



PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC ENTITIES AND POLICIES

CONTRACT CIVIL SERVANTS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

More than one million contract civil servants currently work in the civil service (central government, local authorities, hospital sector), where they occupy a significant but poorly defined role. The trend increase in their number, three times faster than that of permanent civil servants between 2010 and 2017, meets both the needs of administrations for flexibility and difficulties observed in the use of permanent civil servants.

In fact, the management of contract workers in the civil service is gradually moving closer to that of permanent staff, at the cost of greater rigidity in terms of their recruitment, remuneration and career conditions.

At a time when a reform is aiming in particular to facilitate their recruitment, the Cour des comptes makes five audit recommendations aimed at better organising the coexistence of permanent and contract civil servants.

An increase in the number of contract civil servants, reflecting difficulties in adapting the civil service

Contract civil servants currently represent 18.4% of civil service employees. Although accurate figures for the wage bill are not calculated by central government, the Cour des comptes estimated it to be between €25.8 billion and €40 billion in 2017, depending on the scope examined and the source of the data used. Between 2010 and 2017, their number (in full-time equivalents) grew faster than that of all civil servants (+15.8% compared with +5.9%).

In most cases, recruitment is explained by needs that cannot be met by permanent civil servants: replacement of absences due to holidays, occasional needs for seasonal peaks in activity, specific occupational needs when there is no suitable civil service or employment corps. However, the hiring of contract civil servants is also the outcome, in many cases, of mismanagement by permanent civil servants. The same applies to recruitment caused by the rigidity of procedures for the assignment and mobility of civil servants, which leaves many roles unfilled, as is the case in the national education system. The hiring of contract civil servants also makes it possible to avoid working conditions and remuneration that are not adapted to the reality of the labour market in particular segments. Finally, the recruitment process for permanent civil servants, which is often long and complex, explains the use of contract civil servants to cover urgent needs.



Increasingly rigid management methods

While the recruitment of contract civil servants is justified by administrations' needs for adjustment and flexibility, management of these civil servants is gradually becoming more rigid.

Their recruitment is increasingly codified, leading to longer and more complex recruitment conditions, both in the central government civil service and in the local and regional civil service.

On a like-for-like basis for jobs and ages, contract civil servants, especially low-skilled ones, are usually paid significantly less than permanent civil servants. For highly sought-after sectors often corresponding to highly-skilled jobs, the situation is reversed, due to competition between public and private employers, or even between public employers.

Unlike permanent civil servants, contract civil servants do not legally have access to any career or promotion system. In practice the circumstances vary enormously, ranging from simple compliance with the rules to a "quasi-status" based on the provisions applicable to civil servants.

Tenure is often offered at the end of the contract, but this is increasingly being overridden by the transformation of fixed-term contracts (CDD) into permanent contracts (CDI). The increase in public law permanent contracts, which are more attractive for employees because they do not involve certain restrictions such as mobility, exposes the public employer to the risk of placing its human resources management under constraint.

Better organisation of the coexistence of permanent and contract civil servants

The Government has recently embarked on a reform process aimed at expanding employment opportunities for contract workers in the civil service. While permanent civil servants in all three branches of the civil service are expected to remain a majority for a long time to come, the prospect of a further increase in the proportion of contract civil servants leads the Cour des comptes to make five audit recommendations aimed in particular at:

- adapting recruitment conditions for civil servants, by broadening the possibility of recruiting on the basis of qualifications;
- better negotiating the remuneration of contract civil servants, by developing the use of benchmarks by employers;
- proposing collective bargaining for executives, where this is compatible with the role;
- adapting arrangements for dealing with unemployment risks due to an increase in the number of contract civil servants;
- improving social dialogue conditions to better involve contract civil servants in the organisation and operation of public services.

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