

# Not one step back on the path to free education in Portugal

For the first time in a decade, the Portuguese government announced it was considering a proposal to the State Budget that would have unfrozen the value of public tuition fees for bachelor students, allowing for a rise of up to 53% in fees over the coming years.

This proposal, which was abandoned after universal condemnation and opposition by the Portuguese student movement, would have fundamentally threatened the constitutional right of Portuguese citizens to «progressively free» access to all levels of education and further deteriorated the economic situation of students already burdened by the cost of living and housing crisis.

The unfreezing of tuition fees in Portugal would have represented a major step back on the victory achieved by the student movement in 2014, when the legal mechanism for automatic rise of fees was overruled in the State Budget for the first time, with the maximum legal value of 1st cycle fees being gradually decreased from 1063.47€/year in 2014 to 697€/year in 2024. Unfreezing tuition fees would allow this value to rise up to and above 1066€/year, making higher education more expensive than ever before.

With families already struggling to finance students' studies due to the unprecedented cost of housing, food and study materials, a rise in tuition fees has the potential to exclude tens of thousands of people from pursuing and completing a higher education degree. The consequences would be felt not just in the lives of students, but on all sectors of society that depend on highly qualified professionals to function.

After a decade of carving a clear and sustainable path to fulfill Portuguese students' right to free, quality education, we cannot tolerate any sign of the government's intention to turn its back on higher education and evade its responsibilities to provide adequate funding for institutions.

For these reasons, FARe (Fórum Académico para a Informação e Representação Externa) and ESU (European Students' Union) call on the Portuguese government

and parliament to set a renewed commitment for the progressive decrease of fees, guaranteed through additional state funding to higher education institutions. We also congratulate and thank the Portuguese local student unions and federations for their successful opposition to this proposal, and celebrate the effort of all members of the European student movement who fight to make higher education an accessible and affordable right.

The voice of students is loud and clear on this matter: not one step back!

Bibliography:

Lei n. 37/2003, capítulo II, secção II, artigo 16o do Diário da República

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Proposers: FAIRe

Seconders: FAGE