

Contractual Workers in Public Education or «Precarity Management»

Fady Noun*

According to the Educational Center for Research and Development's figures for 2016-2017, the total number of teachers in the public sector is 43,500 for 328,171 pupils. However, about half of them, i.e. 21,500 teachers, are contract workers, working part-time and not full-time.

At the root of this complex phenomenon is the war and the barriers set up between regions, which have allowed the proliferation of hiring teachers on contract basis. In the 1990s, for example, contract workers accounted for almost 90% of the teaching workforce in the public sector according to an academic source at the Lebanese University.

Today, this imbalance has been redressed but it has not fully disappeared. As a result, contract workers in public education regularly demonstrate, demanding permanent employment, and the precariousness of their situation is a potential driver of social instability.

«With contract-based employment comes instability,» said a member of the Primary School Teachers' League. «Do you know, for example, that contract workers are paid once a year only? Do you know that they are paid based on number of hours of actual teaching and that official holidays are not paid? Not even March 9, Teacher's Day! Do you know that the hourly wage rate of contract teachers does not change or take into consideration seniority or level of education? And finally, do you know that contract workers are not registered with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and do not receive commuting allowance or end-of-service indemnity?»

In addition, inequality in terms of employment complicates the issue further, with contract

workers teaching only four hours per week while others teach twenty.

«Finally, there has been an additional injustice to contract workers when the competition for the recruitment of new

teachers was opened to everyone in 2008,» adds the source. «While contract workers had asked that this competition be exclusively reserved for them, as was the case in 2004. In any event, some teachers spend their entire professional career in precariousness.»

«Recruitment throughout the public sector, including of teachers, is only a vast enterprise of precarity management,» said

an official source at the Lebanese University who requested anonymity.

The distribution of teachers across the 1,257 public schools in Lebanon is a good example, with over-employment or shortages depending on the region, given that there is on average one teacher for every 7.54 pupils in the public sector, whereas the figure is 12.40 in the private sector. That's a significant difference.

It is obvious that this state of affairs has repercussions on social peace. However, with the policy of spending cuts set down by the CEDRE conference donors in Paris, this situation could become more complex, especially with the decision to stop new hirings in the public sector.

How will the Ministry of Education fill the positions of retiring teachers every year?

There is no clear answer to this challenge yet.

According to our source at the Primary School Teachers' League, it is the currently working teachers, whether working on a permanent or contract basis, who will temporarily take on additional teaching hours, «which is not a bad thing».

But according to a source in charge at the Ministry of Education who requested anonymity, this approach is only viable in the short term. In the long term, a feasibility study is underway at the Ministry of Health to include the 1.8 million Lebanese citizens who do not benefit from any social security in the NSSF and thus remedy to the precarious situation of contract workers. At the same time, training sessions for the professionalization of the teaching profession, with the prospect of a new competition, are also planned.

* Author, journalist at L'Orient-Le Jour



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