



FEDERAÇÃO NACIONAL DOS MÉDICOS

The struggle of Portuguese doctors

A Portrait of the National Health Service in Portugal

Dear Commissioner Stella Kyriakides,

Respected Members of the European Parliament,

The Portuguese delegation of the National Doctors Federation (Federação Nacional dos Médicos, FNAM) extends its formal greetings as we prepare to embark on a crucial mission to Brussels. Our purpose is to present, in person, the dire state of the Portuguese public health service to the distinguished Health and Food Safety Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, and the esteemed Members of the European Parliament.

Regrettably, the very future of Portuguese public health national service (NHS) is hanging in the balance due to profound labor deregulation, chronic underfunding, and an alarming devaluation of the medical profession. These major concerns are pivotal in retaining physicians within the NHS, which is a pillar and an undeniably essential for the well-being of Portuguese society.

We make an earnest request to the political powers to embrace, with fortitude, the proposals set forth by medical doctors. We firmly believe that the safeguarding of public health services is central to the support of European democracies and the assurance of universal access to health for all citizens.

We categorically reject the inevitability of exceeding the legal limit of 150 hours per year for overtime work, for patient safety and our own. It is untenable for the Portuguese NHS to rely on doctors working 300, 400, 500, or even 1000 hours of overtime annually, equating to an additional 2 to 6 months of labor per year. Despite our explicit warnings that improved working conditions are imperative to retaining doctors in public services, our government has regrettably failed to take decisive action, thereby exacerbating the ongoing crisis in health public services nationwide.

Contrary to pre-pandemic times, healthcare delivery to the population has regressed significantly. The number of citizens without a family doctor (GP) has surged to 1.6 million, constituting 16% of the population. As of the present moment, over 30 Emergency Room Departments are either closed or operating under severe understaffing conditions, posing imminent threats to both medical practitioners and patients alike. The compromise of clinical safety in the provision of care to vulnerable demographics, including children, pregnant women, and adults, is an intolerable consequence of the current situation.

Moreover, according to the OECD, Portuguese doctors rank among the lowest paid in Europe, experiencing a 20% decline in purchasing power over the last decade. In 2023, while certain professional classes in health received increases of up to 7% to compensate for inflation, doctors were only granted a meager 2% improvement.

After 19 months of negotiations, the Portuguese government has failed to put forth any viable proposals to safeguard the medical career. This reveals a stark incompetence in negotiating an appropriate collective bargaining agreement to address the needs of NHS doctors.

In solidarity with medical professionals in Portugal and numerous other countries across Europe and beyond, we are resolutely engaged in the battle to preserve our National Health Services. Our goal is to actively contribute to viable solutions that will enable the Public Health Service to fulfill its duty to those in need.

To propel progress, the Portuguese government must use European funds judiciously and allocate its own budget, and surplus, to implement the following:

1. A fair wage increase for doctors, compensating the purchasing power loss and inflation for the last 10 years;
2. A 35-hour working week (instead of the current 40-hour);
3. Rejection of illegal increase of the annual limit of supplementary work to 300 hours (maintaining the existing 150 hours);
4. Return to the weekly 12-hour shift in emergency room (instead of present 18 hours);
5. Return to the possibility to choose a working contract with exclusive dedication to the NHS, with wages accordingly.
6. Rejection of a new work regimen that discriminates doctors' wages according to the professional field;
7. Loss of doctor's rights that potentially put patients at risk, for example by changing resting periods after night shifts for hospital doctors, or limiting the prescription of exams and medication in the primary healthcare;
8. All Public Health doctors should receive the bonus for permanent availability;
9. Inclusion of medical residency in the medical career;
10. Implementation of transparent and democratic medical leadership and management;
11. Application of improved parenting protection measures and continued medical education for doctors;
12. Lowering of retirement age (66 years and 4 months, presently).

The Portuguese National Doctors Federation (FNAM), will keep struggling until the the future of the medical career and of the NHS is granted, to curb the exodus of medical doctors to the private sector and emigration, claiming for fair wages and decent working conditions, as well as to halt NHS deterioration.

Sincerely,

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