Fédération Européenne
des Médecins Salariés
European Federation
of Salaried Doctors

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1. Political Context

- Portugal held early elections in May, after which the previous government remained in office. The Minister of Health and the Executive Board of the National Health Service also retained their positions.

2. State of the National Health Service

- Emergency Services: during the summer of 2025, just like in previous years, Portugal's National Health Service (NHS) continued to experience severe constraints, with ongoing shortages of medical professionals limiting access to care. Several emergency departments — particularly those specializing in maternal and child health — remained closed or operated at minimal capacity due to a lack of doctors. As a result, many pregnant women were forced to travel long distances to receive medical attention, with dozens reportedly assisted by firefighters in ambulances, often without timely access to the level of safety and care provided in hospitals.

- Shortage of Family Doctors: around 1.6 million citizens—roughly 16% of the population—do not have an assigned primary care physician, underscoring significant gaps in healthcare access. Due to various constraints, the government has been unable to recruit the full complement of family doctors needed for the NHS.

- Shifting Public Resources to the Private Sector: millions were paid to pharmacies to provide vaccinations; and SNS24, the national health telephone triage line, referred thousands of patients to private teleconsultation or consultation companies without first fully utilizing the public healthcare resources that were available.

Faced with poor working conditions and ineffective retention policies, doctors continue to leave for the private sector or seek opportunities abroad. The measures implemented have also failed to strengthen medical careers, further worsening the shortage of healthcare professionals and putting the sustainability of the NHS at risk.

3. Professional and Union Activities

Sindicato Independente dos Médicos (SIM)

SIM as signed a new agreement effective from July which not only secures substantial salary increases but also introduces key measures to improve working conditions:

- Reduction of working hours to 36h/week at the physician's request, without requiring authorization
- Gradual reduction of working time in emergency departments
- All physicians are now entitled to one day of rest within eight days following work performed on Sundays, public holidays, or mandatory weekly rest days, regardless of the duration of the work
- Option to work 50% of normal weekly hours with 60% of pay
- Increase in the minimum rest interval from 11 to 12 hours
- inclusion of handover time for clinical information (e.g., in emergency) as part of normal working hours
- Possibility of continuous work with a one-hour daily reduction or two hours during pregnancy
- All NHS service time now counted toward increased annual leave entitlements.
- Physicians with Individual Employment Contracts (CIT) prior to 2013 will transition into the medical career structure.

SIM welcomes the outcomes of this agreement and remains ready to negotiate with the incoming government.

Federação Nacional dos Médicos (FNAM)

FNAM actively promoted measures that strengthen the medical profession and reinforce the SNS, ensured the full preservation of collective labor agreements and workers' rights, and reaffirmed its commitment to valuing medical careers while defending a public, universal, and high-quality health service. In summary:

- FNAM collective agreements were fully maintained, with no setbacks for workers.
- Key rights were preserved, including:
    - Age limits for night shifts (50 years) and Emergency Service duty (55 years)
    - Compensatory rest for night work, Sundays, and holidays
    - Prohibition of time-bank schemes or shift work.

Faced with government intransigence in negotiations, FNAM employed all available legal mechanisms, including interventions through the Ministry of Labor, with Local Health Units—integrating primary care centers and hospitals—and the Portuguese Oncology Institutes to fulfill its duty to negotiate.

FNAM maintains its independence, representing the interests of medical professionals and the public, and does not act as an extension of government, while continuing to engage constructively with authorities.

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Ordem dos Médicos (OM, Portuguese Medical Association)

Over the past four months, the Portuguese Medical Association (Ordem dos Médicos) has new governing bodies, incorporating no-doctors in some of them.

- Critical Level of the SNS: OM has publicly and repeatedly warned that the SNS has reached a "critical level" of difficulties, demanding urgent government intervention.
- Shortage and Devaluation of Doctors: the lack of doctors is a central issue, affecting various specialties and being particularly acute in in maternal and child health. The OM emphasizes that the public sector is not agile enough to hire and value these professionals, leading to a major challenge in managing duty rosters and the continuous closure of emergency services.
- Competition and Retention: there is a significant problem with doctor retention, as the SNS faces growing competition from the private sector in Portugal and from foreign healthcare systems actively recruiting Portuguese doctors. The OM stresses the need for the SNS to be more competitive.

Portuguese medical unions and the medical board continue demanding effective change in health policies, implementation of structural measures to support the NHS, and better health care delivery, which include improvement of medical careers, working and pay conditions.

Porto, 10th October 2025

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