



Contract Employment in Education in Morocco: Impacts and Tensions

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Introduction

Since 2016, contractual employment has become the Moroccan government's preferred mode of employment at all levels of the education sector, with the Regional Academy of Education and Training (AREF) organizing competitions to recruit teachers on temporary contracts. This shift was motivated by several political and economic concerns and reflected the State's changing position in the management of public policies.

Despite the controversies and tensions resulting from the adoption of this method, the government is determined to maintain it. The government has made nominal concessions to improve the system, but according to those affected, this method remains merely a form of privatizing the teaching profession. There has also been talk of the State's intention to gradually extend the contracted employment model to other sectors such as health, local administration, and higher education.

From this perspective, the following question arises: What are the stakes behind the employment of teaching staff on fixed-term contracts? What are the implications of this for the education sector and its workers? To address this issue, this paper will examine the different contexts for the fulfilment of the contractual employment policy in the field of education, while also monitoring the effects of the adoption of a regional recruitment strategy and the resulting tensions; the following analysis is based on the reports of national and international bodies,

the statements of the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MNEVT), and the trade unions representing and defending the contracted staff.

Reasons Behind the Contractual Employment Policy: Background and Stakes

On 24 June 2016, the Council of Government approved a decree on the terms and conditions of contract employment in public administrations. On 7 October 2016, the ministers of National Education and Vocational Training and of Economy and Finance signed a joint decision on the status of teachers contracted with academies. The job description was then later changed to academy teachers, following the issuance of statutes starting in September 2018 and subsequent amendments in March 2019.

The adoption of the contract option in the employment of educational staff reflected a fundamental shift in the course of public sector reform. It expressed a willingness to experiment with new approaches in human resource management in education, which constitutes the backbone of public service in Morocco. Some of the core changes included:

- **Regionalization:** The government has expanded the powers of AREF to reduce the burden of centralization in the management of education sector human resources.¹ Notably, the launch of the advanced regionalization workshop in 2015 moved the burden of recruitment to the regional units but neither qualified them to perform this role nor developed any convincing arguments to justify the regional dimension of contracting. Regionalization and contract employment are not inherently connected, so linking regional recruitment with contractual labor raises questions.²
- **Fiscal decentralization:** Decentralization of public finances has been an urgent demand, and the Organic Law on Finance (LOF) allowed for the financial basis underpinning decentralization to be strengthened. The education sector has emerged as a major area for experimenting with this approach by transferring some of the competencies related to budget management and financial decisions to the directors of AREF, with the aim of limiting the State's function to strategic guidance and gradually withdrawing from financing public services in education.³
- **Diversifying forms of employment:** In 1999, the National Charter for Education and Training recommended diversifying the status of new teachers, including resorting to contractual employment with options for term renewal.⁴ This option has continually been delayed, however, and the political context only favored its adoption in some partial measures to address shortages. These include the temporary employment of degree holders to address shortages in remote areas, or the so-called "casual teachers,"

who the government was forced to integrate into the civil service in 2007 after a series of protests.⁵

The contract labor approach also reflected the government’s concern about budgetary control in response to the recommendations of donor agencies, which kept demanding that education spending be reduced and that the wage bill be reduced.⁶ This reform coincided with the International Monetary Fund making a permanent credit line (the Liquidity and Prevention Line) worth approximately US\$3.5 billion available in July 2016, in exchange for special conditions related to rationalizing the management of the public sector by reviewing the pension system, tax reform, and expanding the decentralization of social sector management, including education in particular. The World Bank, on the other hand, has been enumerating the advantages of fixed-term contracts, recommending in several reports that the government make general use of the contractual employment model.⁷

Benefits for the Government

In quantitative terms, there has been a surge in teacher recruitment since the introduction of contractual employment. The total number of teachers recruited over the years went from 11,000 in 2016 to 55,000 in 2018 and exceeded 100,000 in 2022; the annual increase was approximately 17,000, an average that exceeds the pace of recruitment before 2016, which remained around 5,000 jobs per year.⁸ From the annual fiscal laws, the total number of budgeted jobs in the education sector barely reached 66,000 between 2006 and 2016.⁹

TABLE: Pace of hiring in education sector after introducing the contracting system*

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Placements (rounded to thousands)	11,000	24,000	17,000	15,000	15,000	17,000	15,000	20,000

* Personalized synthesis based on tracking annual financial laws and MNEVT communications

This pace helped reduce the huge labor shortage, which had led to the adoption of do-it-yourself solutions such as shared classrooms and reduced learning time, including the inadequacy of the pool of substitute teachers available to replace teachers who were absent for long periods of time with reason. This shortage led to the use of casual teachers who often started in the middle of the school year; these teachers had diplomas, but lacked any prior training and were not given incentives or employment protections.

According to government statements, the intensity of regional hiring has improved the learning environment by alleviating overcrowding in classrooms. Regional appointments have also helped to: cover remote areas with educators willing to settle close to their workplace; expand

the pedagogical offerings by extending the French language learning throughout all school years; expand the teaching of the Amazigh and English languages; and provide universal primary education in schools by recruiting educators working with associations.

However, could these improvements not have been provided through formal or permanent employment?¹⁰ Especially in light of the failure of contract employment experiments in education in Morocco's neighboring countries such as Algeria and Senegal? To justify this paradox, sector officials argue that this level of recruitment could not have been achieved under centralized recruitment. This justification actually intersects with the narrative of contractual employees, who have been criticizing the government's commitment to implementing international dictates without taking into account the best interests of the sector and its workers.

Outcomes for Contracted Teachers and the Education Sector

Despite the government's narrative of equality, reality indicates that the opposite is true between "ministry teachers," who are fully certified by and included in the public service, and "academy teachers," who are subject to a special set of rules.¹¹ This duality has fueled the sense of precariousness of the contractual teachers' administrative status. Although the official characterization of this category changed from teachers under contract in 2016 and in 2018 to academy staff and employees in 2019, they prefer to call themselves "teachers forced to contract," feeling that their contracts are "contracts of submission" due to the ministry's unilateral contract drafting despite the law stipulating that the contract must be drafted in the presence of both parties.¹²

Social speaking, the context accompanying the adoption of the fixed-term employment model has contributed to the entrenchment of a state of inferiority in social circles for contract workers; as they are merely employees recruited to work outside the classic employment process, their 'inferior' status is embedded in the societal mindset. They are not subject to a rigorous qualification and training process.¹³ The training they undergo is characterized by several shortcomings, such as irregularity and the continuous reduction of training duration of the training, which since 2016 has been reduced to less than a year.¹⁴

In addition, the adoption of this model has affected educational security, with tensions increasing throughout the school year, as recognized by official authorities. The Bank of Morocco's 2021 report emphasized that the unrest caused by the contracting system, which has accumulated since 2016 without any solution, has only worsened the educational situation.¹⁵ The escalation of protests aimed at overturning the contract system, accompanied by cases of violence, trials, and disciplinary measures, has fueled feelings of grievance among this group. This has affected the attractiveness of teaching, with frequent resignations and migration

abroad. These indicators prompted the Supreme Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research to recommend the need for human resource management in the education sector to have a clear strategy that recognizes the requirements of quality, commitment, and motivation.¹⁶

The Future of Fixed-term Employment: Between Optimization and Abolition

Contracting has been a pressing factor in the negotiations between educational unions and the MNEVT on the preparation of a new statute covering all employees in the sector. The National Coordinating Committee for Teachers and Support Staff Forced to Contract (CNPCC) was able to exert pressure on the negotiations to elevate their concerns on the settlement agenda at the expense of other sectors, given their demographic weight, structural impact, and social repercussions. While the new statute approved by the government on 27 September 2023 stipulated that the MNEVT employees would be covered by the same basket of rights and privileges,¹⁷ the CNPCC felt that the MNEVT chose to sidestep the issue, as the financial relationship of these employees is still linked to AREF and not to the ministry, which means that the gap between the central and regional employment systems will continue.¹⁸

By tracking the projects aimed at revising the public service system, the reactions of actors and practitioners, and in light of the general trends of public sector reform, several scenarios emerge:

- **Abolition:** The protests against contracting may lead to the disruption of educational facilities in a way that may favor actual integration into the public service, and a break with the hybrid formula for regional recruitment. However, this scenario remains unlikely given the economic calculations of the contract policy and its interdependence with far-reaching institutional reforms that are being implemented.¹⁹
- **Optimization:** The draft statute of the MNEVT includes several amendments to the methodology of regionalization without completely abandoning the contractual approach. The CNPCC rejected it outright because it relies on changing employee demographics by increasing the number of “temps” and reducing the number of public employees, thus replacing public service jobs with more precarious employment options.²⁰
- **Generalization:** International donor organizations have been urging the government to move away from lifetime employment and to introduce contracting as it responds to the challenges of modern management based on productivity and flexibility, while valorizing the local public service to enhance the governance of human resources management. In this context, the secretary-general of the Ministry of Digital Transition

and Administration Reform revealed that regionalization will be introduced in various sectors such as health.²¹ The government spokesperson said that the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is in the process of preparing a draft law to introduce a contractual employment system in the health sector. The same is true for higher education. There are signs that university professors are beginning to be hired on fixed-term contracts,²² following the experience of some countries of the OCDE. Universities cover their needs for research and teaching staff under annual contracts.²³

Given the government's current direction, the latter scenario seems to be the most likely to materialize, with the possibility of policy softening and improvement in light of the negative legacy of the AREF recruitment and the aftershocks that not only compromise educational security but also threaten social peace in the form of groups of young adults that, after a long experience of rejection, found a job in education as a last resort. In light of the confusion caused by the introduction of regional recruitment the debate has shifted from a view limited to the ministry's relationship with teachers to a wider scope that includes all of society, not to mention the growing apprehension in other sectors and the warnings of various unions and group-driven coordinating bodies against the generalization of this policy. This is especially due to the efforts of affected groups in promoting a narrative that merges factional demands with a discourse that understands contractual employment as a gateway to the privatization of education and public schools.

Conclusion

The use of fixed-term contracts and the systematic effects this has had on public policies in the fields of education and training are not an isolated technical or transitional measure of an experimental nature. On the contrary, this represents a strategic step aimed at creating the conditions for the transformation of public administration into private sector management based on the goals of flexibility and profitability; this explains the governmental and international insistence on the contracting model and the trend toward its general use, despite numerous parties disapproving of the policy.

While quantitative assessment may favor the virtues of the contracting policy and its ability to employ a growing number of teachers and administrators within the education sector, qualitative assessment highlights the limitations of this policy in confronting the chronic shortcomings of the education system. Indicators continue to decline, such as the low ranking of Moroccan students in international tests and the persistence of difficulties in controlling school demographics, such as overcrowding, shared classrooms, and assigning multiple subjects to the same teacher. This is not to mention the diminishing attractiveness of the teaching profession and the deterioration of learning conditions students and teachers.

In light of this, the following suggestions are relevant and should be seriously considered:

- Improvement of the current statute governing MNEVT employees, with more serious guarantees to make it truly inclusive, motivating, and unified, and enabling the same rights and services to be granted equally to different educational and administrative cadres.
- Starting a broad national dialogue on the contractual employment model, since it has become unpopular with the public and a subject of apprehension and rejection by public sector employees.
- Controlling fiscal decentralization by providing actual support in terms of planning and management powers, instead of limiting it to a technical scope to justify the contracting policy.

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³ Mohamed El-Othmani, Contractualization in the Education Sector: Backgrounds and Risks, Dana Press, March 28, 021. <https://2u.pw/CTN6zo6>

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⁸ Ahlam nazih, Prof contractuels : 100000 recrues depuis 2016, L'économiste , n 5978, 30 mars 2021, p.5.

⁹ Le métier de l'enseignant au Maroc, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, rapport thématique, p.15.

¹⁰ Mohamed Eldrige, The Crisis of Contract Teachers: Missed Experiences and Forgotten Lessons, Alhudud website, April 3, 2019. <https://2u.pw/9iXF6WO>

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¹⁴ Annual Report, High Council of Auditors for 2021, Rabat, November 2022, p. 148.

¹⁵ Annual Report of the Bank of Morocco for the fiscal year 2021, p. 7.

¹⁶ Le métier de l'enseignant au Maroc à l'aune de la comparaison internationale, CSEFRS, Rabat, 2021, p.19-20.

¹⁷ The Council of Government approves a draft decree on the statute of the employees of the national education sector, Maghreb Arab News Agency. September 27, 2023, available at: <https://shortlink.uk/u5zT>

¹⁸ Contractors: The ministry jumped on our file in the statute and only changed the names, Al-Safir newspaper, September 26, 2023, available at: <https://assafir.ma/393590.html>

¹⁹ Nadia El-Baoun and Badr Boukhrouf, Contract Employment in Education in Morocco: From Economic Governance to Social Implications, Takamol Studies and Research Center, p. 36.

²⁰ Contract teachers comment on the contents of the Ministry of Education Staff Statute, Al-Safir newspaper, July 31, 2023. <https://2u.pw/UiXcKlK>

²¹ After sparking controversy in education... Is Morocco relying on contract recruitment in the health sector? Aswat Magharebia, December 4, 2022. <https://2u.pw/6RCUmle>

²² Noura Mzaghani, Ce qui change avec le nouveau statut des enseignants-chercheurs, lematin.ma, 23 AOÛT 2023. <https://shortlink.uk/u5BA>

²³ Enders J and Musselin C. Back to the Future? The Academic Professions in the 21st Century. In: Center for Educational Research and Innovation (ed.) Higher Education to 2030. Paris, Center for Educational Research and Innovation: OECD, 2008, p.134.