best practices is a valuable way of encouraging interaction among all relevant stakeholders and advancing decent work for all at the subnational level.