



Noteworthy experiences in digitalisation by employers' and
business membership organisations (EBMOs) in Latin America

Technical Note: Nicaragua

Sofia - Virtual Assistant

This Technical Note forms part of a collection of noteworthy experiences in digitalisation by employers' and business membership organisations (EBMOs) in Latin America, identified during research carried out by the ILO's Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) for the production of the 2022 Regional Report "Where do Business Organisations Stand on the Road to Digitalisation? A look at Latin America". The aim of these noteworthy experiences is to inspire other EBMOs in their transition towards digitalisation. We would like to thank the ILO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) programme for its support in drafting this document, which will serve as a basis for an exchange of knowledge among EBMOs around the world.

► What is South-South and Triangular Cooperation?

South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) can be defined as collaboration between two or more developing countries, which frequently have the support of traditional partners, guided by the principles of solidarity and unconditionality, the aim of which is to put into practice inclusive and distributive development models governed by demand. SSTC complements North-South cooperation with joint action to encourage development opportunities. As can be seen from the Sustainable Development Programme 2030, SSTC has become an important means of international cooperation for development and an essential item in the United Nations toolbox.

► Summary

The Instituto Nicaragüense de Desarrollo (Nicaraguan development institute - INDE) is an organisation that promotes and defends the economic and social importance of private enterprise. The institution has 57 years of experience and a great deal of credibility; its members are businesses and professionals who are implementing innovative and responsible initiatives that contribute to local and national development. In June 2022, INDE launched a virtual assistant (chat bot) named Sofia.



► What services does it offer?

“Sofia's” principal task is to provide information in a simple and automated form. Her main menu offers free advice to users on the following subjects:

1. Citizens' records.
2. Entrepreneurship and formalisation for companies.
3. Educational credits.
4. Loans from Fondo del Instituto Nicaragüense de Desarrollo (Nicaraguan development institute fund - FINDE).

Each heading contains a more detailed sub-menu. For example, number 2 concerning “entrepreneurship and formalisation for companies” includes options for registering trademarks, licences, and hygiene permits, as well as tax information. The service offered by Sofia also enables users to contact an advisor from the organisation.

► How to join?

Interested users start a conversation with the virtual assistant or make contact via INDE's social media. The conversation starts with a message that activates a menu of services. The assistant is available on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and, very soon, INDE website.

► Why this project?

“The pandemic gave us pause for thought. The world has embraced digital media for communications and relations with clients and beneficiaries, who want it to be ever quicker and easier” - INDE.

► How was it developed?

Red Centroamericana y del Caribe de Microfinanzas (Central America and Caribbean Microfinance Network) has been a key ally in the creation of the virtual assistant, while INDE has produced the content. Although INDE says there were no major obstacles in implementing this digital tool, it does emphasise the challenge posed by adapting the content of its business advisors for simple automated conversations, as well as the importance of an attitude to change that eschews the traditional way of doing things.

► What impact has it had?

In the first three weeks after its launch on the 22nd June 2022, it received 10,213 messages from 454 new contacts. These contacts were associate and non-associate members who found the virtual assistant to be an efficient way of making use of the services of INDE. The simple and accessible language of the assistant enabled them to close the digital gap with clients, create opportunities for contacting potential members, eliminate repetitive tasks carried out by officers of the organisations and offer a 24-hour service, 7 days a week.

“Our main advice to other business chambers is that they should go for innovative services; having one eye on the road and the other on the horizon, as the saying goes” - INDE.