

Egyptian teachers protest after mass rejections from state hiring scheme without clear selection criteria

Thursday 2 November 2023, by [MAMDOUH Rana](#) (Date first published: 17 October 2023).

Security forces dispersed on [Sunday evening](#) hundreds of teachers who had gathered outside the Education Ministry headquarters in the new administrative capital to protest what they described as obscure and prejudiced hiring criteria in a recent public education program.

Facing a substantial shortage of teachers and a freeze on normal state hiring has strained public schools for years, the government launched a scheme last summer to make an exceptional 30,000 hires for kindergarten and assistant primary school teachers.

The sit-in began Sunday morning after 14,000 teachers discovered that they had not passed the final step of the hiring process in the scheme: a verbal exam at the Military Academy. Those rejected say they had passed all other steps of the process, including the academy's medical and physical fitness exams.

Amira, one of the teachers who participated in the protest outside the Education Ministry, told Mada Masr that thousands of female educators had come from different governorates with their children. Security forces aimed water hoses at some of the teachers and took several people away from the scene, making them board buses and releasing them half an hour later at a considerable distance from the ministry, according to three teachers who spoke to Mada Masr on condition of anonymity for fear of arrest or retribution.

"You didn't pass," Education Ministry spokesperson Shady Zalata told the protesters on Sunday. "Maybe the people down at the verbal exam didn't like the look of you."

Tens of thousands of hopeful teachers had applied for the scheme last year. Of those, 95,000 were selected to undergo a two-hour-long test, comprising 260 questions, conducted in Cairo by the Central Agency for Organization and Administration. Several teachers who spoke to Mada Masr said that the 28,000 who passed were invited to an unorthodox second phase of testing at the Military Academy, a new requirement [introduced](#) last year for employment at any government body. They submitted to a mandatory medical examination and a fitness test that included running, push-ups and abdominal exercises.

Many women who applied for the program have since [complained](#) that they weren't given prior warning of the physically strenuous requirements and were discriminated against on the basis of being pregnant or overweight.

Finally, applicants underwent a verbal exam at the Military Academy. Teachers say that this stage involved ten teachers standing in front of a group of Military Academy major generals, where they had to introduce themselves by stating their names, governorates and scores in the medical and physical tests at the Military Academy.

Educators who spoke to Mada Masr described this final stage of the hiring process as being completely obscure. Fatma, a teacher who applied from Fayoum, says that 500 women qualified alongside her for the verbal exam, but only 239 of them passed the last hurdle. None of those who failed were informed why.

Education directorates in several governorates began announcing the results of the application process on Wednesday. Teachers who had applied were directed to check their application status online by entering their national ID numbers. In some governorates, education directorates also published the names of successful candidates. Of the 28,000 teachers who passed all of the first steps, only 14,000 were hired, several teachers said.

At the time of publication, Mada Masr was unable to reach Zalata to confirm the figures and the criteria upon which applicants were rejected during the last phase of the hiring process.

Essam Mohamed, one of the rejected applicants, said it was disappointing to be denied clear information after so much effort. Thousands of teachers endured the burden of traveling from their governorates to Cairo to take the written test and Military Academy exams, he said. They attended training sessions in other governorates for nearly two years, and many of them lost their other jobs.

Asmaa, one of the teachers whose application was rejected in Assiut, told Mada Masr that she had reached out to the governorate's education directorate to ask for more information regarding her rejection. She graduated from college with honors, passed the written tests, the educational and psychological training and the Military Academy's medical and physical fitness exams. She also took the verbal exam, where she was asked to state her name, governorate and the scores from her medical and physical exams.

Now, she is uncertain about how to proceed. An Assiut Education Directorate official told her and other rejected applicants to submit appeals on a blank sheet of paper and that once they are resolved, they might be accepted in a second round of hiring, Asmaa said. However, applicants from other directorates weren't told whether there would be another round of hiring, she said. "Each directorate says something different, that is why we came to the ministry," she said.

Mohamed said that he also understood that teachers would be able to submit appeals to their governorate's education directorate and that they might be able to retake the exams they hadn't passed. But he didn't know which exams they would be invited to try out for again. Would it be the physical exams, which saw 4,000 to 6,000 people excluded on the basis of their weight, fitness or for being pregnant, or the verbal exam the criteria for which they do not understand?

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