



PSI statement on South Korea

It is an honor to address this committee on behalf of Public Services International.

The number of precarious workers at public institutions is increasing every year. The reason is Korea's lump-sum personnel expenditure system, under which the central government sets the total level of personnel costs for public institutions. Because they cannot exceed the level set by the government, public institutions are forced to turn to outsourcing and short-term employment, paid for on the basis of project budgets. Thus, precariously-employed workers are filling Korea's growing public services needs, but face vast challenges due to inferior working conditions.

Precariously-employed public sector workers are highly discriminated against in comparison to regularly employed workers. This can be seen in case of education support workers, who make up roughly half of all directly-employed precarious workers in the public sector. The monthly wage for most of these workers is less than USD 1000, between roughly 50 ~ 70% of what is made by regularly-employed school staff doing similar types of work. Education support workers have no wage scale, so their wages remain the same no matter how long they work.

Precariously-employed education support workers, the vast majority of whom are women, must endure various forms of discriminatory and sexist treatment because their precarious employment status means they can be dismissed at the whim of school principals.

The Government of the Republic of Korea claims it will regularize the employment status of public sector workers on fixed-term contracts by 2015.

This claim is gravely misleading. The Government is changing fixed-term contracts to unlimited-term contracts, calling this regularization of employment status. In fact, however, there is a very significant difference



between the conditions of workers on unlimited-term contracts and those who have truly regular employment status.

Most public institutions use two sets of employment rules, one for regularly-employed workers and one that groups unlimited-term contract and fixed-term contract workers together. Thus, the wages and working conditions of unlimited-term contract workers are closer to those of fixed-term workers than regularly-employed workers. In the case of education support workers, transfer from fixed to unlimited-term contracts means no increase in wages whatsoever.

In addition, workers on unlimited-term contracts face much more job insecurity than regularly-employed workers, because the conditions under which they can be legally dismissed are much more lax.

The Korean government has also recently announced a plan to increase the employment rate to 70% by creating 'good part-time jobs', beginning in the public sector.

It is highly questionable whether part-time jobs can really be 'good' jobs. Experience shows that for civil servants part-time schedules simply means the same amount of work done in less time for less pay, or increased burden placed onto full time workers. Work intensity for Korean civil servants is already so intense that the number of civil servant suicides has skyrocketed in recent months. We do not want to see an exacerbation of this trend.

It is the government's plan that women, who supposedly prefer flexible work schedules to be able to look after families, will most of these jobs. In other words, the government's plan will perpetuate gender inequality by channeling women into part-time jobs that are not good at all.

In conclusion, the Government's policies are not a solution to precarious employment in the public sector, but rather a means for perpetuating vast inequalities. A comprehensive policy, based on the principle of direct and



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secure employment for public sector workers is needed. This will require avoiding indiscriminate outsourcing, increasing funding for personnel costs and fundamental reform the lump-sum personnel expenditure system.

As was mentioned in the General Survey presented in this Committee, more than 50% of public service workers are on precarious contract. We once more express our deep concern and request the ILO to address this issue as a matter of urgency.

Thank you.