

LABOUR ADMINISTRATION

# ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF LABOUR ADMINISTRATION

*Module 2*

# ▶ Module 2. Organisation and structure of a national system of labour administration

## Summary

This module examines the organization and structure of national labour administration systems, the institutional backbone through which governments design, implement and monitor labour policy. Drawing on Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158, it reviews how ministries of labour, parastatal bodies, regional and local offices, and consultative institutions interact to form a coherent system. The module explores both central and decentralized structures, the role of internal organization and specialized units, and the mechanisms of coordination within the system, across ministries, and with agencies, social partners and private actors. It also addresses the territorial organization of labour administration, including in federal states and export processing zones, and highlights recent structural trends and reforms. In doing so, the module situates national practices within the context of contemporary challenges such as informality, technological change, globalization, demographic shifts and crisis response.

## Objectives of the module

- Understand the principles set out in Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 regarding the organization and structure of labour administration systems.
- Analyse how different institutional arrangements – ministries, agencies, field services and consultative bodies – combine to form a coherent system of labour administration.
- Assess the importance of coordination within the system and across the wider machinery of government, including with social partners and private actors.
- Examine territorial organization models, with attention to federal states and export processing zones, and evaluate their implications for consistency and effectiveness.
- Identify recent trends in structural reforms and modernization efforts in labour administrations worldwide.
- Apply these insights to strengthen the leadership role within labour administration and ensure systems are resilient, responsive and aligned with national development objectives.

## A. Introduction

The organization and structure of national labour administration systems constitute the institutional backbone of labour governance. They provide the framework through which governments fulfil their responsibility to design, implement and monitor national labour policy, while ensuring meaningful participation of employers' and workers' organizations.

Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150)<sup>1</sup> and its accompanying Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158)<sup>2</sup> remain the principal international reference instruments in this regard. They define labour administration as public administration activities in the field of national labour policy, and the system of labour administration as the network of public bodies – at central, regional, and local levels – entrusted with these responsibilities, together with the mechanisms for coordination and consultation with social partners.

At its core, a well-functioning labour administration system integrates a coherent national labour policy, an institutional structure endowed with adequate human and financial resources, and clear mechanisms for coordination across public bodies and with employers' and workers' organizations. The system is not limited to ministries of labour alone: it may encompass parastatal agencies, decentralized entities, and specialized institutions responsible for labour inspection, employment services, occupational safety and health, social protection, or dispute resolution. The instruments also allow for the delegation of certain functions to non-governmental actors, particularly to social partners, as well as the regulation of certain matters through direct negotiations between employers and workers' organizations. This flexibility reflects the diversity of national contexts and the evolving nature of labour markets.

The need for effective institutional design has only grown in recent years. Profound transformations in the world of work – the expansion of the informal economy, non-standard and platform-based employment, rapid technological advances including artificial intelligence, demographic shifts, climate change, and increased labour migration – have heightened demands on labour administrations. Recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic also underscored the importance of resilient and adaptable labour administrations capable of balancing the protection of workers' rights, ensuring public health and safety, and supporting economic recovery. During such emergencies, principles enshrined in Convention No. 150, such as tripartism, social dialogue, and inter-institutional coordination, proved indispensable in shaping effective responses.

In many countries, however, structural weaknesses persist: fragmented institutional arrangements, insufficient coordination across ministries and agencies, limited financial and

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<sup>1</sup> Full text of the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312295:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312295:NO)

<sup>2</sup> Full text of the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312496:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312496:NO)

human resources, and uneven involvement of social partners. Prolonged fiscal constraints have exacerbated these challenges, pushing administrations to modernize and innovate in the way they deliver services. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become integral to internal management, reporting and performance monitoring, inter-agency information-sharing, and direct service delivery to citizens. Yet they also highlight risks of digital exclusion, requiring careful governance to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness.

Labour administrations today must therefore adapt their structures to ensure both efficiency and legitimacy. They need to safeguard values such as the rule of law, equity, transparency, and accountability, while embracing innovation, partnerships, and whole-of-government coordination. Public-private partnerships, involvement of civil society, and decentralized delivery models have become more common, but must be framed by clear rules and oversight to remain aligned with national labour policy objectives. At the same time, effective tripartite social dialogue – based on respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining – remains central to every function of labour administration.

This module examines how national labour administration systems are organized and structured in practice. It explores their architecture at central and decentralized levels, the role of ministries of labour and affiliated bodies, and the modalities of internal and inter-institutional coordination. It also addresses the territorial organization of labour administration, with particular reference to federal states and export processing zones, and discusses the resources, reporting, and coordination mechanisms needed to ensure that the system functions effectively. Finally, it considers how labour administrations are adapting to new challenges and what reforms are underway to strengthen their leadership role in shaping labour and employment policy in consultation with social partners.

For the managers of labour administration systems – the stakes are high. Strong, coordinated and well-resourced labour administration systems are not merely technical structures: they are strategic instruments for safeguarding fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting decent employment opportunities, supporting sustainable enterprises, and advancing social justice. This module aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how institutional design and organizational arrangements can be leveraged to ensure that labour administrations remain effective, resilient, and responsive in a rapidly changing world of work.

## **B. Organisation of a national system of labour administration**

Convention No. 150 establishes that each Member State must, in a manner appropriate to its national conditions, ensure the organization and effective operation of a system of labour administration whose functions and responsibilities are properly coordinated. This systemic perspective is central: labour administration is not the work of a single institution, but the outcome of a network of public bodies at central, regional and local levels, complemented by consultative mechanisms with employers' and workers' organizations.

Convention No. 150 (Article 4) provides that “each member state should, in a manner appropriate to national conditions, ensure the organisation and effective operation in its territory of a system of labour administration, the functions and responsibilities of which are properly co-ordinated.”

The concept of a *system* of labour administration, as defined in Article 1 of Convention No. 150, covers ministerial departments, public agencies, parastatal bodies, regional and local offices, and any institutional framework that ensures coordination and consultation. Such a system reflects the need to combine policy leadership with decentralized service delivery, while securing the active participation of the social partners.

Convention No. 150 (Article 1) refers to “all public administration bodies responsible for and/or engaged in labour administration- whether they are ministerial departments or public agencies, including para-statal and regional or local agencies or any other form of decentralised administration - and any institutional framework for the co-ordination of the activities of such bodies and for consultation with and participation by employers and workers and their organisations.”

Experience shows that the effectiveness of such a system largely depends on the existence of a strong body capable of ensuring policy coherence and institutional effectiveness<sup>3</sup>. In most countries, this role is performed by the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which acts as the principal authority for labour policy formulation and implementation. In other contexts, coordination has also been exercised through national committees, tripartite boards or councils that bring together different ministries and the social partners, or through specialized public bodies dealing with specific fields of labour administration. The form chosen reflects national traditions and legal systems, but in every case the coordinating role must be strong enough to give direction to the system as a whole.

▶ **Box 1. The Irish National Economic and Social Council (NESC)**

The Irish National Economic and Social Council (NESC), established in 1973, is an advisory body to the Prime Minister (Taoiseach) and Government. It provides strategic analysis and recommendations on key economic, social, and environmental issues affecting Ireland’s long-term development. Its membership is deliberately broad, bringing together representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations, farming and community groups, environmental bodies, senior civil servants and independent experts. This plural composition reflects Ireland’s national tradition of seeking consensus through structured dialogue among government, social partners and civil society.

<sup>3</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

While NESC does not perform the operational functions of a Ministry of Labour, it embodies an institutional arrangement that secures coordination and coherence in national labour and social policy. By integrating diverse perspectives and producing evidence-based, consensus-oriented reports, NESC strengthens the legitimacy of policy choices and ensures that labour concerns are embedded in broader socio-economic strategies. The Council illustrates how the organizational form of a labour administration system can vary according to a country's legal and political traditions. What matters is that the coordinating role—whether exercised by a ministry, a council, or another mechanism—remains strong enough to give clear direction to the system as a whole and to ensure that labour policy is effectively linked to national development objectives.

<https://www.nesc.ie/>

The *mission, vision and objectives* of labour administration are typically anchored in legislation and national labour policy frameworks. These establish the mandate of the system, its responsibilities and its role in broader national development strategies. Although no single model is prescribed, a modern labour administration system has to be guided by a vision of promoting employment, equity, competence and social justice, and a mission of developing and implementing policies, programmes and mechanisms that advance non-discriminatory opportunities, sound labour relations and social dialogue, and respect for international labour standards. Such framing is essential not only to guide the day-to-day operation of services, but also to signal to the public, to enterprises and to workers the central role of labour administration in the pursuit of social and economic progress.

Recommendation No. 158 emphasizes that the ministry of labour or its equivalent should be *appropriately represented* in the administrative and consultative bodies where economic and social policies are debated and decided. This is essential for ensuring that labour concerns are integrated into the formulation of national socio-economic policies and not treated as a secondary matter. The dissemination of information on labour issues, the regular reporting of activities, and the participation of social partners in policy formulation are also integral parts of an effective system of labour administration.

Despite this centrality, labour administrations have seen their importance decline in some contexts. Their contribution to economic efficiency and productivity is sometimes undervalued, with labour administration narrowly perceived as a welfare function or criticized because its performance is not easily quantifiable. Such views overlook the crucial role of skills development, active labour market policies, decent working conditions, and sound labour relations in creating a resilient and competitive economy.

For this reason, policy makers and senior officials within labour administrations must combine strong technical competence with efficient organizational structures. Field officers, in turn, require sufficient authority and adequate resources to ensure compliance and credibility in the delivery of services. Many countries are re-engineering their labour administration systems to meet the emerging challenges posed by informality, global supply chains, technological

transformation and fiscal constraints<sup>4</sup>. These reforms increasingly emphasize modernization, stronger coordination mechanisms, the use of digital technologies, and an expanded role for tripartite and sometimes wider forms of dialogue.

Ultimately, the system of labour administration is tripartite in nature. While the State acts through its ministries and decentralized structures, employers and workers are represented through national councils, consultative boards and para-governmental agencies. Together, they give life to a system whose effectiveness depends less on its precise institutional form than on the quality of coordination, consultation and participation that it sustains. The distribution of responsibilities varies widely – for example, social security may be integrated within the labour ministry in some countries and entrusted to a separate ministry in others – but the overriding requirement is that coherence be maintained and duplication avoided. What matters is that the system functions as a whole, guided by a clear vision, equipped with adequate resources, and capable of adapting to the complex and rapidly changing demands of the world of work.



#### Recommendation No. 158, Paragraph 19

The ministry of labour or another comparable body determined by national laws or regulations, or national practice, should take or initiate measures ensuring appropriate representation of the system of labour administration in the administrative and consultative bodies in which information is collected, opinions are considered, decisions are prepared and taken and measures of implementation are devised with respect to social and economic policies.

### C. Structure of the labour administration system

The structure of a national system of labour administration reflects both the principles established in international instruments and the institutional traditions of each country. Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 make clear that the system encompasses all public administration bodies responsible for labour policy, together with the institutional arrangements for their coordination and for consultation with employers and workers and their organizations.



#### Convention No. 150, Article 1(b)

(b) the term system of labour administration covers all public administration bodies responsible for and/or engaged in labour administration--whether they are ministerial departments or public agencies, including parastatal and regional or local agencies or any other form of decentralised administration --and any institutional framework for the co-ordination of the activities of such bodies and for consultation with and participation by employers and workers and their organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> ILO Brief No.11 New directions for the governance of work, Prepared for the 2nd Meeting of the Global Commission on the Future of Work 15–17 February 2018 - <https://www.ilo.org/publications/no11-new-directions-governance-work>

Recommendation No. 158, Paragraph 1(b)

A Member may, in accordance with national laws or regulations, or national practice, delegate or entrust certain activities of labour administration to non-governmental organisations, particularly employers' and workers' organisations, or--where appropriate--to employers' and workers' representatives.

It therefore extends beyond the ministry of labour itself to include parastatal agencies, regional and local offices, and specialized institutions entrusted with particular functions such as labour inspection, employment services, occupational safety and health, or minimum wage setting. At the same time, the system is not complete without the frameworks that ensure the active participation of social partners in policy formulation, monitoring and implementation.

Convention No. 150, Article 4

Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall, in a manner appropriate to national conditions, ensure the organisation and effective operation in its territory of a system of labour administration, the functions and responsibilities of which are properly co-ordinated.

Convention No. 150, Article 9

With a view to the proper co-ordination of the functions and responsibilities of the system of labour administration, in a manner determined by national laws or regulations, or national practice, a ministry of labour or another comparable body shall have the means to ascertain whether any parastatal agencies which may be responsible for particular labour administration activities, and any regional or local agencies to which particular labour administration activities may have been delegated, are operating in accordance with national laws and regulations and are adhering to the objectives assigned to them.

While the instruments are not prescriptive as to the precise form of organization, they provide guiding principles that help shape a coherent structure. Article 4 of the Convention emphasizes that each Member State must ensure the effective operation of the system and guarantee coordination of its functions and responsibilities. Article 9 adds that the ministry of labour, or another comparable body, must be able to verify that parastatal, regional or local agencies operate in accordance with national law and adhere to their assigned objectives. In other words, regardless of the institutional form adopted, the structure must ensure coherence, accountability and direction across all the bodies involved in labour administration.

Recommendation No. 158, Paragraph 25

(1) The system of labour administration should normally comprise specialised units to deal with each of the major programmes of labour administration the management of which is entrusted to it by national laws or regulations.

(2) For example, there might be units for such matters as the formulation of standards relating to working conditions and terms of employment; labour inspection; labour relations; employment, manpower planning and human resources development; international labour affairs; and, as appropriate, social security, minimum wage legislation and questions relating to specific categories of workers.

Recommendation No. 158 offers further practical guidance. It suggests that the internal structure of the system should normally include specialized units to address the main programmes of labour administration: the development of labour standards; labour inspection; labour relations; employment policy and manpower planning; human resources development;

international labour affairs; and, where appropriate, social security, minimum wage regulation, and policies for specific categories of workers. This reflects the understanding that the diverse responsibilities of labour administration cannot be effectively discharged without dedicated expertise and organizational arrangements. Specialized units, services and departments are not created for their own sake but exist to ensure that the functions of the system are properly fulfilled and that policies are translated into effective action.



Recommendation No. 158, Paragraph 26

(1) There should be appropriate arrangements for the effective organisation and operation of the field services of the system of labour administration.

(2) In particular, these arrangements should--

(a) ensure that the placing of field services corresponds to the needs of the various areas, the representative organisations of employers and workers concerned being consulted thereon;

(b) provide field services with adequate staff, equipment and transport facilities for the effective performance of their duties;

(c) ensure that field services have sufficient and clear instructions to preclude the possibility of laws and regulations being differently interpreted in different areas.

Territorial organization is another key aspect of structure. Paragraph 26 of the Recommendation underlines the need for appropriate arrangements for the effective organization and operation of field services. Field offices must be strategically placed to respond to the needs of local areas, adequately staffed and equipped, and given clear instructions to avoid inconsistent interpretation or application of laws and regulations. This territorial dimension ensures that national labour policies reach all workers and employers, regardless of geography, and that labour administrations remain close to the realities of the world of work. In federal systems, or where labour responsibilities are shared across different levels of government, these requirements take on even greater importance.

The instruments also stress the importance of regularly reviewing the structures of labour administration in consultation with the social partners. Such reviews are particularly relevant in the current context of rapid change, as labour administrations adapt to technological advances, shifts in employment patterns, and the emergence of new forms of work. Keeping structures under review helps ensure that the system remains fit for purpose, capable of addressing contemporary challenges while continuing to uphold the fundamental principles of labour policy.

The Committee of Experts has noted that the framework provided by Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 can be applied in all Member States, regardless of their level of development or the sophistication of their administrative systems<sup>5</sup>. The instruments deliberately leave room for diversity, recognizing that institutional arrangements will reflect national political, social and cultural realities. Yet certain traits are common across effective

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<sup>5</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

systems: the presence of a ministry of labour or a comparable coordinating body with the authority to lead and verify the activities of all other components; the existence of specialized units for the main programmes of labour administration; a territorial network of field services capable of reaching workers and enterprises; and mechanisms for meaningful participation by employers' and workers' organizations.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the structure depends not only on formal arrangements but also on the resources and authority available to the system. Article 10 of the Convention underlines that staff must be properly qualified, independent, and adequately trained, and that they must be provided with the status, means and financial resources necessary to carry out their duties. Without such investment in human and material resources, even the most carefully designed structure cannot deliver on its objectives. A well-structured labour administration system is therefore one that combines clear institutional arrangements, strong coordination, specialized expertise, territorial presence, social partner participation and adequate resourcing. It is this combination that allows the system to play its pivotal role in promoting decent work, ensuring social justice and contributing to sustainable economic development.

## **D. Internal organization**

### **1. Specialization, integration and coordination within labour administration**

The internal organization of a labour administration system reflects the balance between the scope of its mandate, the resources available, and the institutional traditions of the country. Structural arrangements vary accordingly. In smaller labour administrations, where financial or human resources are limited, it is often necessary to group different responsibilities together under a single unit—for example, combining employment services with human resource planning and vocational training. Larger systems, by contrast, tend to develop more specialized departments, allowing for a clearer division of functions and greater technical expertise.

In federal or decentralized contexts, where responsibilities are shared between national and sub-national authorities, the internal organization of labour administration requires particular attention to coordination. Federal, provincial or regional governments must align their activities to provide citizens with consistent and integrated services. A good working relationship between levels of government is not only desirable but essential if policies are to be applied coherently across a country's territory. The absence of such coordination risks duplication, fragmentation and uneven protection of workers' rights.

International labour standards emphasize the importance of specialization within the internal structure of labour administration. Recommendation No. 158 indicates that the system should normally comprise distinct units dedicated to the major programmes entrusted to it by national laws or regulations. By way of example, these include the formulation of standards relating to working conditions and terms of employment, labour inspection, labour relations, employment and manpower planning, vocational training and human resources development, international

labour affairs, and, as appropriate, social security, minimum wage legislation, and policies concerning specific categories of workers.

The underlying rationale is that labour administration encompasses a wide range of activities, each of which requires dedicated technical capacity and professional expertise. Specialized units ensure that these diverse functions can be carried out effectively, while the overall coherence of the system depends on their integration and coordination within the ministry or agency responsible.

The design of internal structures must therefore strike a balance between specialization and integration. Units and departments must be sufficiently distinct to allow expertise to develop, but they must also be part of a larger organizational framework that promotes coordination and coherence of action. In this way, the internal organization of labour administration becomes not simply an exercise in bureaucratic design, but a central determinant of the system's ability to perform its mission: to safeguard workers' rights, to promote decent employment opportunities, and to contribute to social justice and sustainable development.

## 2. The central body

At the central level, the labour administration system is organized around the ministry of labour or an equivalent body, which embodies the institutional leadership of national labour policy. Its internal arrangements reflect the breadth of responsibilities entrusted to labour administration: from the regulation of labour standards and industrial relations, to the administration of employment services, social security, occupational safety and health, and the promotion of gender equality. To discharge these responsibilities effectively, the functions and responsibilities of the ministry are divided among distinct units, ensuring both specialization and coherence.

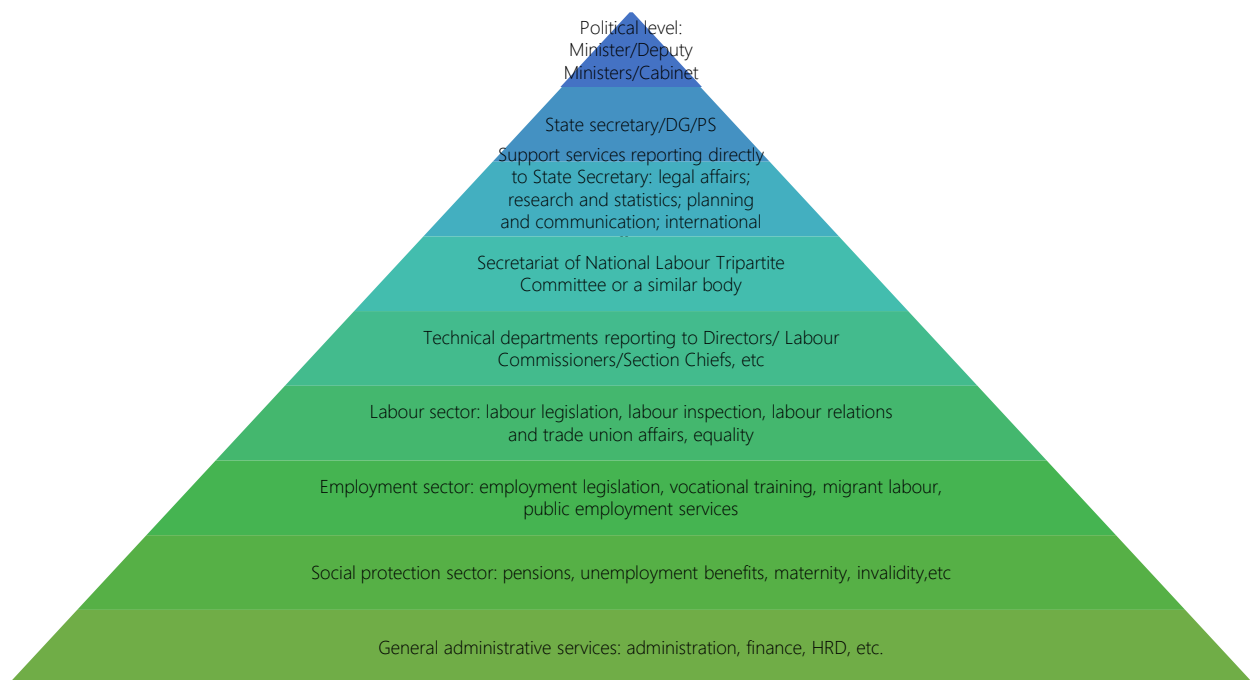
In most countries, these units fall into three broad categories. The first comprises the **technical or specialized services**, which are directly responsible for the major programmes of labour administration. These include departments for labour inspection, labour relations, employment policy and services, vocational training, migrant labour, and in many cases social security. Increasingly, ministries also house **gender bureaux** tasked with mainstreaming equality considerations across policies and promoting fairness in the workplace. These technical departments typically maintain a relatively small staff at central headquarters, focusing on policy development, systems management, the coordination and monitoring of field operations, and the preparation of national reports. Operational activities—such as workplace inspections, the handling of complaints, the provision of advisory and conciliation services, and the compilation of local labour statistics—are normally undertaken by decentralized field offices, which report back to the central units. This distribution of tasks allows the central body to concentrate on strategy and oversight while ensuring that services remain close to the realities of workers and enterprises.

The second category encompasses the **general administrative services**, which are responsible for the management of the ministry's internal human, financial and material resources. These services oversee recruitment and training of staff, internal budget management, procurement,

and the day-to-day administration of the ministry. Their efficiency is vital, for no labour administration can operate effectively without well-managed resources and properly trained officials.

The third category includes the **support services**, which provide essential functions to underpin the ministry's operations. They normally cover legal affairs, communication and information, planning, research and statistics, and international relations. In many systems, the secretariat of the national tripartite committee or an equivalent consultative body is also located within the ministry, ensuring institutional continuity between government and the social partners.

Although the precise form varies by country, a typical structure of a ministry of labour reflects this three-tiered division. At the political level, the Minister, Deputy Ministers and Cabinet provide strategic leadership. At the administrative level, the State Secretary, Permanent Secretary or Director-General oversees the work of the general administrative and support services, including legal, statistical, communication and international units. Beneath this, specialized technical departments are headed by Directors, Labour Commissioners or Section Chiefs responsible for the labour sector (covering labour legislation, inspection, industrial relations and equality), the employment sector (covering employment law, public employment services, vocational training and migrant labour), and the social protection sector (covering pensions, unemployment insurance, maternity and invalidity benefits, among others).



▶ **Figure 1. Typical structure of a ministry of labour**

The precise structure reflects national circumstances. In smaller labour administrations, where resources are limited, functional responsibilities may be grouped together—for example, combining labour inspection, working conditions and employment policy into a single

department. Larger ministries may operate with a high degree of specialization, establishing separate units for each functional area. What matters is that the central body ensures cohesive management, effective coordination, and a consistent execution of missions, policies and programmes across the country.

In all cases, the central body provides the institutional anchor of the labour administration system. It is here that national policy is formulated, strategies devised, programmes coordinated, and outcomes monitored. It is also here that the government, through its ministry of labour, maintains its institutional interface with workers' and employers' organizations, consults with other ministries, and represents the country in international labour forums. In this way, the central body gives direction to the entire system, ensuring that the diverse institutions engaged in labour administration act in concert to promote decent work, social justice and sustainable economic development.

### 3. Bodies responsible for labour administration

The structural organization of labour administration varies widely across countries, reflecting national histories, administrative traditions, and socio-economic priorities. While the specific design differs, the information provided by governments confirms that in the vast majority of cases the governance of labour is headed by one or more ministerial bodies. These may be designated as ministries, departments or secretariats, and while their titles suggest the main portfolio entrusted to them, in practice their competences often extend well beyond what the name implies. In most countries, the ministry of labour or its functional equivalent is the primary body responsible for implementing national labour policy. In some systems, however, labour-related responsibilities are distributed among several ministries. For example, in Mali the administration of labour policy is divided among the Ministry of Labour, Civil Service and Social Dialogue, the Ministry of National Entrepreneurship, Employment and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Health and Social Development. These examples illustrate how labour administration may be organized under different institutional configurations, depending on national circumstances and political decisions.

#### ▶ Box 2. Brazil: re-establishing the Ministry of Labour and Employment

Brazil provides a recent example of how the structure of a national labour administration system can evolve in response to political decisions and shifting national priorities. In 2019, the Ministry of Labour was extinguished and its functions were absorbed into the Ministry of Economy. This move reflected a vision of reducing the size of government and consolidating administrative functions, but it also raised concerns among social partners and labour specialists about the diminished visibility and institutional weight of labour issues within national policymaking.

With the change of government in 2023, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MTE) was re-established as a separate ministry. The decision to reinstate a dedicated ministry reflected a renewed emphasis on the importance of labour governance as a distinct area of public policy. It signalled recognition of the need for a strong institutional anchor to lead the design and

implementation of employment and labour market policies, to coordinate with social partners, and to ensure compliance with international labour standards.

The new MTE was entrusted with a broad mandate, including the promotion of employment, the regulation of working conditions, labour inspection, vocational training and social dialogue. One of its early priorities was the implementation of the Equal Pay Law (Law No. 14.611/2023)<sup>6</sup>, which aims to strengthen pay equity between men and women. This legislative initiative illustrates how the ministry provides the institutional foundation for advancing reforms and ensuring that labour rights are at the centre of national development strategies.

The Brazilian case highlights how the form of a labour administration system is not fixed but may change with political transitions. It demonstrates the risks of diluting labour functions within broader ministries where they may lose prominence, as well as the benefits of maintaining a strong, specialized institution with clear authority and visibility. Above all, it confirms that whatever organizational model is chosen, the coordinating role of labour administration must remain strong enough to give direction to the system as a whole and to ensure that the governance of work contributes to equity, social justice and sustainable economic growth.

*Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego* – <https://www.gov.br/trabalho-e-emprego/pt-br/orgaos/ministerio-do-trabalho-e-emprego>

The division of responsibilities across ministries is also evident in the treatment of vocational training, which in many countries falls under the ministry of education, or in the regulation of specific sectors, where labour inspection services may be entrusted to ministries responsible for agriculture, transport or mining.

### ▶ **Box 3. Bulgaria – Sectoral agencies overseeing labour compliance in transport**

In Bulgaria, the enforcement of labour legislation in specific transport sectors – maritime, civil aviation, and road transport – is entrusted not to the central labour ministry but to specialized agencies operating under the corresponding sectoral ministries. The Executive Agency “Maritime Administration” (EAMA), under the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications, bears responsibility for ensuring “the working and living conditions of seafarers” and conducts inspections to uphold safety and labour standards in maritime spaces and inland waterways<sup>7</sup>.

This arrangement reflects how national labour administration structures may delegate enforcement functions to sector-specific bodies, especially where technical expertise or regulatory context differs across industries.

<sup>6</sup> Law No. 14,611/2023: The primary law establishing the framework for gender pay parity. Decree No. 11,795/2023: Provides additional details on deadlines, reporting, and the requirements for action plans. MTE Normative Instruction No. 06/2024: The Ministry of Labor and Employment's detailed guidelines on how to comply with the law's requirements.

<sup>7</sup> Executive Agency „Maritime Administration” (EAMA) is a legal entity to the Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications. The statute of the Agency is regulated in the Merchant Shipping Code of Bulgaria - Art. 360, para. 1. - <https://danubusafety.net/en/maritime-administration-eama/>

*Bulgaria, NATLEX, Labour Inspection Act -*

<https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/80565/BGR-80565.pdf>

In smaller administrations, ministries of labour may be entrusted with additional portfolios, ranging from migration and public services to community development or even health. Such arrangements show the adaptability of labour administration to the size and capacity of public institutions, while highlighting the importance of maintaining coherence across functions.

Alongside ministerial structures, parastatal agencies have become a common feature of labour administration systems. Unlike territorial field services, which remain directly under ministerial authority, parastatal agencies operate with a degree of political, functional, financial and managerial autonomy. They are typically responsible for implementing specific aspects of labour policy, such as labour inspection, employment services, social security or occupational safety and health. Examples include the National Institute of Social Security and the National Office of Labour Inspection in Cuba, both attached to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security<sup>8</sup>, or the various attached agencies under the supervision of the Department of Labour and Employment in the Philippines, dealing with mediation, conciliation and occupational safety<sup>9</sup>. These bodies often bring specialized expertise and operational flexibility, but their proliferation raises questions about whether they risk weakening the technical capacity of the ministry itself by drawing away qualified staff and resources.

As indicated in the 1997 General Survey, the characteristic feature of parastatal bodies is their autonomy, which distinguishes them from field services or decentralized departments of ministries of labour<sup>10</sup>. While territorial services represent the ministry at regional and/or local level and are directly under the authority of the minister or senior ministry officials, parastatal agencies are normally under the delegated management of the ministry which remains responsible for the formulation and overall coordination of labour policy. Parastatal agencies are responsible for the operationalization of certain aspects of the policy, and they function with a degree of political, functional, financial and managerial autonomy. In some cases, agencies responsible for social security or insurance matters report directly to the government rather than through the ministry of labour. In Costa Rica, the National Insurance Institute administers

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<sup>8</sup> Cuba: The National Institute of Social Security (INASS), the National Office of Labour Inspection (ONTI), the National Training and Development of Staff Centre (CNFDC), the Study and Labour Research Institute (IEIT), the National Commission of Prevention and Social Attention and the National Council for the Attention of Disabled Persons are attributed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. - <https://www.oitcenterfor.org/en/instituci%C3%B3n-miembro/ministerio-trabajo-seguridad-social-ministry-labour-and-social-security-mtss>

<sup>9</sup> The Philippines: Executive Order No. 126 (January 31, 1987) created the National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB) as an agency attached to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). - [www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/OPCCB/opif2009/dole-ncmb.pdf](http://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/OPCCB/opif2009/dole-ncmb.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> ILO, *Role, Functions and Institutional Development of Labour Administration*, Working Paper for the Meeting of Experts on Labour Administration, Geneva, 15–26 October 1973 - [https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1973/73B09\\_523.pdf](https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1973/73B09_523.pdf)

workers' compensation schemes, while the Social Security Fund operates as an autonomous institution managing mandatory social security<sup>11</sup>.

These arrangements, while demonstrating the diversity of institutional forms, underline the importance of ensuring central coordination and oversight, as provided in Article 9 of Convention No. 150. Without such supervision, the effectiveness of labour administration can be undermined by fragmentation, duplication or inconsistent practices across agencies.

The ILO Committee of Experts has repeatedly emphasized that central coordination is indispensable<sup>12</sup>. Parastatal and autonomous agencies, while valuable for their expertise and flexibility, must report to the ministry of labour or a comparable authority to ensure that their work aligns with national laws and the objectives of labour policy. Equally, their feedback is essential for policy formulation, since they bring practical insights from service delivery and regulatory enforcement. The balance lies in enabling these agencies to contribute effectively while maintaining a coherent, coordinated national system.

Overall, the diversity of institutional forms across countries demonstrates the adaptability of labour administration systems. They may be organized through single ministries or multiple portfolios, supported by parastatal bodies or autonomous agencies, and complemented by sectoral administrations or cross-cutting authorities. What matters is not the specific architecture but the coherence of the system as a whole, the clarity of roles and responsibilities, and the strength of coordination mechanisms. Only with these in place can labour administration effectively contribute to decent work, social justice and sustainable development.

#### 4. Internal structure of ministerial bodies

The internal organization of ministries of labour or their functional equivalents is generally defined in law, decrees or regulations. These instruments set out the mandate, responsibilities and portfolio of the ministry and determine how its functions are to be carried out. At the political level, the minister or secretary of state, appointed by the government or the president depending on the constitutional system, bears ultimate responsibility for labour policy. The minister embodies the state's mandate in this area and provides the strategic direction for the system as a whole.

In most countries, the minister is supported by one or more layers of politically appointed officials who act as intermediaries between the political leadership and the civil service. These positions often carry the title of deputy minister, state secretary or principal secretary, and they oversee the day-to-day work of the ministry. For example, in Sweden the Ministry of

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<sup>11</sup> ILO, Social Protection Platform – Costa Rica - <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action;jsessionid=exbF0eKbK11HYYOpT41SU5ujdNb1Zj6dutbahg8IeTJnDGihf1pU!-688150444?id=15124>

<sup>12</sup> For example, CEACR, Convention No. 150: Kyrgyzstan, direct request, 2018; Niger, direct request, 2023; Mauritius, direct request, 2021; Republic of Moldova, direct request, 2016; Ukraine, direct request, 2021.

Employment has two state secretaries who coordinate planning and follow-up of activities<sup>13</sup>, while in Colombia two deputy ministers respectively oversee employment and pensions on the one hand, and labour relations and inspection on the other<sup>14</sup>. In many systems, the highest-ranking civil servant is the permanent secretary or secretary-general, responsible for policy implementation and coordination across departments. This division between political authority and administrative continuity allows ministries to remain functional across political cycles while ensuring that policy direction is firmly anchored at the top.

▶ **Box 4. Colombia: dual deputy ministerial structure**

In Colombia, the internal structure of the Ministry of Labour reflects a clear functional division of responsibilities at the deputy ministerial level. The ministry operates with two deputy ministers: one responsible for employment and pensions, and another for labour relations and inspection. This arrangement ensures that both key dimensions of labour governance—labour market policies and social protection on the one hand, and compliance, rights at work and social dialogue on the other—receive dedicated attention at a high administrative level.

The dual deputy ministerial model is intended to strengthen policy focus, enhance coordination between technical units, and provide greater oversight of both preventive and enforcement functions. It reflects Colombia's recognition that effective labour administration requires balanced investment in employment and social security policies while maintaining robust institutions for labour inspection and industrial relations.

*OECD (2017), Corporate Governance in Colombia, OECD Publishing, Paris.*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281134-en>

The minister is also typically advised by cabinets or strategy units composed of technical advisers and collaborators. These advisers are often appointed for the duration of the minister's term of office and play a role in shaping policy decisions, managing parliamentary or media relations, or focusing on specialized issues. In Burkina Faso, for instance, the cabinet of the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare includes up to five technical advisers appointed by the Council of Ministers<sup>15</sup>. In Belgium, reforms carried out between 1999 and 2003 abolished the traditional ministerial cabinets, replacing them with strategic units and secretariats for each federal service, thereby clarifying the boundary between political

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<sup>13</sup> Government Offices of Sweden, Organisation of the Ministry of Employment (updated 13 September 2024) - <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-employment/organisation-of-the-ministry-of-employment/>

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2017), Corporate Governance in Colombia, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281134-en>

<sup>15</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

leadership and the permanent administration<sup>16</sup>. Such examples illustrate how countries adapt their internal structures to balance the need for political responsiveness with administrative stability and professionalism.

▶ **Box 5. Belgium: separation of political leadership and civil service under the Copernicus reform**

Between 1999 and 2003, Belgium undertook a major reform of its federal public administration known as the Copernicus Reform, which fundamentally redefined the relationship between political leadership and the civil service. A central element of this reform was the abolition of traditional ministerial cabinets—previously powerful structures composed of political advisers directly attached to ministers. In their place, all federal public services were provided with strategic bodies, composed of a strategy unit and a secretariat for each service.

These strategic bodies are explicitly political in nature: they assist ministers in policy orientation, political communication and strategic planning, but they are not part of the permanent federal administration. The reform thereby established a clear separation between the political level and the civil service structure, enhancing transparency, continuity, and professional management within the public administration while preserving the ability of ministers to set political direction.

For labour administration, this model demonstrates how institutional design can reduce overlap between political advisers and permanent officials, clarify accountability, and strengthen the professional capacity of ministries to implement policy. It also illustrates how reforms can be tailored to national traditions while respecting the principle that political leadership must not undermine the neutrality and continuity of the public service.

*Belgium, Service public fédéral "Personnel et Organisation", [Copernicus](https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch_copernicus_fr.pdf) – Au centre de l'avenir: La réforme de l'Administration fédérale belge*, Brussels, 2004 –

[https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch\\_copernicus\\_fr.pdf](https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch_copernicus_fr.pdf)

In many cases, ministries of labour also rely on advisory councils or boards, sometimes of a tripartite nature, which report directly to the minister or cabinet. These bodies provide technical advice and recommendations on policy matters and ensure structured dialogue with social partners. In Japan, the Labour Policy Council (LPC), established under the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour, deliberates on employment policy issues in a tripartite setting<sup>17</sup>. In South Africa, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) operates under the purview of the Ministry of Employment and Labour and serves as a platform for government, business, labour and community stakeholders to build consensus on labour market and socio-

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<sup>16</sup> *Belgium, Service public fédéral "Personnel et Organisation", [Copernicus](https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch_copernicus_fr.pdf) – Au centre de l'avenir: La réforme de l'Administration fédérale belge*, Brussels, 2004 – [https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch\\_copernicus\\_fr.pdf](https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/documents/broch_copernicus_fr.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> SUWA, Y., *The Labor Policy Council: Functions of the Group Consultation in the Process of Forming Labor Policy in Japan*, Japan Labor Issues, vol.7, no.43, May, 2023 - [www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2023/043-01.pdf](http://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2023/043-01.pdf)

economic policy<sup>18</sup>. Such institutionalized forms of consultation reinforce the participatory nature of labour administration and anchor decision-making in dialogue.

Beneath the political and advisory levels lies the operational and technical segment of the ministry. Here, thematic departments or directorates form the backbone of the civil service structure. Headed by senior civil servants, these units are responsible for implementing national policies in their respective areas. Their number and scope vary considerably, reflecting national contexts, administrative traditions and resource availability. In Chile, the Directorate of Labour reports to the Under-Secretary of Labour and supervises compliance with labour legislation, industrial relations, and dispute resolution<sup>19</sup>. In the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Employment and Labour is organized into four offices responsible for planning and coordination, labour, employment and occupational safety and health, supported by 16 bureaus, 49 divisions and 8 teams<sup>20</sup>. In France, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Economic Inclusion encompasses directorates for labour, employment and vocational training, social security, statistics, and international and European affairs<sup>21</sup>. Such examples underline the diversity of internal structures, but also their common focus on ensuring that specialized functions are coherently integrated within the ministry's vertical hierarchy.

A growing number of ministries have established dedicated gender units or directorates to ensure that equality and non-discrimination are mainstreamed into all aspects of labour policy. Paraguay's Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security includes a General Directorate for the Promotion of Working Women<sup>22</sup>, while Cyprus has established a gender equality section within its Department of Labour Relations<sup>23</sup>. By contrast, in Greece, the removal of gender equality responsibilities from the Ministry of Labour and their transfer to another ministry has raised concerns among workers' organizations about the weakening of oversight in this critical area<sup>24</sup>. These developments confirm the importance of embedding equality within the core structure of labour ministries to ensure consistency and effectiveness in promoting fairness in the workplace.

Finally, most ministries include administrative departments responsible for finance, procurement, human resources and auditing, as well as support divisions for legal advice, communication, research and statistics. These units may not be directly involved in policy delivery, but their role is vital to ensure that the ministry as a whole functions effectively,

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<sup>18</sup> South Africa: the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) - <https://nedlac.org.za/#>

<sup>19</sup> Chile: Dirección del Trabajo - <https://www.dt.gob.cl/portal/1626/w3-channel.html>

<sup>20</sup> The Republic of Korea: Ministry of Employment and Labour (MOEL) - <https://www.moel.go.kr/english/about/history.do#:~:text=With%20the%20establishment%20of%20the,1996>

<sup>21</sup> France: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Economic Inclusion - <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/ministere/organisation/directions-et-services-centraux>

<sup>22</sup> Paraguay: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security - [www.mtess.gov.py/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-10-16-RES-MTESS-941-2024.pdf](http://www.mtess.gov.py/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-10-16-RES-MTESS-941-2024.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Cyprus: Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance - <https://www.gov.cy/mlsi/en/department-of-labour-relations/>

<sup>24</sup> Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2024, published 113rd ILC session (2025), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) - Greece (Ratification: 1984) - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4415371,102658:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4415371,102658:NO)

manages resources responsibly, and produces the information needed for evidence-based decision-making.

The internal structure of ministries of labour thus brings together political leadership, advisory mechanisms, technical departments and administrative services. While the configuration varies across countries, the guiding principle remains the same: to provide a clear chain of accountability, ensure coherence across functional areas, and enable the ministry to perform its mandate effectively. By combining political responsiveness, administrative professionalism, social partner participation and technical specialization, ministries of labour are able to act as the central anchor of the national labour administration system.

## E. Coordination

### 1. Proper coordination of labour administration functions

Coordination lies at the heart of an effective labour administration system. By its very nature, labour administration encompasses a wide range of activities – labour inspection, labour relations, employment services, social security, vocational training, occupational safety and health – which are often entrusted to different bodies, sometimes even across several ministries or agencies. The challenge for governments is to ensure that these diverse functions operate as parts of a coherent whole. Without proper coordination, the system risks fragmentation, duplication, and the inconsistent application of labour law and policy across the national territory.

Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 make coordination a central principle. Article 4 of the Convention calls on Member States to guarantee the organization and effective operation of labour administration in a manner appropriate to national conditions, while Article 9 requires that a ministry of labour or another responsible body have the means to ascertain whether parastatal, regional or local agencies to which functions have been delegated are operating in accordance with national laws and the objectives assigned to them. Recommendation No. 158 complements these provisions by emphasizing the importance of coordination in both the internal functioning of the system and its integration into broader socio-economic policymaking.

At the operational level, proper coordination requires **systematic information flows between the components of the system**. Each principal service – whether responsible for labour relations, inspection, employment services or social security – should report regularly to the ministry of labour or its equivalent. Reports should include not only statistics, but also analysis of problems encountered, outcomes achieved, and anticipated developments, enabling the central authority to identify trends and adjust policy accordingly. In turn, the system should evaluate, publish and disseminate labour administration information of general interest, using diverse communication channels to ensure transparency and comparability, including at the international level.

Coordination is equally important **between central and field offices**. Only when the two levels are effectively connected can national laws and regulations be applied uniformly throughout the country. Clear guidance, adequate reporting, and the provision of sufficient resources and authority to field staff are essential to avoid inconsistent interpretation of the law or uneven service delivery. In federal or decentralized systems, where responsibilities are shared between national and provincial governments, coordination acquires an additional dimension: effective working relationships between levels of government are indispensable for ensuring a consistent and integrated set of labour administration services.

Beyond internal structures, coordination also has an **external dimension**. Ministries of labour must engage with other ministries – such as those responsible for social affairs, health, vocational training, education, industry or agriculture – since labour policy intersects with a wide range of economic and social domains. Coordination with parastatal agencies and public institutions is equally necessary, as is territorial coordination between regional and local administrations. The instruments also highlight the need for labour administration systems to be represented in the administrative and consultative bodies where socio-economic policies are designed, ensuring that labour perspectives are fully integrated into national development strategies.



Convention No. 150, Article 5:

1. Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall make arrangements appropriate to national conditions to secure, within the system of labour administration, consultation, co-operation and negotiation between the public authorities and the most representative organisations of employers and workers, or--where appropriate-- employers' and workers' representatives.
2. To the extent compatible with national laws and regulations, and national practice, such arrangements shall be made at the national, regional and local levels as well as at the level of the different sectors of economic activity.

Finally, proper coordination cannot be achieved without the active involvement of social partners. Article 5 of Convention No. 150 explicitly requires arrangements for consultation, cooperation and negotiation between public authorities and the most representative organizations of employers and workers. These arrangements should operate at all levels – national, regional, local and sectoral – and should be linked to the system's coordination functions.

Where governments promote confidence in tripartite consultation and ensure that social partners play a meaningful role in policy-making, social dialogue becomes both more effective and more sustainable. In many countries, tripartite social dialogue institutions have proven to be powerful mechanisms for reconciling competing interests and for ensuring that labour administration policies enjoy legitimacy and broad-based support.

The bottom line is that proper coordination is not simply an administrative requirement. It is the mechanism that enables the system of labour administration to function as a system – an integrated whole that connects its diverse institutions, aligns them with national objectives, and ensures their accountability to the law and to the social partners. Without such coordination,

labour administration cannot fulfil its role as a cornerstone of decent work, social justice and sustainable development.

## 2. Coordination within the labour administration system

Effective labour administration depends on how well its many components work together as a single, coherent whole. Inter-institutional relations are therefore central to both the design and the implementation of national labour policy. Because responsibilities are often distributed across several public bodies – and, in decentralized or federal contexts, across multiple levels of government – coordination is the mechanism that prevents duplication, resolves divergent interpretations of rules, and ensures efficient use of scarce resources. The COVID-19 crisis made this particularly clear: where ministries, inspectorates, public employment services and social security institutions shared information and aligned decisions, local crisis management and cross-sector policy responses proved faster and more effective<sup>25</sup>.

Within the system, the ministry responsible for labour typically **leads coordination** by setting common strategies and work plans, issuing guidance, and supervising delivery. This leadership must reach across internal directorates, attached and parastatal agencies, and territorial services.

In practice, governments use a mix of tools: regular reporting cycles that combine statistics with analysis of problems and results; vertical guidance through circulars and instructions to ensure uniform application of new laws; horizontal mechanisms such as inter-departmental meetings, joint operations and shared databases; and, where helpful, formal agreements – memoranda of understanding – to structure information-sharing, joint investigations, training and outreach. Modern information systems can reinforce this architecture by giving headquarters and field services a shared view of inspections, cases and outcomes, while also supporting evidence-based adjustments to policy and practice.

### ▶ Box 6. Croatia: strategic labour and OSH planning aligned with National Development Goals

Croatia demonstrates an integrated approach to labour administration planning, aligning its annual and multi-year sectoral strategies with overarching national development priorities. The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy bases its annual reports on a clearly defined annual work plan that aligns with the country's 2030 National Development Strategy.

Beyond annual planning, the Ministry has adopted a forward-looking framework for occupational safety and employment policy. It developed a National Plan for Labour, Safety at

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<sup>25</sup> ILO, High-level independent evaluation of ILO's COVID-19 response, 2020-2022. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2022 -

[https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_mas/@eval/documents/publication/wcms\\_854253.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_mas/@eval/documents/publication/wcms_854253.pdf)

Work and Employment, covering the period 2021–2027, accompanied by a detailed Action Plan for implementation spanning 2021–2024.

These planning instruments incorporate strategic objectives, measurable priorities—such as improving job quality, workplace safety, workforce adaptability—and defined implementation measures, complete with cost estimations and monitoring indicators. This layered planning structure ensures coherence between national development objectives and sectoral labour strategies, while supporting periodic performance evaluation and progress reporting.

*Croatia: The European Sustainable Development Network, single country profile -*

<https://www.esdn.eu/country->

[profiles/detail?tx\\_countryprofile\\_countryprofile%5Baction%5D=show&tx\\_countryprofile\\_countryprofile%5Bcontroller%5D=Country&tx\\_countryprofile\\_countryprofile%5Bcountry%5D=4&cHash=cf79dc929aea215c738485b8c704644e#basicinfo](https://www.esdn.eu/country-profiles/detail?tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Baction%5D=show&tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Bcontroller%5D=Country&tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Bcountry%5D=4&cHash=cf79dc929aea215c738485b8c704644e#basicinfo)

**Strategic planning** is another pillar of coordination. A single strategic framework, with measurable objectives and time-bound targets, helps align technical units, decentralized offices and parastatal bodies behind common priorities. Ministries increasingly link annual and multi-year plans to national development strategies and require periodic performance reporting from subordinate entities. Where appropriate, a dedicated coordination office—whether in the minister’s cabinet, the permanent secretary’s office, or the executive secretariat—can steward this cycle, consolidate reports, and monitor delivery against indicators.

Because many labour functions sit at the interface with other policy domains, coordination necessarily extends **beyond the labour portfolio**. Ministries of education, health, social affairs, industry, transport or agriculture often share responsibilities for vocational training, OSH, sectoral enforcement or migration. Clear inter-ministerial arrangements – ranging from standing committees to project-based task forces – ensure that labour perspectives are present where socio-economic policies are prepared and decisions are taken.

In federal and decentralized systems, sustained cooperation between national and sub-national authorities is indispensable to avoid fragmented services and uneven standards; intergovernmental fora, harmonized legal frameworks and territorial coordination units are common ways to secure consistency across jurisdictions.

Reporting is another important tool for ensuring coordination. A considerable number of countries indicate that bodies under the direct, delegated or indirect management of the ministry, such as departments, directorates, decentralized units or public and parastatal agencies, have an obligation to submit periodic reports to the ministry.

#### ▶ **Box 7. Germany: structured reporting as governance tool**

In Germany, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) operates with a notable degree of autonomy under public law. Despite this independence, it remains subject to legal supervision by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS). Central to this oversight is the annual reporting mechanism: the BA must submit a comprehensive Annual Report to BMAS, which is reviewed by the Ministry and presented to the agency’s Board of

Governors for approval. This report accounts for the agency's operations, financial results, and compliance with regulations, forming a key tool for ensuring alignment with national labour policy.

The structure reflects a balanced governance model: the BA maintains operational flexibility, while the Ministry retains strategic oversight and ensures accountability through structured reporting and supervisory authority.

*Germany: Federal Employment Agency Annual Reports – <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/en/annual-reports>*

Parastatal and autonomous agencies add capacity and specialization, but they also increase the premium on oversight. The ministry must be able to verify that delegated bodies operate in line with national laws and assigned objectives, receive their reports on a regular schedule, and use their frontline feedback to refine policy. Advisory and equality bodies can be valuable partners here: cooperation agreements with inspectorates, for example, have strengthened the system's ability to address discrimination, disseminate information and raise awareness on equality at work.

It is worth mentioning that not all coordination challenges are external. Labour administration audits frequently reveal “departmentalization” within a single ministry – units with interconnected mandates that do not exchange data, co-draft legislation or pool resources. Addressing these hurdles requires governance that promotes horizontal cooperation: shared information systems, joint standard-setting, consolidated planning and budgeting, and leadership that rewards collaborative delivery. Where coordination mechanisms are weak or absent, the result is uneven enforcement, gaps in service, and loss of public trust; where they are strong, the system operates with a single voice and purpose.

▶ **Box 8. Namibia: towards centralized coordination of employment policy**

In Namibia, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation is currently responsible for coordinating employment matters. However, both government reports and ILO assessments acknowledge that coordination across bodies and services is not functioning at an optimum level. Fragmentation and weak oversight mechanisms have limited the system's effectiveness in delivering integrated employment policies and services.

To address these challenges, the Government is considering the creation of an Employment Creation Commission. This new body would centralize the coordination of activities relating to employment, ensuring that initiatives and programmes are coherent, aligned with national development strategies, and efficiently implemented. The proposal reflects broader ILO recommendations that emphasize the need for clear institutional leadership and coordination in labour administration systems, particularly where responsibilities are dispersed among multiple bodies.

By establishing a specialized commission, Namibia seeks to strengthen its labour administration framework, improve oversight, and better support employment creation strategies in line with international standards of effective governance.

*ILO, Namibia Labour Administration and Inspection Needs Assessment, Technical Memorandum, 2013; ILO – [https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2013/113B09\\_16\\_engl.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2013/113B09_16_engl.pdf)*

Coordination is the connective tissue of labour administration: it links headquarters and field, ministries and agencies, centre and territories, and the labour portfolio with the wider machinery of socio-economic policymaking. By institutionalizing information flows, aligning strategies, clarifying oversight, and enabling joint action, governments ensure that diverse institutions function as one system – capable of implementing national labour policy uniformly and credibly across the country.

### 3. Coordination among ministries

Labour administration rarely exists as a fully self-contained portfolio. In most countries, responsibilities in the field of labour and employment are spread across several ministries and agencies, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of labour market issues. While the Ministry of Labour generally assumes the lead role in shaping and implementing labour policy, related responsibilities often rest with ministries of social affairs, trade, industry, health, or education. This diffusion of functions underscores the need for strong mechanisms of inter-ministerial coordination.

In practice, ministries of labour usually focus on core labour market policies, labour law enforcement and the promotion of decent work, while ministries of trade or industry oversee matters such as productivity enhancement, skills for competitiveness, or entrepreneurship promotion. Social protection, pensions and welfare policies are frequently the responsibility of ministries of social affairs or finance, even though they interact closely with employment policies. In the field of occupational safety and health, inspection services are often divided between the ministry of labour, which enforces compliance with labour law, and the ministry of health, which is responsible for workplace health and medical oversight. Such overlapping mandates, unless carefully coordinated, risk duplication of effort, inconsistent application of rules, and inefficient use of public resources.

International labour standards, particularly Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158, emphasize the importance of coordination across all competent public bodies involved in labour administration. The aim is not to prescribe a single institutional model, but to ensure that when responsibilities are distributed, mechanisms exist to bring together the various actors in a coherent national framework. Coordination may take different forms: formal inter-ministerial committees, regular joint planning meetings, memoranda of understanding between ministries, or consolidated strategies that integrate the contributions of different portfolios into a single policy framework.

The experience of many countries shows that where coordination is weak, outcomes suffer. Labour inspection systems, for example, can become fragmented when labour and occupational health inspections are conducted separately by different ministries without sufficient information-sharing. Conversely, where ministries have established clear channels for cooperation – such as joint inspection programmes, shared databases, or coordinated national employment strategies – policies have been implemented more consistently and effectively.

Strong coordination among ministries is thus not an administrative luxury but a necessity. It ensures that labour, social, health, industrial and educational policies reinforce one another, rather than working at cross purposes. In doing so, it strengthens the overall capacity of government to deliver on the objectives of decent work, social justice and sustainable development.

#### 4. Coordination with agencies

From the 1970s onwards, waves of public sector reform led many governments to delegate functions traditionally carried out by ministries of labour to semi-autonomous bodies or parastatal agencies<sup>26</sup>. Over time, private entities have also become increasingly active in delivering specific services within the labour administration system. Vocational training, for instance, is often entrusted to private training providers operating under a licensing or accreditation system. In the field of occupational safety and health, governments in some countries have authorized private agencies or certified professionals to conduct inspections of hazardous products or workplaces – tasks that were once the exclusive domain of the labour inspectorate. These developments reflect a broader trend towards decentralization and diversification of service delivery, with the aim of making systems more flexible and responsive.

Such arrangements, however, also raise critical governance challenges. When multiple actors are involved in delivering labour administration functions, strong supervision and coordination are essential to safeguard the integrity of national labour policy. Without clear oversight, there is a risk of inconsistent standards, uneven enforcement, and diminished public accountability. Article 9 of Convention No. 150 explicitly addresses this concern, requiring that the ministry of labour or another competent authority retain the means to ascertain whether delegated bodies – parastatal agencies, regional or local authorities, or licensed private actors – are operating in accordance with national laws and adhering to their assigned objectives. This provision underscores the principle that, even where delivery is decentralized, the responsibility for coherence and legality remains with the central authority.

Effective supervision can take several forms. A structured reporting scheme ensures that agencies regularly submit technical and financial information to the ministry, enabling oversight of their activities and outcomes. Financial supervision, through budget allocation and expenditure control, allows the central authority to ensure that resources are being used in line with policy objectives. Legal supervision may involve requiring agencies to comply with regulations, codes of conduct, and performance standards established by the ministry. In some cases, ministries also exercise influence through governance arrangements, such as the appointment of representatives to the management boards of parastatal agencies, thereby maintaining a direct line of accountability.

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<sup>26</sup> Comparative developments in labour administration / Thomas Hastings, Jason Heyes; International Labour Office. Geneva: ILO, 2016 - [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_dialogue/@ed\\_dialogue\\_msu/documents/publication/wcms\\_506148.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@ed_dialogue_msu/documents/publication/wcms_506148.pdf)

The purpose of these supervisory mechanisms is not to undermine the autonomy or expertise of agencies but to integrate their work into a coherent system. Agencies can bring innovation, flexibility, and specialized knowledge, while ministries ensure policy consistency, protect the public interest, and uphold international labour standards. When properly coordinated, this balance enhances the reach and effectiveness of labour administration. When neglected, it risks creating parallel structures that fragment authority, duplicate functions, and erode confidence in labour governance.

In sum, coordination with agencies has become an indispensable element of modern labour administration. It requires ministries of labour to combine strategic oversight with effective monitoring tools, ensuring that the growing diversity of actors contributes to, rather than detracts from, the effectiveness and integrity of national labour policy.

### 5. Coordination on socio-economic policies

Labour policy does not exist in isolation. Its objectives intersect with, and often shape, broader spheres of public policy such as economic development, social protection, health, education, and industrial policy. For this reason, coordination between the ministry of labour and other ministries responsible for socio-economic policy is a cornerstone of effective labour administration. Without such coordination, there is a risk that labour market measures will be disconnected from wider economic strategies, that employment initiatives will lack adequate funding, or that fiscal decisions will undermine social and labour rights.

The central labour administration body serves as the institutional link between the world of work and the broader machinery of government. Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 both stress the importance of ensuring that labour administrations are represented in the administrative and consultative bodies where socio-economic policy is formulated, decisions are prepared, and implementation measures are devised. This presence ensures that labour perspectives – grounded in the daily experience of inspectorates, job centres and social dialogue – are not marginalized but instead inform national strategies. The ministry of labour brings a unique voice to these processes, drawing on its direct contact with employers, workers, and their organizations, and translating workplace realities into policy concerns.

In practice, **horizontal coordination** requires structured arrangements. In many countries, cabinet meetings or inter-ministerial committees provide the forum where labour, finance, economy, education, and health ministries align their strategies. In others, **thematic coordination** mechanisms or socio-economic councils ensure that labour issues are considered as part of wider national planning. The negotiation of budgets for active labour market policies, for instance, typically takes place between labour and finance ministries, highlighting the need for robust dialogue to secure resources for employment creation and skills development. The same applies to occupational safety and health, where ministries of health and labour must align inspections, prevention measures and awareness campaigns.

Examples from recent years illustrate how governments have institutionalized such coordination. In Azerbaijan, a Committee for Labour Coordination and Administration was established by presidential decree in 2017, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection

worked with the Cabinet of Ministers to create Republican Coordination Committees for employment, aligning labour policy with occupational safety, rights protection, and broader economic objectives<sup>27</sup>. In the Republic of Korea, the government has gone further, introducing a system of staff quotas that allows ministries to second personnel to one another in order to address cross-cutting policy areas and break down “invisible walls” between departments<sup>28</sup>.

These experiences showcase that socio-economic coordination is not simply a technical exercise, but a political necessity. It ensures that employment promotion, labour rights, and social justice are considered integral to economic growth strategies. It also helps to prevent contradictions between policies – for example, when fiscal austerity undermines employment objectives, or when industrial promotion overlooks labour rights. By securing a strong seat at the table of socio-economic governance, labour administrations reinforce their central role as guarantors of fair, inclusive and sustainable development.

## 6. Coordination with actors in the private sector

The participation of the private sector in the governance and delivery of labour administration functions has expanded steadily in recent decades. Responding to growing complexity in the labour market and rising demands on public institutions, many governments have turned to public-private partnerships and private providers as a way of broadening expertise, improving service delivery, and accessing new technologies. Vocational training is often delivered by private training centres operating under licensing schemes. In the field of occupational safety and health, some countries allow certified private agencies or professionals to inspect high-risk products or workplaces, supplementing the work of public labour inspectorates. In employment policy, private recruitment companies and placement services now operate alongside public employment services, in some cases under formal authorization from ministries of labour.

International labour standards anticipate such arrangements but also impose clear conditions. The ILO Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88)<sup>29</sup> and Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)<sup>30</sup> call for effective cooperation between public and private employment services, while ensuring that public authorities retain regulatory oversight. Convention No. 150 and Recommendation No. 158 further acknowledge the possibility of delegating certain activities to non-governmental actors, but they affirm that governments

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<sup>27</sup> Azerbaijan: Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2030, Approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan date of October 30, 2018 - [https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/emplab/download/nep/azerbaijan/azerbaijan\\_national\\_employment\\_policy\\_2018.pdf](https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/emplab/download/nep/azerbaijan/azerbaijan_national_employment_policy_2018.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> The Korean system of staff quotas for inter-ministerial secondment is part of its Public Officials Service Regulations and is managed by the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM), see - *Secondment of Civil Servants (State Public Officials Act: Article 32-4 and Article 43; Decree on the Appointment of Public Officials: Article 41)* - <https://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/infoBiz/bizHr05/>

<sup>29</sup> Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88), full text - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312233:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312233:NO)

<sup>30</sup> Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), full text - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312326:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312326:NO)

remain responsible for the effective operation of the system as a whole. In this sense, private participation must complement, not replace, the role of public authorities, and it must be embedded within mechanisms of supervision, accountability and tripartite consultation.

The potential benefits of engaging private actors are considerable. Partnerships with enterprises, training institutions, universities or professional associations can help to promote employment creation, enhance workforce skills, and extend the reach of labour administration services. Corporate social responsibility initiatives and multi-stakeholder certification schemes – such as those in the garment and agricultural sectors – have in some contexts improved compliance with labour standards in global supply chains. New self-assessment tools and private monitoring initiatives may also raise awareness of rights at work and strengthen corporate accountability. At the global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the role of business, from microenterprises to multinational corporations, as essential partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in promoting decent work.

#### ▶ **Box 9. The private sector and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The role of the private sector in achieving decent work extends beyond national labour administrations and is firmly embedded in the international governance framework. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for an enhanced global partnership that brings together governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors. The Agenda specifically highlights partnerships as a driving force for implementation and fully recognizes the role of businesses of all sizes—from microenterprises and cooperatives to multinational enterprises—in advancing its goals and targets.

The UN Global Compact provides practical guidance to enterprises by embedding labour standards into the core of business operations. Its labour principles (Principles 3, 4, 5 and 6) call on companies to uphold freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, the abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. By adopting these principles, enterprises contribute not only to compliance with international labour standards but also to the creation and promotion of decent work for all workers, thereby reinforcing the institutional role of public labour administration.

*UN, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1, 2015); UN Global Compact, The Ten Principles – <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>*

Yet the growing involvement of private actors also carries risks. Outsourcing core functions – such as inspection, conciliation, or employment placement – without adequate safeguards can dilute state responsibility and undermine public trust. Workers' organizations, in particular, have voiced concerns about privatization eroding the enforcement of fundamental rights at work.

**▶ Box 10. Labour inspection and private compliance initiatives**

The 2013 ILO Meeting of Experts on Labour Inspection and Private Compliance Initiatives (PCIs) reaffirmed a fundamental principle: labour inspection is a core function of the State and cannot be outsourced to private actors.

While private compliance schemes, auditing systems, or certification initiatives may complement public efforts, they cannot replace the legal authority, impartiality, and accountability of government labour inspectorates. Labour inspectors alone hold the statutory mandate to enforce labour laws, ensure protection of fundamental rights at work, and impose sanctions where violations occur.

The report emphasized that delegating inspection tasks to private providers risks undermining consistency, transparency, and workers' trust. PCIs can be useful in raising awareness, collecting data, or promoting good practices, but they must remain subordinate to public oversight. Governments are therefore required to maintain direct responsibility for inspection services, in line with ILO Conventions Nos 81 and 129, and ensure that any private initiative supplements—rather than substitutes—the authority of the State.

*ILO, Final Report: Meeting of Experts on Labour Inspection and the Role of Private Compliance Initiatives, MEPCI/2013/7, 2013 - <https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2014/484758.pdf>*

The International Trade Union Confederation has stressed that governments must not abdicate their obligations: outsourcing should only occur where the state can guarantee respect for freedom of association, collective bargaining and other fundamental rights, while maintaining policymaking authority and robust oversight. Similarly, the International Organisation of Employers has argued that while public-private partnerships should be encouraged, they must be subject to mechanisms of good governance - benchmarking, auditing, and transparent evaluation - to ensure that private providers operate in line with policy, law and ethics.

**▶ Box 11. Cooperation with private employment services**

Unlike labour inspection, where functions cannot be outsourced, employment services are an area where collaboration with private actors is possible - provided it is regulated and properly coordinated. The ILO's Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181) establishes a framework for such cooperation, recognizing the growing role of private agencies in labour markets while safeguarding workers' rights.

Under this Convention, governments may authorize private employment agencies to operate alongside public employment services, but they must:

- license or certify agencies and monitor their activities;
- prohibit abuses, such as charging fees to workers for recruitment;
- ensure cooperation between public and private services to improve overall efficiency;
- require reporting so that the ministry of labour can aggregate and analyse data on private agency operations.

This model allows governments to tap into private sector capacity - particularly in areas like recruitment, training, or overseas placement - while retaining ultimate responsibility for labour

market governance. As emphasized by the ILO, private participation must supplement public services, not replace them. Only through clear regulation, continuous supervision, and close coordination can private agencies contribute positively to decent work and effective labour administration.

*ILO, Guide to Private Employment Agencies: Regulation, Monitoring and Enforcement (2007) – <https://www.ilo.org/publications/guide-private-employment-agencies-regulation-monitoring-and-enforcement>*

The lesson is clear: private sector involvement in labour administration is neither inherently positive nor inherently problematic. Its value depends on design, regulation and coordination. When carefully structured, with strong oversight and full involvement of the most representative employers' and workers' organizations, public-private partnerships can enhance labour administration and support the achievement of decent work. When poorly regulated or allowed to replace public institutions, they risk weakening the very system they are meant to reinforce. The coordination with the private sector should be seen as a tool to strengthen the system, not to substitute the government's central role in protecting rights, promoting employment and advancing social justice.

### 7. Functions delegated to social partners

The role of employers' and workers' organizations in labour administration goes beyond consultation and participation. Convention No. 150 explicitly recognizes the possibility of delegating or entrusting certain activities of labour administration to non-governmental organizations, particularly to the social partners themselves or, where appropriate, to their representatives. This provision reflects the long-standing ILO principle that tripartism and social dialogue are not only mechanisms of policy consultation but also practical means of delivering labour administration functions.



#### Convention No. 150, Article 2:

A Member which ratifies this Convention may, in accordance with national laws or regulations, or national practice, delegate or entrust certain activities of labour administration to non-governmental organisations, particularly employers' and workers' organisations, or--where appropriate--to employers' and workers' representatives.

In many countries, social partners sit on the administrative boards of key institutions such as public employment services, social security funds, occupational safety and health agencies, or vocational training bodies. Their **presence in governance structures** helps ensure that the perspectives of workers and employers are embedded in the design and oversight of services, and that policies reflect the realities of workplaces and enterprises. It also strengthens the legitimacy of these institutions, as decisions are seen to be taken with the participation of those most directly affected.

Beyond governance, social partners are often directly involved in the **implementation of programmes**. Employers' associations and trade unions may design and deliver training and re-training schemes, operate bipartite or tripartite training funds, or participate in skills certification systems. In several countries, national bipartite agencies dedicated to training have

been established, pooling resources from both employers and workers to finance and manage continuous education and skills development. These initiatives illustrate how social partners can contribute not only to policy design but also to practical service delivery in areas that are closely linked to the needs of the labour market.

The delegation of functions to social partners requires clear legal frameworks and effective oversight by the central authority to ensure that responsibilities are exercised in line with national policy objectives and international labour standards. When properly structured, such arrangements enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour administration by leveraging the expertise, networks and commitment of employers' and workers' organizations. They embody the cooperative spirit at the heart of Convention No. 150 and confirm that labour administration is not simply a task for government alone but a shared responsibility among all actors in the world of work.

### **8. Territorial coordination and field services**

The effectiveness of labour administration depends not only on the strength of its central institutions but also on its ability to deliver services consistently and equitably across the national territory. To meet the needs of workers and employers wherever they are located, the system must be decentralized, conferring powers and responsibilities to provincial, regional and district bodies. Decentralization makes labour administration more responsive and accessible, but it also creates a heightened need for coordination to ensure that national laws and policies are applied uniformly.

Convention No. 150 (Art. 4) requires governments to guarantee the efficient operation of labour administration throughout their territory. This principle is echoed in Recommendation No. 158 (par. 26), which provides detailed guidance on the organization of field services. It calls for the strategic placement of field offices in areas where they are most needed, with the consultation of representative organizations of employers and workers to ensure that local realities are taken into account. Field services must be staffed adequately, and their personnel must be equipped with the resources and transport facilities necessary to carry out inspections, provide advisory services, compile statistics and deliver employment support. Equally important, they must operate under clear and consistent instructions to prevent variations in the interpretation and application of laws between different parts of the country.

Territorial coordination also requires systematic planning and regular reporting, enabling central authorities to monitor the performance of field services, evaluate outcomes and adjust strategies as needed. This vertical link ensures that decentralized offices remain aligned with national policy objectives while responding to regional and local conditions. In federal or shared jurisdiction systems, the challenge is even greater: effective cooperation between national and sub-national governments is indispensable for providing an integrated set of labour administration services. Mechanisms such as intergovernmental committees, cooperation agreements or joint planning frameworks are essential to reconcile differences in resources and policy approaches across jurisdictions.

Field offices are the face of labour administration for most citizens. They bring national policies into direct contact with workplaces and communities, ensuring that the protection of rights and the provision of services are not confined to the capital but extend to every part of the country. When properly resourced and effectively coordinated, territorial and field structures make labour administration more legitimate, more trusted and more effective. They embody the principle that decent work and social justice must be realized not only in law but also in practice, in every region and locality.

## F. Territorial organization of labour administration

### 1. Decentralization to tailor services to the regional or local contexts

Decentralization has become a defining feature of modern labour administration systems. In order to bring services closer to workers and employers, and in some cases to reduce costs or increase democratic accountability, governments have increasingly delegated specific functions to regional or local authorities. This trend, observed for several decades, reflects the search for efficiency, responsiveness and improved service delivery. Yet as Convention No. 150 makes clear, decentralization must never weaken the ability of the central authority to coordinate and maintain a coherent national labour policy<sup>31</sup>.



Recommendation No. 158, Paragraph 26:

- (1) There should be appropriate arrangements for the effective organisation and operation of the field services of the system of labour administration.
- (2) In particular, these arrangements should--
  - (a) ensure that the placing of field services corresponds to the needs of the various areas, the representative organisations of employers and workers concerned being consulted thereon;
  - (b) provide field services with adequate staff, equipment and transport facilities for the effective performance of their duties;
  - (c) ensure that field services have sufficient and clear instructions to preclude the possibility of laws and regulations being differently interpreted in different areas.

Recommendation No. 158 provides detailed guidance on the organization of field services. It highlights that field offices should be placed in locations corresponding to real needs, with the consultation of representative employers' and workers' organizations. They must be staffed adequately, provided with the necessary equipment and transport facilities, and operate under clear and consistent instructions. This is essential to prevent uneven interpretation of laws and regulations across regions and to ensure that citizens, regardless of where they live, enjoy equal access to labour administration services.

#### ▶ Box 12. Côte d'Ivoire – territorial structuring of labour administration

Côte d'Ivoire reformed its Ministry of Employment and Social Protection in 2021, establishing a structured territorial network to enhance service delivery across the country. The reform

<sup>31</sup> ILO, Labour Administration and Labour Inspection, ILC.100/V, vii. See also CEACR, Convention No. 81: Rwanda, direct request, 2022; Uganda, observation, 2022; and Conventions Nos 81 and 129: Ukraine, observation, 2021.

created a multi-tiered system, comprising regional directorates, departmental labour offices, occupational safety and health (OSH) regional offices, and social centres. All these units operate under the supervision of the central Labour Inspectorate-General, ensuring that local actions remain aligned with national policies and oversight. This model blends decentralization with centralized supervision, promoting responsiveness to regional contexts while safeguarding uniform enforcement of labour standards.

In parallel, the government has also launched broader initiatives aimed at reducing territorial disparities and improving local governance. The Programme d'Appui à la Planification Territoriale (PAPT), introduced in 2021 by the Ministry of Planning and Development, seeks to strengthen spatial, regional and local planning to maximize the impact of development projects. Its objectives include reducing regional inequalities, improving coordination of local development initiatives, supporting local authorities in planning processes, and producing reliable territorial data. By combining decentralization of labour administration with strengthened territorial planning through the PAPPT, Côte d'Ivoire is reinforcing its capacity to deliver fairer, more coherent and better-coordinated services to its population.

*Côte d'Ivoire, Ministère de l'économie, du plan et du développement – <https://www.plan.gouv.ci/accueil/actualite/658>*

▶ **Box 13. Portugal: decentralization reflecting territorial structure**

Portugal's approach to decentralization reflects its unique territorial structure. The Autonomous Regions of the Azores and Madeira manage their own labour administration bodies with responsibilities spanning vocational training, employment services, labour inspection, and dispute resolution. These regional entities operate autonomously but are integrated within the national labour system, representing a federative adaptation within a unitary State:

- Azores: The Regional Directorate for Vocational Training and Employment develops and implements employment and training policies, focusing on enhancing workforce qualifications and employability—supported by regional budgets, state transfers, and European Social Fund resources.
- Madeira: The Regional Government holds broad executive authority, including the management of labour and vocational training within the autonomous framework of the region.

These regional structures illustrate how a country can combine decentralization with effective coherence by embedding regional decision-making within the broader national labour administration system.

*Azores, Regional Labour Inspectorate and Vocational Training Directorate, Government of Azores Portal – <https://portal.azores.gov.pt/en/home>*

*Madeira: the Regional Government – [https://www.madeira-web.com/en/madeira/facts/government.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.madeira-web.com/en/madeira/facts/government.html#google_vignette)*

The experience of Member States illustrates the diversity of approaches to decentralization. These examples show how decentralization can be adapted to national administrative structures, whether through field offices directly reporting to central ministries or through regional administrations with significant autonomy.

The benefits of decentralization are clear: services are brought closer to citizens, labour administration can be adapted to local labour market realities, and implementation becomes more responsive. Yet decentralization also brings risks. Reports from trade unions in Peru and Ethiopia<sup>32</sup> note that the absence of strong coordination mechanisms between national and regional governments has created disparities in service delivery and resource allocation, undermining the consistent application of national labour policy. The International Trade Union Confederation has also cautioned against the dispersion of responsibilities that may arise when too many functions are devolved without adequate oversight<sup>33</sup>.

The challenge, therefore, lies in finding the right balance. Decentralization must be accompanied by systematic planning, reliable reporting, and strong coordination mechanisms between central and local levels. It requires adequate staffing, training and resources for field services, as well as effective channels of communication and consultation with social partners in every region. Only under these conditions can decentralization achieve its purpose: tailoring labour administration to the specific needs of regional and local contexts while upholding a coherent national framework that guarantees equal rights and services throughout the country.

## 2. Labour administration in federal states

In federal states, the organization of labour administration reflects the **constitutional division** of responsibilities between the central government and the federated entities. This creates a dual structure in which a federal labour administration system co-exists with distinct governance arrangements at the level of provinces, states or territories. The challenge is to ensure that these different levels operate in a coordinated manner, so that labour standards and services are applied consistently across the country and resources are used efficiently. Without strong mechanisms of coordination, fragmentation can easily occur, leading to duplication of tasks, uneven enforcement and gaps in protection.

The institutional arrangements in federal states vary widely. In Australia, the federal government plays the leading role in labour relations through the Fair Work Act of 2009<sup>34</sup>, which created a national workplace relations system covering most private sector workers, while states and territories exercise residual responsibilities. Occupational safety and health is

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<sup>32</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

and ITUC, Organising and Collective Bargaining in Non-Standard Forms of Work, Policy Brief, 2019 - <https://www.ituc-csi.org/Organising-CollectiveBargaining-in-NonStandard-Work>

<sup>34</sup> Australia: Fair Work Act 2009 - <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2009A00028/2017-09-20/text>

regulated jointly: each state maintains its own authority, but Safe Work Australia serves as a national policy body bringing together the Commonwealth, states, territories and the social partners to ensure coherence<sup>35</sup>. This model illustrates how federal labour administrations can combine national standards with subnational enforcement.

In Pakistan, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution devolved labour to the provinces, giving them full responsibility for legislation and administration in this field<sup>36</sup>. Federal authorities retain control of certain welfare functions such as pensions and benefits through the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution and the Workers Welfare Fund, but provincial ministries of labour now carry the main responsibility for regulating labour relations, employment and inspection. This devolution has broadened the scope of provincial action but also underlined the need for effective intergovernmental coordination to avoid disparities between regions<sup>37</sup>.

▶ **Box 14. Nigeria: shared responsibility of the Federal Government and the states governments with regard to labour administration**

Nigeria's federal system creates a dual structure of labour administration. At the national level, the Federal Government holds exclusive legislative powers over labour matters, including trade unions, industrial relations, conditions of work, safety and welfare, industrial disputes, the national minimum wage, and arbitration. These powers are enshrined in section 4(2) and Part I of the Second Schedule to the 1999 Constitution.

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment serves as the central authority, responsible for formulating and implementing national labour policies. It is structured into 14 departments and 6 zonal labour offices, and operates through 36 state labour offices, the Federal Capital Territory and 23 district offices. This extensive network provides the backbone of the federal labour administration system.

At the same time, under section 4(7) and Part II of the Second Schedule, state governments retain the freedom to enact their own labour laws and regulations, provided these do not conflict with federal legislation. As a result, many states maintain their own ministries of labour. Examples include the Enugu State Ministry of Labour and Productivity, the Lagos State Ministry of Wealth Creation and Employment, and the Kano State Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Cooperatives and Solid Minerals, which includes a Labour and Productivity Department. These institutions are responsible for implementing labour laws locally and ensuring compliance with federal standards.

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<sup>35</sup> Australia: Safe Work Australia, a national policy body representing the interests of the Commonwealth, states and territories, as well as workers and employers - <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are-and-what-we-do>

<sup>36</sup> Imran Ahmed, *The 18th Amendment: Historical Developments and Debates in Pakistan*, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 2020 - <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/the-18th-amendment-historical-developments-and-debates-in-pakistan/>

<sup>37</sup> Individual Case (CAS) - Discussion: 2013, Publication: 102nd ILC session (2013), Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) - Pakistan (Ratification: 1953) - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID:3131524](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3131524)

This shared responsibility illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of federalism. On one hand, state-level ministries allow labour administration to be tailored to local economic and social contexts. On the other, the coexistence of federal and state laws requires strong mechanisms of coordination to avoid overlap, ensure consistency and maintain the integrity of national labour policy.

*Nigeria: Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 –*

<https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>; Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment – <https://labour.gov.ng/?utm>

Federalism takes different forms around the world, and some of the most recent examples show how constitutional reforms have reshaped the distribution of labour responsibilities. Nepal's 2015 Constitution<sup>38</sup> introduced a three-tier system of government – federal, provincial and local – with labour responsibilities distributed across all three levels. The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security sets national policies, provincial governments adapt and implement them<sup>39</sup>, and local governments<sup>40</sup> are tasked with employment promotion, vocational training, and data collection on labour markets. Article 56 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution establishes local government as comprising rural municipalities, municipalities and district assemblies, with village and municipal executives leading the former two and district assemblies administered by District Coordination Committees<sup>41</sup>. This design reflects the ambition of tailoring services to local realities, but also highlights the need for strong mechanisms to ensure alignment with national strategies.

▶ **Box 15. Germany: labour administration under federal and state powers**

In Germany, labour law, occupational safety and health, employment services and social security fall under concurrent legislative powers shared by the Federal Government and the Länder. This means that Länder may legislate on these matters so long as the Federation has not exercised its legislative authority. In practice, however, labour matters are almost entirely governed by federal law, with state governments influencing adoption and amendment through their participation in the legislative process.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) oversees the Federal Employment Agency, a self-governed institution under public law responsible for employment promotion and job placement, as well as the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Federal Office for Social Security. Enforcement and implementation of federal labour laws, including those on OSH, are delegated to the Länder. Here, the organization of labour inspectorates varies: in some states, inspectorates are part of the general administrative

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<sup>38</sup> Nepal: The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 - [https://ag.gov.np/files/Constitution-of-Nepal-2072\\_Eng\\_www.moljpa.gov.npDate-72\\_11\\_16.pdf](https://ag.gov.np/files/Constitution-of-Nepal-2072_Eng_www.moljpa.gov.npDate-72_11_16.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Nepal: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Jurisdiction of the Ministry - <https://moless.gov.np/pages/1054012944/>

<sup>40</sup> Nepal: total number of local bodies and wards per district of Nepal, last updated 18/07/2025 - <https://opendatanepal.com/dataset/total-number-of-local-bodies-and-wards-per-district-of-nepal>

<sup>41</sup> Nepal: Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, District Coordination Committees - <https://mofald.gov.np/en/ddc>

structure, while in others they operate as independent agencies. In all cases, they fall under the supervision of the competent Land ministry, most often the ministry responsible for labour and social affairs.

This system illustrates the balance between federal coherence and regional flexibility typical of federal states. While labour law remains predominantly federal, the Länder play a decisive role in implementation, ensuring that national labour standards are adapted and enforced within their own administrative frameworks.

*Germany: Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) – <https://www.bmas.de/EN/Ministry/BMAS-at-a-glance/bmas-at-a-glance.html> ; Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany – [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch\\_gg/englisch\\_gg.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html)*

Across these examples, the underlying lesson is the same. Federal systems allow labour administration to be adapted to regional contexts, but decentralization must be balanced by coordination, planning and oversight. Strong relationships between the federal and provincial levels, mechanisms for information-sharing, and agreed strategies are essential to provide a consistent and integrated set of services nationwide. Only in this way can federal states ensure that all workers and employers, regardless of location, benefit equally from national labour policy.

### Labour governance in export processing zones

Export processing zones (EPZs) have been established in many countries as part of strategies to attract foreign direct investment, stimulate exports and integrate into global value chains. These zones typically offer tariff exemptions on imports and exports, allowing producers to access inputs at international prices and thereby increase competitiveness. However, their regulatory frameworks often differ from national systems, and in some cases EPZs are exempted from parts of the general labour law altogether. This raises important questions for labour governance, since exemptions or parallel regulatory systems can create risks of weaker protections for workers<sup>42</sup>.

EPZs are usually managed by specialized administrative bodies responsible for supervising the application of zone-specific laws and regulations, including those relating to labour. These bodies often report to ministries of commerce, trade or industry, with only marginal involvement from ministries of labour.

#### ▶ **Box 16. Seychelles: Labour governance in an international trade zone**

In Seychelles, the International Trade Zone (SITZ) was established by an Act of Parliament to promote international trading activities and attract foreign investment. Unlike the rest of the

<sup>42</sup> ILO, Promoting decent work and protecting fundamental principles and rights at work in export processing zones, Report for discussion at the Meeting of Experts to Promote Decent Work and Protection of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work for Workers in Export Processing Zones (Geneva, 21–23 November 2017), International Labour Office, Enterprises Department, Geneva, ILO, 2017 - [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/@ifp\\_seed/documents/publication/wcms\\_584474.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_584474.pdf)

national economy, the zone is regulated by the Financial Services Authority, which operates under its own legislation and applies a set of distinct employment rules to enterprises within the zone. Oversight is exercised by a board of directors appointed by the President, bringing together representatives from both the public and private sectors.

This governance model reflects the investment-oriented logic of export zones: priority is given to facilitating business operations, offering exemptions from general laws and regulations, and ensuring flexibility for foreign investors. However, it also illustrates a recurring challenge: the marginal involvement of the Ministry of Labour in zone governance can weaken oversight and compromise the consistent application of national labour policies. The ILO has stressed that even where special regimes apply, labour administrations must retain sufficient authority to ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work are respected, and that labour inspectors can operate without restriction inside the zones<sup>43</sup>.

*Seychelles: International Trade Zone Act, Act 8 of 1995 -*  
<https://seylit.org/akn/sc/act/1995/8/eng@2012-06-30>

The ILO has consistently emphasized that the establishment of EPZs must not come at the cost of fundamental principles and rights at work. Labour administrations should ensure that inspectors have the authority to enter and monitor workplaces in EPZs without restriction, and that the full range of labour rights – including freedom of association, collective bargaining, protection against anti-union discrimination, timely payment of wages, and the right to quality employment – are guaranteed within these zones<sup>44</sup>. Experience shows that EPZs can be prone to deficits in decent work, making robust oversight and enforcement mechanisms particularly vital.

▶ **Box 17. Bangladesh: labour rights and inspection in export processing zones**

Bangladesh has established a network of export processing zones (EPZs) that play a central role in its industrial and export strategy, particularly in the garment sector. These zones are managed by the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), which operates under its own legislation and regulatory framework. For many years, labour rights within EPZs were regulated separately from national labour law, with restrictions on trade union activity and collective bargaining, and with limited access for labour inspectors.

The ILO's supervisory bodies have repeatedly drawn attention to these shortcomings. Observations under Conventions Nos 81, 87 and 98 have emphasized the need to ensure that workers in EPZs enjoy the same protections as those in the wider economy, including freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and protection against anti-union

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<sup>43</sup> ILO, Conclusions to promote decent work and protection of fundamental principles and rights at work for workers in EPZs, Tripartite Meeting of Experts to Promote Decent Work and Protection of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work for Workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), 21–23 November 2017 - [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/@ifp\\_seed/documents/publication/wcms\\_605081.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_605081.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

discrimination<sup>45</sup>. The Committee of Experts has also requested that inspectors be fully empowered to enter EPZ workplaces without restriction and carry out their duties in accordance with international labour standards<sup>46</sup>.

Recent reforms have sought to bring the regulatory framework for EPZs closer to national labour law and to strengthen workers' rights, but challenges remain in ensuring full alignment and effective enforcement. The Bangladesh case illustrates both the economic significance of EPZs and the risks that can arise when investment promotion is prioritized over labour rights. It underscores the importance of a strong role for labour administration in monitoring conditions, engaging social partners, and ensuring that fundamental rights are respected inside zones.

*Bangladesh: ILO, Report by the Government of Bangladesh on progress made in the implementation of the road map to address all outstanding issues mentioned in the article 26 complaint concerning alleged non-observance of Conventions Nos 81, 87 and 98, GB.353/INS/9(Rev.1) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/gb/353/report-government-bangladesh-progress-made-implementation-road-map-address>*

*Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) - <https://www.bepza.gov.bd/public/>*

The Committee of Experts has drawn attention to these issues in many countries, noting challenges in ensuring the presence of inspectors<sup>47</sup> in EPZs and highlighting concerns about restrictions on union rights<sup>48</sup> or wage protection<sup>49</sup>. It has urged governments to ensure that workers in EPZs enjoy the same protections as other workers and that labour administrations, in consultation with social partners, design policies that explicitly cover EPZs. The 2017 ILO Tripartite Meeting of Experts on EPZs reaffirmed this principle, stressing that private governance initiatives or zone-specific regulatory bodies cannot substitute for the role of labour administrations in safeguarding rights<sup>50</sup>.

Export processing zones thus exemplify both the opportunities and the risks of special regulatory regimes. They can attract investment and create jobs, but they also require careful governance to prevent the erosion of labour standards. For labour administrations, the

<sup>45</sup> CEACR, Convention No. 87: Bangladesh, observation, 2022; Nigeria, observation, 2021; CEACR, Convention No. 98: Bangladesh, observation, 2020; Pakistan, observation, 2022; Sri Lanka, observation, 2022 - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=1000:13201:::13201:P13201\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:103500](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:13201:::13201:P13201_COUNTRY_ID:103500)

<sup>46</sup> Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2024, published 113rd ILC session (2025) Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) - Bangladesh (Ratification: 1972) - [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4414905,103500](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4414905,103500)

<sup>47</sup> See *inter alia* CEACR, Convention No. 81: Djibouti, direct request, 2022; India, observation, 2022; Conventions Nos 81 and 129: Madagascar, direct request, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> See *inter alia* CEACR, Convention No. 87: Nigeria, observation, 2021; CEACR, Convention No. 98: Pakistan, observation, 2022; Sri Lanka, observation, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> See *inter alia* CEACR, Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95): Dominican Republic, observation, 2011; CEACR, Convention No. 122: Costa Rica, direct request, 2018; Nicaragua, direct request, 2021.

<sup>50</sup> ILO, Conclusions to promote decent work and protection of fundamental principles and rights at work for workers in EPZs, Tripartite Meeting of Experts to Promote Decent Work and Protection of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work for Workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), 21-23 November 2017 - [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/@ifp\\_seed/documents/publication/wcms\\_605081.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_605081.pdf)

challenge is to reconcile the objectives of economic competitiveness with the obligation to ensure that the rights and protections guaranteed by international labour standards apply fully to all workers, regardless of where they are employed.

## G. Structural features of current labour administration systems and recent trends

The structure of labour administration systems is not static; it evolves in response to political, economic and social transformations. National practices over recent decades show that changes in government, economic crises, public administration reforms, and wider social change have all left their mark on the organization of ministries of labour and related institutions<sup>51</sup>. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, trade liberalization and concerns about employment led several countries to experiment with merging ministries of labour with those responsible for economic affairs or finance, on the premise that employment creation required closer synergy with economic policy. Germany and France both adopted such arrangements for a period before reverting to more traditional structures<sup>52</sup>.

Structural changes have also occurred more recently, often with the intention of modernizing labour administration and aligning it with broader state reforms. In Georgia, a major labour law reform carried out in consultation with the social partners between 2019 and 2020 strengthened labour market institutions by expanding the mandate of the Labour Inspection Service and creating a new State Employment Promotion Agency<sup>53</sup>. Spain restructured its ministerial portfolios in 2020, transferring social security issues to a newly created Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, while creating a Ministry of Labour and the Social Economy responsible for employment, the social economy and corporate social responsibility<sup>54</sup>. In other countries, such as Austria, Brazil and Oman, the trend has been to expand the scope of the labour ministry by reallocating portfolios previously held elsewhere, thereby reinforcing the centrality of labour administration within government<sup>55</sup>. Conversely, in some developing countries, ministries of labour have faced long-term marginalization, reflected in persistently low budget allocations and reduced visibility within the machinery of government.

These shifts reflect both pragmatic considerations and deeper debates about the role of labour administration. While integration with economic portfolios may promise efficiency, it can also

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<sup>51</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

<sup>52</sup> ILO, Ministries of labour : comparative overview : history, mandate, challenges world-wide database and organizational charts / Ludek Rychly ; International Labour Office. - Geneva: ILO, 2013, p.16 - [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_dialogue/%40lab\\_admin/documents/publication/wcms\\_216424.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_dialogue/%40lab_admin/documents/publication/wcms_216424.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> ILO, Georgia's Parliament adopts historic labour law reform package, 2020 - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/georgia%E2%80%99s-parliament-adopts-historic-labour-law-reform-package>

<sup>54</sup> ILO General Survey 2024 on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) - Labour administration in a changing world of work, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution) - Part B: General Survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158), ILC.112/Report III(B), para. 149 - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/labour-administration-changing-world-work>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*

dilute the distinct voice of labour in national policymaking. Conversely, maintaining or expanding labour ministries helps to safeguard their role as coordinators of employment and labour policy, as regulators of working conditions, and as guarantors of social dialogue.

At the same time, the world of work is undergoing profound transformation, driven by technological innovation, demographic shifts and global crises. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the indispensable role of labour administrations in crisis response and recovery, while also exposing weaknesses in their capacity and reach<sup>56</sup>. Looking forward, the spread of artificial intelligence, changes in employment patterns and the need for sustainable transitions will require labour administrations to be modernized and strengthened. The International Organisation of Employers stresses the need to explore new methods of governance, adopt innovative management practices and build partnerships with private actors<sup>57</sup>. The International Trade Union Confederation, recalling the ILO Centenary Declaration and the Global Call to Action for a human-centred recovery, underscores that robust labour administrations are essential for promoting decent work and social justice, and must be equipped with adequate resources to discharge their responsibilities effectively<sup>58</sup>.

Recommendation No. 158 emphasizes that the structures of national labour administration systems should be kept under ***continuous review***, in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers. Such reviews ensure that institutions remain responsive to emerging challenges and that they operate efficiently and transparently. Involving the social partners in these processes not only strengthens the democratic legitimacy of labour administration but also ensures that governance of labour is attuned to the realities of the workplace and the needs of all stakeholders.

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<sup>56</sup> ILO, *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*, Resolution adopted at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference (2021) - <https://www.ilo.org/resource/ilc/109/global-call-action-human-centred-recovery-covid-19-crisis-inclusive>

<sup>57</sup> ILO, IOE, *Changing business and opportunities for employers' and business organizations*, International Labour Office and International Organisation of Employers – Geneva: ILO and IOE, 2019 - [www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_dialogue/@act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_679582.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_679582.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> ILO, *Discussion on the General Survey Labour administration*, Committee on the Application of Standards CAN/PV.General Survey, 4 June 2024, International Labour Conference, 112th Session, 2024 - <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/ILC112-CAN-PV-General%20Survey-%5BNORMES-240520-021%5D-EN.pdf>

## Exercise – “Ideal” labour administration system

### Goal

Develop together a vision of the *ideal labour administration system* that is well organized, coherent, and capable of coordinating functions effectively across ministries, agencies, social partners and territorial levels.

### Suggested time

1 session of 90 minutes.

### Method

Guided discussion in small groups followed by a plenary exchange, leading to the development of a shared vision of the ideal organization of a labour administration system and the concrete steps needed to bridge the gap between the current reality and that vision.

### Preparation

- Adapt the exercise questions (below) to the context of labour administration.
- Provide handouts with questions, or prepare them on a flip chart.
- Materials: flip charts, markers, tape.


### During the exercise

1. Divide participants into small groups. Ask them to discuss the questions and record their reflections on a flip chart with two columns: **“Current reality”** and **“Ideal system”**.
2. Each group nominates a rapporteur to present in plenary.
3. In plenary, rapporteurs present the results. Participants identify the most important gaps between current practice and the vision of an ideal labour administration system, and discuss proposals for improvement.
4. Facilitator guides the discussion from abstract ideas to concrete proposals, focusing on how the ideal characteristics could be incorporated into the daily functioning of ministries, agencies, and territorial offices.

### Helpful questions for the discussion

Imagine and describe an ideal labour administration system:

- What reputation would it have with citizens, employers, workers and international partners?
- What contributions would it make to decent work, social justice and sustainable development?

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- What values would underpin it (for example, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, inclusiveness)?
  - How would its mission be defined and communicated?
  - How would coordination between central, regional and local bodies be organized?
  - How would ministries, agencies, and social partners interact?
  - How would information and knowledge flow across the system to ensure coherence and evidence-based decisions?
  - How would decision-making be structured to balance central guidance with local responsiveness?
  - What mechanisms would ensure effective coordination with other ministries, agencies, and the private sector?
  - How would the system cope with crises and adapt to new challenges in the evolving world of work?

### **Expected outcome**

The discussion should produce a collective vision of an ideal labour administration system, identify current challenges and gaps, and generate practical proposals for strengthening organization, structure and coordination.

### **Tips for trainers**

While this exercise can be conducted as part of a stand-alone module focusing specifically on the organization and structure of a labour administration system, it can be equally applied as part of a more complex integrated exercise of the training curriculum. In this case, it may build on the mapping of the institutional architecture of labour administration in a given context and be linked to the analysis of its core functions (Module 1), followed by a gaps analysis and the identification of resources and strategies needed to strengthen performance (Modules 3 and 4) from leadership and management perspective.

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### Contact details

International Training Centre of the ILO

Programme on Social Protection, Governance and Tripartism (SPGT)

Viale Maestri del Lavoro, 10  
10127 Turin – Italy

E: [Inspection@itcilo.org](mailto:Inspection@itcilo.org)

[www.itcilo.org](http://www.itcilo.org)