

Tens of thousands of Portuguese teachers take to streets in Lisbon to demand better pay

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People carry a banner reading " We are also teaching fighting" as school workers demonstrate for better salaries and working conditions, in Lisbon, Portugal January 28, 2023. (Photo by Reuters)

Lisbon, January 29 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of public school teachers and school staff have marched through the streets of capital Lisbon to demand higher wages and better working conditions. The Saturday demonstrations were seen as a further step by the country's teachers to put more pressure on the Portuguese government as it grapples with a cost of living crisis.

According to police, about 80,000 protesters filled the Portuguese capital, shouting slogans like "for the banks there are millions, for us there are only pennies." Portugal's socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa is currently facing a slump in popularity and street protests not just by teachers, but by other professionals such as doctors, only a year after he won a majority in parliament.

The Union of All Education Professionals (STOP) is demanding the government increase the wages of teachers and school workers by at least 120 euros (\$130) a month and speed up career progression.

The government has not made a counter-proposal specifically for teachers, but has said it will add 52 euros to the monthly salaries of all civil servants who earn up to about 2,600 euros. Teachers say because of career freezes in the past, they are the lowest-paid senior civil servants, which means their financial situation has worsened after a recent spike in inflation to a 30-year high.

Teachers on the lowest pay scale are paid around 1,100 euros per month and even those in the top band typically earn less than 2,000 euros monthly.

"For years, they (politicians) kept us silent. We need better conditions in terms of salary. It's unacceptable that we don't have progression in our careers," said Isabel Pessoa, 47, a science and biology teacher.

Since early December, teachers and other education staff across Portugal have been staging job walkouts, closing many schools and leaving students unable to attend classes. The strikes have been organized on an area-by-area basis with successive days of action in each of Portugal's 18 districts.

The government has criticized STOP for the way it has organized the industrial actions because, it says, it does not have a pre-set timetable and teachers and staff only refuse to work certain hours on a specific day but are still able to close schools.

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