

Punished for Their Political Stance: Is Returning to Work Enough?



The issue of employees dismissed from their jobs because of their support for the Syrian revolution has occupied a broad space in the attention of the state and public opinion in Syria since liberation. As the process of reviewing these cases has continued since 2025, with registration opened for those affected and their situations reexamined by specialized committees, initial estimates have emerged speaking of tens of thousands of workers who have applied to return to their jobs after years of exclusion from the public sector, whether because of arrest, leaving besieged areas, or joining the revolution.

That has brought the issue back to the center of debate as one that goes beyond its administrative and livelihood dimensions.

Although dismissal from public employment was used during the early years of the revolution as a tool to punish opponents, the issue remained for years without precise figures or a central database documenting its true scale. The picture only became clearer after registration was opened and files were

reviewed again, as initial estimates began to reveal the scale of exclusion that affected employees because of their political positions, and the profound changes that resulted within the structure of public employment during that period.

This article seeks to examine the issue of the dismissed as more than merely a matter of jobs and salaries. Behind every request to return lies a story of long years of exclusion, interruption, and loss. And as thousands of dismissed employees return to demand their rights, a central question comes back to the fore: How can institutions be rebuilt in a way that makes Syrians feel they are more just and fair to everyone.

How did thousands of Syrians lose their jobs?

During the years of the revolution, the issue of dismissing employees in Syria became a tool in the hands of the Assad regime to reshape the public sector. According to what the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented, thousands of workers lost their jobs because of their political positions or suspicion surrounding them. Many dismissal decisions were attributed to security reports and suspicions, leading political loyalty to outweigh competence and professional experience within government institutions.

At the same time, appointments in state institutions expanded in favor of regime supporters, redistributing positions within the administrative apparatus and creating a distorted employment reality. This led to inflated hiring and the emergence of jobs that did not necessarily reflect any real need within institutions.

Legal researcher Nawras al-Abdullah told Noon Post, in response to our question about the impact of employment policies during the war years on the structure of the public sector: “Before the revolution, Syria’s public sector was already suffering from severe bloat, in addition to structural and ethical corruption. But during the years of the Syrian revolution, the Assad regime used public employment as a kind of reward for the militias fighting alongside it and their relatives, and as support for its own social base.

As a result, bloat and corruption increased dramatically, accompanied by a decline in performance and services in both quantity and quality.”

He added: “After liberation, we began seeing and hearing in many sectors about astronomical numbers of employees in directorates and public facilities beyond what logic can bear. Although many of these hiring processes were political and security-driven rather than administrative, the new Syrian government’s efforts to address them have run into numerous obstacles.”

Returning to work: A road still full of obstacles

Indeed, the issue of reinstating dismissed employees faces many obstacles. Institutions are handling the matter through different and varying mechanisms, making the fate of applications often dependent on the discretion of administrative committees within each entity. Many employees have remained stuck between unresolved decisions and lengthy procedures that offer no clear path for objection or follow-up. For some of the dismissed, the journey back has turned into a long process of waiting and repeated reviews.

Ahmed al-Khaled, a former employee in the education sector, recounts his suffering, saying that what weighed on him most was not only the years of dismissal, but the feeling that he had to prove the injustice done to him all over again. “With every administrative review, I feel that the very institutions that excluded us before are still handling our case with the same mentality.”

Administrative Development Ministry building – SANA

Hiba al-Tannari, a former employee at the Ministry of Higher Education, told Noon Post about her experience: “After the door was opened for dismissed employees to return, many of us did not go back to our previous employment status as it had been before dismissal. Those who had been permanent employees returned under new temporary contracts or on terms inferior to what they had before, while the files of many dismissed employees are still pending or awaiting a clear decision.

As for the employees who remained in state institutions during the years of the revolution, they preserved their job stability and moved up the administrative ladder over time in terms of salaries and promotions.”

“We feel that justice is still incomplete, even though we were patient and waited for this issue to be handled fairly in a way that restores rights to their owners,” Hiba said.

According to Nawras al-Abdullah, this disparity “reflects a fundamental problem in the issue of reinstating the dismissed, one that is not only related to the existence of a general legal framework, but also to how it is applied within different institutions.” He noted that some bodies succeeded in reinstating and integrating employees more quickly and in a more organized way, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior, which worked to absorb defectors and dismissed employees and return them to their posts or integrate them into their structures with relative smoothness.

Other bodies, however, faced slowness and administrative complications that affected the path of return and prolonged procedures, making the experience of

dismissed employees unequal from one institution to another despite the common overall title of the issue.

Al-Abdullah said that “this right could have been entrenched through a provision in the constitutional declaration obligating institutions to ensure a swift and dignified return for those dismissed for revolutionary reasons, thereby limiting discretionary interpretations and removing obstacles.”

The accumulation of wartime hiring complicates employee reintegration

Syrian institutions today are confronting the heavy legacy of previous employment policies that made loyalty to the Assad system the standard instead of competence. Over the past years, institutions saw an expansion in hiring through sham contracts for employees who were not needed.

Khaled al-Ahmadi, a former employee at the Ministry of Agriculture who recently returned to work, says he was surprised by the scale of change inside the institution, not only in terms of personnel but also in the structure of work: “I found new job titles, some of which seem to have no duties or real connection to the daily work inside the departments.”

As for the solutions available to the state to address this problem, al-Abdullah believes that “carrying out purges and replacement processes would allow reintegration without disrupting institutions or putting pressure on the budget. That is because canceling sham contracts and removing employees who had been appointed to three, four, or five public jobs at the same time during the Assad regime, as well as ending nominal contracts and dismissing the corrupt and those implicated in violations, would on the one hand entrench the process of employment reform and the achievement of justice, and allow the return of the dismissed.

On the other hand, so that the logic does not appear to be based on firing a corrupt employee merely to make room for a dismissed one to return, justice requires the return of the person who lost his job for national reasons as a priority in and of itself.”

The subcommittee for interviewing revolutionary dismissed employees during one of its assessment interviews – SANA

Is returning to work enough to achieve fairness?

Experts believe the issue of the dismissed should be discussed within a broader context linked to transitional justice because the effects of dismissal decisions that affected thousands of employees were far-reaching. They were not limited to the loss of income, but extended to the loss of service-related rights such as career progression, retirement, and professional stability.

Dr. Ahmad al-Qurbi, an academic and researcher specializing in public law, said in response to our questions about how the issue of the dismissed has been affected by salary increase decrees and the reintegration process that the problem is not only about raising salaries, but about setting priorities in public policy.

In his view, an approach based on positive discrimination and reparations for dismissed employees should have been prioritized, through reintegrating them and compensating them materially and morally in a way that ensures fairness after years of exclusion, instead of directing priority toward improving the salaries of employees who remained in service.

He added that most of those who were returned to their jobs after dismissal with the exception of some categories such as officers and diplomats, and with special treatment for educational staff were integrated under temporary or unstable contracts, leaving them in a fragile employment position.

Meanwhile, employees who remained in service benefited from the recent salary increases, creating a sense of disparity and grievance among a segment of the dismissed who are still waiting for the completion of their path toward employment and financial redress.

He considered the core problem to lie in the absence of an integrated approach to reparations, including restoring professional standing and compensating for years of interruption, within a broader vision for reforming the public sector.”

The issue of reinstating dismissed employees touches a significant part of the collective memory. It is the framework that documents the past and shapes society’s view of the future. Every return to work, and every resumption of the path of an employee whose career was interrupted for years, falls within a broader process tied to acknowledging the harm, addressing its effects at the social level, and trying to recover from the impact that years of dismissal left on the lives of individuals and society.

Therefore, every decision should proceed from an awareness of preserving the truth, doing justice to those who were harmed, and preventing what happened from being repeated in the future.