



FEDERAÇÃO NACIONAL DOS MÉDICOS

State of Healthcare and the Portuguese National Health Service

Executive Summary:

Portugal's National Health Service (SNS) is facing one of its most critical periods in recent history. Political instability, repeated elections, and a succession of short-lived governments have undermined healthcare policy and hospital management. Between 2022 and 2025, emergency services—particularly maternal and child—closed or operated at minimal capacity, leaving thousands of patients with limited access to care. Over **1.6 million citizens** remain without a family doctor, while a persistent exodus of physicians to the private sector and abroad threatens the sustainability of public healthcare.

Government policies, including unilateral labor reforms and privatization initiatives, have intensified these challenges, creating inequalities, overburdening medical staff, and diverting public resources to private entities. In response, the **National Federation of Doctors (FNAM)** has led national strikes, legal actions, and international advocacy, defending the profession and the SNS, and ensuring the preservation of collective agreements and essential working rights.

This report highlights the urgent need for political commitment, sustainable workforce policies, and protection of universal public healthcare to secure the SNS for future generations.

1. Political Context

Over the past decade, Portugal has experienced significant political instability affecting the Portuguese National Health Service (SNS). The Socialist Party governed for eight years, followed by the Social Democratic Party with the Popular Party. Between 2015 and 2025, Portugal held **five parliamentary elections**, leading to frequent changes in government and a climate of uncertainty. This instability has had direct consequences on healthcare policy, administration, and the working conditions of medical professionals.

2. Key Challenges in the SNS

2.1 Closure of Emergency Services

- Several emergency departments, particularly in maternal and child health, have been closed or operate with limited capacity due to doctor shortages.
- Many pregnant women face long travel distances for care; over 100 births occurred in ambulances or under inadequate conditions in the last two years.

2.2 Shortage of Family Doctors

- Approximately **1.6 million citizens (16% of the population)** lack an assigned family doctor, highlighting gaps in primary healthcare access.

2.3 Healthcare Workforce Exodus



FEDERAÇÃO NACIONAL DOS MÉDICOS

- Ineffective retention policies have led to continuous migration of doctors to the private sector and abroad.
- Politically driven measures have devalued medical careers, exacerbating workforce shortages in the SNS.

2.4 Resignations in Health Administration

- Several Local Health Units and the Portuguese Oncology Institute experienced resignations among administrative boards.
- Political appointments replaced these positions, raising concerns over political influence in healthcare leadership.

2.5 Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

- Government initiatives aim to transfer public hospital management to private entities and charitable organizations.
- Complex and costly cases, including oncology and chronic diseases, remain primarily under SNS responsibility.

3. Policy Measures and Labor Impacts (2022–2025)

- **2023:** Under Prime Minister António Costa, a unilateral **Dedicação Plena (Full-Time Dedication)** regime was introduced for hospital doctors:
 - Daily work hours increased to 9 hours
 - Saturday work imposed for non-emergency doctors
 - Compensatory rest after night shifts eliminated
 - Annual overtime limit raised to 250 hours
- Regime applied to family doctors and hospital directors; salary tables imposed without FNAM consent, failing to restore purchasing power.
- **Since 2024:** Governments led by Luís Montenegro refused to negotiate with FNAM on:
 - Fair salary tables
 - Restoration of 35-hour workweek
 - Reintegration of medical internships
 - Recovery of vacation days lost during economic crisis
 - Medical training improvements and parental support
- **Visible consequences:**
 - Emergency service closures, especially maternal and child health
 - Departments reliant on temporary providers and medical interns
 - Public resources diverted to private sector for profitable cases
 - Vaccination campaigns outsourced to pharmacies; SNS24 referrals to private teleconsultation companies
 - Attempts to reintroduce PPPs excluding complex cases
- **2024 legislation** (without FNAM agreement):
 - Performance-based rewards exceeding legal overtime limits
 - Unequal hiring procedures among medical specialties
- **Planned for 2025:**
 - Forced physician mobility and regional concentration of emergency services



FEDERAÇÃO NACIONAL DOS MÉDICOS

- Hiring of external providers without specialty, risking care quality and accelerating outflow to private sector

4. FNAM Advocacy and Actions

During this period, FNAM led multiple initiatives:

- National strikes and high-participation demonstrations in Porto, Coimbra, and Lisbon
- The “Doctors in Struggle” (Médicos em Luta) movement, refusing overtime beyond legal limits and forcing government negotiations in 2023
- Engagement with European institutions in Brussels to internationalize the fight and expose SNS degradation

Achievements:

- Maintained collective agreements intact without labor setbacks
- Preserved key rights:
 - Age limits for night and emergency work (50 and 55 years)
 - Compensatory rest for night, Sunday, and holiday work
 - No use of time banks or shift work manipulation

FNAM used all legal mechanisms, including DGERT, to compel Public Health Enterprises to negotiate, ensuring protection of medical rights and the SNS.

5. Conclusion

The period 2022–2025 highlights how political instability, poorly conceived policies, and a focus on privatization have severely impacted the SNS. FNAM’s advocacy has been essential to:

- Protect physicians’ rights and working conditions
- Preserve the integrity of collective agreements
- Reaffirm the fight for a public, universal, and high-quality SNS

Challenges remain, particularly in workforce retention, emergency care provision, and equitable healthcare access. FNAM continues to defend both the medical profession and the SNS against policies that threaten its sustainability and quality.

Joana Bordalo e Sá | Presidente da Comissão Executiva | Federação Nacional dos Médicos

2nd October, 2025 | João Pessoa, Brasil

Rua Faria Guimarães, n.º 718, 3º, 4200-289 Porto, Portugal

fnam@fnam.pt / +351 912 578 701