

Employment and Unionisation in Municipalities

**Union of General Services
Workers of Turkey - DISK / GENEL-IS**

Labour Research Department
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Employment in municipalities in Turkey has transformed within the process of the marketisation, subcontracting and precarisation of public services, alongside the neoliberal policies implemented after 1980. Although municipality employees are officially classified into statuses such as civil servant, worker, contract and temporary staff, in practice the most common form of employment is that of worker. This situation is not solely a technical choice but also the outcome of a class antagonistic orientation. The fragmentation of the labour process, the flexibilization of employment, and the dismantling of job security constitute the local-scale projection of capitalist restructuring.

In Turkey, workers employed at the local governments are subject to the Labour Law No. 4857. In contrast, civil servants working in municipalities fall under the scope of the Civil Servants Law No. 657. This creates a division in provision of public services, leading to significant rights-based inequalities between workers doing the same job but with different statuses. The shortage of civil servants in municipalities and the restriction of permanent staffing of them for political reasons has resulted in even essential and regular tasks being assigned to workers.

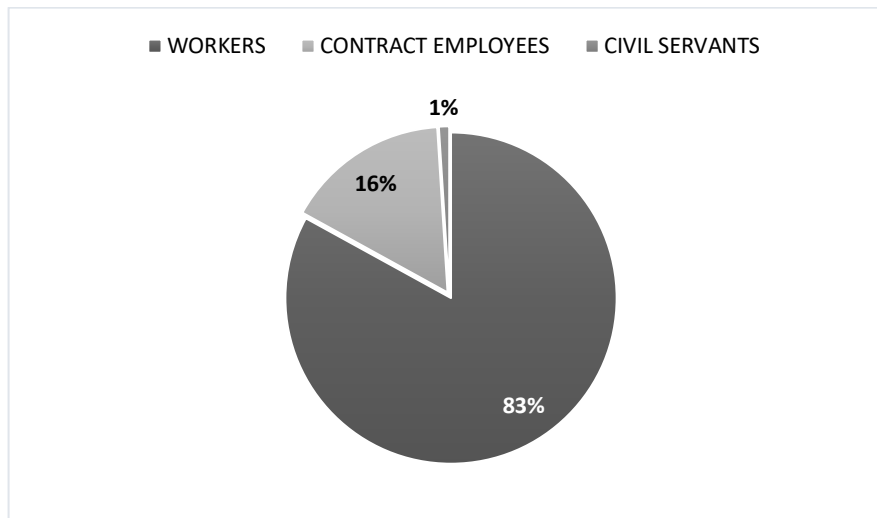
The lack of job security, low wages, and arduous and irregular working conditions have become structural problems for workers in the municipalities. Workers engaged in physically demanding labour are deprived of adequate occupational health and safety measures, and work-related accidents and occupational diseases have become a common occurrence. Furthermore, repression on unionisation makes it difficult for workers in the municipalities to defend their collective rights.

In addition, the use of personnel recruitment in the municipalities as a political tool has led to the shaping of perceived public services not based on subjective requirements but rather on politicised staffing, favouritism towards supporters, and election-focused populist agendas. Hiring and the promotion of employees based on political preferences disregards competency, and antidemocratic practices such as the appointment of trustees in municipalities jeopardise not only the will of the local community but also the future of workers.

Actual Data

According to 2025 data, 83% of employment in municipalities consists of workers (permanent staff, workers in municipal corporations and temporary workers), 16% are civil servants and 1% are contract employees. As can be seen, 8 out of every 10 people working in municipalities are workers.

Figure: Distribution of Employment in Municipalities by Status



Source: Directorate of Strategy and Budget, Public Sector Employment, 2025 Q2

Employment at the Municipal Corporations

The primary form of employment in municipalities has shifted from permanent and secure staffing to recruitment via municipal corporations. The process of corporatisation in municipalities began in the 1990s and was designed by municipalities to dodge control from central government, facilitate politicised staffing, and commercialise public services. This process has led to the elimination of secure employment in municipalities and the institutionalisation of a flexible, subcontracted labour regime.

Staffing via municipal corporations is concentrated particularly in essential public services such as transport, cleaning and maintenance. However, the workers providing these services do not enjoy the same rights as permanent public sector workers. The Decree Law No. 696 issued in 2017, which allowed the recruitment of subcontracted workers to municipal corporations, has not only failed to end the system of subcontracting but has made it more permanent and systematic. Today, hundreds of thousands of workers employed by municipal corporations face serious inequalities in terms of right to be employed on a permanent basis, wage and salary supplements, job security and trade union rights.

This situation is also clear in the figures:

- **Workers:** Over the past decade, the number of workers in municipalities has increased by 426%. However, this increase has not been driven by employment of permanent workers, but rather by hiring through municipal corporations. As of 2025, the number of workers in municipal corporations stands at 665.163, while the number of permanent workers is only 24.184.
- **Civil servants:** The number of civil servants in municipalities exceeds 134.000.
- **Contract employees:** The number of employees working under this status is approximately 8.500.
- **Temporary workers:** The number of workers under this status has gradually decreased and is now limited to approximately 4.600.

Table: Employment in the Municipalities

Civil Servants	Contract Employees	Workers			Total
		<u>Permanent</u>	<u>Corporations</u>	<u>Temporary</u>	
134.293	8.583	24.184	665.163	4.610	836.833

Source: Directorate of Strategy and Budget, Public Sector Employment, 2025 Q2

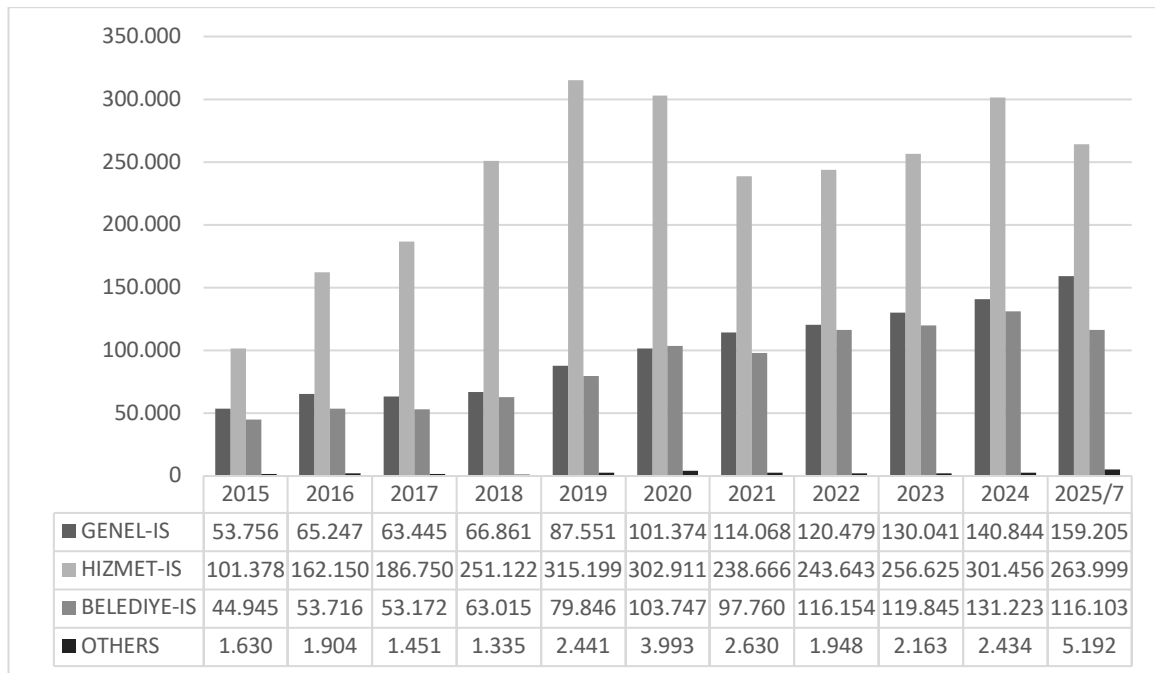
These data reveal that employment with job security has been largely eliminated, and that the public workforce has been transformed into flexible, low-paid and precarious jobs in municipal corporations. This large group of workers employed by municipalities provides public services but does not have a status as public sector employee. This situation creates inequality and injustice not only for the workers themselves but also for the individuals who benefit from these services.

State of Unionisation

The general services is a sector that constitutes the highest level of unionisation in Turkey currently, both in terms of the number of organised workers and the union density. According to the official data from July 2025, while the union density in Turkey 14,02%, the rate in the general services is 58,82%. During the same period, 22,47% of 2.429.527 workers in unions, in other words 546.001 workers, are in the general services. Consequently, the high level of organising in this sector positively impacts the overall level of union density in Turkey.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in both the number of organised workers and unionisation rates in the general services. According to January 2015 statistics, the number of organised workers, which stood at 201.709, reached 546.001 by July 2025. Similarly, the unionisation rate, which was 23,64% in January 2015, rose to 53,8% in July 2025. These figures show that organising in the sector has increased nearly threefold over the past decade and that the general services sector has gained strategic importance for the trade union movement in Turkey.

Graph: Unionisation in the General Services Sector



Source: Directorate General of Labour, July 2025

The three largest unions operating in the municipality sector, DISK / GENEL-IS, HIZMET-IS and BELEDIYE-IS, exhibited significant differences in membership figures during the period 2015-2025. DISK / GENEL-IS increased the number of its members from 53.376 in 2015 to 159.205 in 2025. Similarly, BELEDIYE-IS increased from 44.945 members in 2015 to 116.103 members in 2025. HIZMET-IS, on the other hand, recorded a significant surge, growing from 101.776 members in 2015 to 301.456 in 2024, but fell to 263.999 by 2025.

There has been significant movement of union members within the general services sector, with local elections being a major contributing factor. Following the local elections in March 2019 and March 2024, while the total number of organised workers in the general services remained unaffected, there was a noticeable movement of members between unions within the sector.

Policy Recommendations on the Employment in Municipalities

- A greater share of public expenditure should be allocated, and public sector employment should be increased in proportion to the population.
- Permanent and secure employment should be provided in the public sector instead of contracted, temporary staff.
- Workers employed by central and local administrations should not suffer any loss of rights.
- All workers employed in the municipal corporations should have equal rights and should be entitled to permanent employment and wage and salary supplements.
- The right to job security should be re-established as a right covering all workers, and financial, social and personal differences between public sector employees should be eliminated.
- The limitations on staffing in the Municipalities Law No. 5393 should be lifted.
- Regulations should be put in place to prevent favouritism, nepotism and cronyism in public sector recruitment.
- Protective and preventive occupational health and safety measures should be taken for workers employed by municipalities.
- More women should be employed in municipality jobs, ensuring gender equality.
- Barriers to organising in municipalities should be removed, and the right to collective bargaining should be secured.