

Date:	2026-05-06	Document:	
Title:	National Report Portugal		
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1. Political Context

A labor reform is currently under discussion in Portugal. The Government intends to implement this reform, which could jeopardize acquired rights, including trade union action, the right to strike, working time regulations (such as time banks), protections against dismissal, and parental rights.

2. State of the National Health Service

- **Emergency Services:** during winter of 2025-26, 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. Some of these maternal departments were permanently closed (notably in Vila Franca de Xira, Barreiro). As a result, many pregnant women were forced to travel long distances to access care, and dozens were reportedly assisted by firefighters in ambulances, often without timely access to the level of safety and support available in hospitals.
- **Shortage of Family Doctors:** around 1.6 million citizens—roughly 16% of the population—continue without an assigned general practitioner (GP).
- **Medical Residency:** In the latest Medical Residency recruitment round, one third of the positions remained vacant reflecting the declining attractiveness of NHS services and working conditions.
- **Medical recruitment processes:** delays persist in the publication of recruitment notices and a lack of planning in the opening of vacancies, compromising career progression, team stability, and retention in the National Health Service. The normalization of recruitment processes remains a priority.
- **Medical Mobility:** structural difficulties, especially in General and Family Medicine, with a lack of transparency and flexibility. Negative impact on professional motivation, physician retention, and continuity of healthcare.

- Flexible working hours: difficulties persist in reducing the base working hours from 40 to 35 hours and in achieving flexible working hours based on gender and life stages. Opportunities to improve working conditions to retain doctors are being lost.
- Shifting Public Resources to the Private Sector: millions were again paid to pharmacies to provide vaccinations. The government continues to resort to outsourcing and the transfer of patients to private healthcare providers as a structural response to persistent delays in the public healthcare service.

Faced with deteriorating working conditions and ineffective retention policies, doctors continue to leave the NHS for the private sector or pursue opportunities abroad. Government measures have failed to strengthen medical careers, further deepening the shortage of healthcare professionals and threatening the long-term sustainability of the NHS.

3. Professional and Union Activities

Sindicato Independente dos Médicos (SIM)

SIM has maintained a negotiation strategy with various ministries that employ doctors, focusing on improving working conditions and retaining professionals.

Main developments (last 6 months):

- Collective bargaining agreements – Agreement for civilian doctors in the Armed Forces (April 2026): Allowed for career advancement and guaranteed progression, as well as ensuring the training of new specialists.
- Career progression – Agreement within the framework of the integrated performance management and evaluation system in Public Administration (March 2026): implementation of a simpler, more applicable evaluation model, adjusted to the specificities of the medical career, with greater equity in curriculum evaluation.
- Salary Enhancement - Implementation of a phased agreement with progressive salary increases (January 2026): continuation of progressive salary enhancement for physicians until 2027.
- Training - Supplement for Training Supervisors in the Azores (November 2025): allocation of a salary supplement for all specialist-supervised physicians, recognizing the importance of medical training and contributing to its sustainability.

Federação Nacional dos Médicos (FNAM)

FNAM has actively defended measures aimed at strengthening the medical profession and reinforcing the NHS, while ensuring the full preservation of collective labour agreements and doctors' rights. It has reaffirmed its commitment to valuing medical careers and defending a public, universal, and high-quality NHS. In summary:

- FNAM is currently negotiating the revision of collective labour agreements, with the objective of ensuring that there are no setbacks for workers' rights.
- Faced with the government's intransigence during negotiations, FNAM resorted to all available legal mechanisms to compel the government to negotiate. FNAM also took part in the general strike of December 2025 against the Labour Reform, which saw significant participation from healthcare workers.
- As a result of this action, the government was forced to enter into negotiations with FNAM, and the negotiation process is currently ongoing.
- The doctors' evaluation model proposed by the Ministry of Health is unfair and contributes to blocking doctors' career progression within the National Health Service.

Ordem dos Médicos (OM, Portuguese Medical Association)

1. Workforce Crisis & Brain Drain

- **Talent Attrition:** A steady exodus of specialists from the National Health Service (SNS) to the private sector and foreign markets.
- **Working Conditions:** The increase in indicators of violence in health care sector-physical violence-psychological violence and high levels burnout, compromises the doctor mental health and the quality of healthcare services provided, increases the incidence of abstentionism and abandonment of profession, as worsens the shortage of human resources in healthcare, already with unsafe staffing ratios especially in emergency departments

2. Financial Paradox

- **Increased Spending:** The 2025 health budget rose by 13%, yet it remains insufficient to cover rising operational debt and inflation.
- **Out-of-Pocket Burden:** Portuguese households pay 52% of ambulatory care costs—more than double the OECD average (22%)—fueling a "two-tier" health system where 35% of the population now relies on private insurance.

3. The "Specialization Gap" & Young Doctors

- **Non-Specialized Trend:** A concerning number of young doctors are now opting out of the National Residency Program (*Internato de Formação Especializada*) after completing their general foundation year. In the last semester, hundreds of medical graduates chose to remain as non-specialized practitioners (generalists) to work as freelancers in emergency departments or move directly to the private sector. This shift is primarily driven by the refusal to accept the rigid, high-pressure, and low-paid public residency contracts when compared to the flexibility and higher hourly rates of the "locum" or private market. This "talent freeze" threatens the long-term renewal of the country's specialized medical workforce.

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.

Wroclaw, 8th May 2026

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