



Pharmacists Workforce shortages

PGEU position paper

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Community pharmacists' challenges.....	9
Investment in education.....	9
Investment in retention and employment initiatives.....	10
Investment in career development.....	11
Mobilizing resources and retaining talent.....	12
Policy Recommendations.....	13
Annex	15
National experiences from PGEU members.....	15
References:	23

Executive Summary

Community pharmacists play a key role in primary care and are the most easily accessible among all healthcare professionals. However, similar to recent developments in other healthcare fields, the shortage of community pharmacists has become a pressing concern with a potentially significant impact on public health, patient care, and the overall viability of healthcare systems.

The increasing demand for pharmacy services and for the development of future and more advanced clinical roles, fuelled by an ageing population, escalating rates of chronic diseases. Insufficient professionals and shifting healthcare requirements, has resulted in a notable disparity between the supply and retention of qualified pharmacy professionals and the rising need for their expertise.

With this position paper, PGEU seeks to raise awareness on the seriousness of the situation and calls for immediate action to be taken by policymakers and relevant stakeholders to address this critical issue and ensure that patients continue to benefit from the high standard of pharmacy services they currently have also in the future.

To achieve that, PGEU highlights specific points that heavily influence this problem, and need to be considered:

1. **Demographic shifts** as a consequence of an ageing population, coupled with a rise in chronic conditions, more complex medication regimes and more polypharmacy due to the rise in patients with multi comorbidities, have increased the demand for health services including pharmacy services, placing significant strain on existing resources and structures.
2. A **worn-out workforce** due to retirement, burnout, career diversification and dissatisfaction with the profession, impacted and powered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to a diminishing pool of experienced community pharmacists as well as a decrease in interest in the field by students. Many countries in Europe have reported **difficulties in recruiting** frontline personnel, which includes pharmacists working in primary care and other pharmacy staff.
3. A **limited educational capacity**, despite growing demand, educational institutions face constraints in expanding pharmacy programs to produce an adequate supply of graduates prepared for the reality and challenges of the profession, and struggle to keep up with the most recent trends and scientific, pedagogical and technological developments in the field.
4. As the scope of practice for pharmacists continues to broaden, it requires an agile, adaptable workforce equipped with specialised skills and competencies. This underscores the importance of **investing in the education of pharmacists and the continuous education of professionals**. The provision of adequate resources and support structures for continuous professional development must facilitate the highest quality of practice, in particular digital tools that facilitate pharmacists in their daily practice to spend more time dedicated to patient care activities.
5. Nevertheless, despite the evolving roles and responsibilities of community pharmacists, there remains a **shortage of both financial and personnel resources** to enable these healthcare professionals to effectively carry out new tasks. This shortfall could further intensify the shortage of pharmacists capable of performing essential and increasingly valued activities such as pharmacy services (namely medicine use reviews and other advanced medicine counselling services, vaccination, extended prescription for chronic medications, compounding, generic of

therapeutic substitution, point of care testing, medicine optimisation, and other vital advanced pharmacy services), including being an accessible gateway to the healthcare system.

6. A **lack of governmental policies around pharmaceutical care and the utilisation of pharmacists' unique skill sets**, which encompasses lack of vision and strategy, leading to professional dissatisfaction and retention issues.
7. **Remuneration models for pharmaceutical care are often complex and misunderstood.** The core role of community pharmacists is to ensure the safe supply of medicines and associated patient counselling on medication use. However, too often this core role is seen as supply activity solely, and therefore the holistic care provided is not reflected in remuneration models. With the increasing complexity of medicines and with more patients on complex medication regimens, this core role has become increasingly important. However, across most European countries, the remuneration model remains largely unchanged and is not reflective of the universal care provided by community pharmacists.



Having these key points in mind PGEU urges for:

1. **Prioritizing intercollaborative efforts** among healthcare entities, educational institutions, associations representing healthcare students and professional associations to attract a larger pool of candidates to pursue careers in community pharmacy. It is fundamental to emphasize the need to showcase the profession next to the students and cooperate with the universities to close the gap between practice and theory as well as invest in our future professionals' education. It is necessary to stimulate sooner amongst students interprofessional education frameworks, involving associations representing healthcare students that can play a vital role on this process.
2. **Guaranteeing that a pharmaceutical skill set is in place at a policy level**, by ensuring that within the national health services, a senior pharmacist is in place, when appropriate to the national context, to provide strategic leadership, evidence-based analysis and expert advice to the Government, broader health system, and regulatory and professional bodies, helping to shape policy and optimise the contribution of the pharmacy sector in the health service and ultimately lead to better patient outcomes.
3. Developing a **national strategy and implementation plan for the pharmacy sector** that clearly articulates a vision and role for pharmacy within the future integrated healthcare system. There is an urgent need for strategic workforce planning for pharmacists at a national level, aligned with a national pharmaceutical strategy.
4. **Adopting technological solutions** to automate, digitalise and alleviate certain tasks that pharmacists face, thus reducing the administrative burden and time spent in such administrative duties, freeing time for patient counselling. The core role of community pharmacists involves prescription reviews, screening for therapy problems, and patient counselling, among other responsibilities that ensure safe, effective, and legally compliant supply and dispensing of medicines. Adaptation of digital technologies can improve some tasks being manually undertaken and should be deployed, but without losing patient interactions, which is core to quality healthcare.
5. Investments by Governments to **match the workforce planning to allow for an expanded scope of practice**, as it is not sustainable to continue expanding the work with less resources, if a high quality of care is to be maintained. To keep a high level of improved patient outcomes, pharmacists require additional resources across all practice areas to face ageing population, increasing complexity of medicine regimens and medicine shortages.
6. **Increasing educational resources** through investing in expanding pharmacy education programs and leveraging innovative teaching methods to meet the escalating demand for skilled pharmacists effectively. It is fundamental to regularly adapt the curricula in order to integrate the changing roles of the profession to match the evolution of community pharmacy

roles over time, as well as an intercollaborative approach with other healthcare professionals so to create a better-coordinated response to care for the patient. Furthermore, pharmacy education places and curricula should not be static, and should move to match the needs of the profession, population and healthcare system.

- 7. Effective use of skills-mix strategies**, together with promoting interprofessional communication and, where appropriate, decision making.
- 8. Supporting the continuing professional development** and education to improve individual and team performance of community pharmacists and keep up with the emerging new practices in the field so as to provide the most efficient and higher quality of care to the patients.
- 9. Retention and employment strategies** to support the well-being and career advancement of community pharmacists, effectively diminishing burnout, elevating retention rates, and mitigating dissatisfaction within the profession. Moreover, enhancing the encouragement of the field could be achieved through reducing bureaucracy, alleviation of medicine shortages, establishing transparent career progression pathways, manageable workloads, and, where applicable, enhancing salaries and benefits to retain a greater pool of talent within the profession, offering working conditions that are compatible with a better work-life balance. In some European countries it is crucial to address the recurrent migration of the national talents to other countries, so as not to lose the return on the investment allocated into training and educating skilled professionals.
- 10. Recognising the indispensable role of community pharmacists** in healthcare and promoting initiatives designed to address workforce shortages and the overall investment in the community pharmacy sector. This is essential for meeting the current needs of the population, and of community pharmacists and ensuring long-term sustainability in the profession and that the best care can be provided to European citizens.

Addressing the shortage of community pharmacists demands urgent action and unified commitment from all healthcare stakeholders. Through the implementation of focused initiatives aimed at attracting, retaining, and empowering the community pharmacy workforce, we can safeguard the current access to high-quality pharmacy services and effectively adapt to the changing healthcare landscape.

PGEU believes that collaboration, innovation and active advocacy work in this matter will serve as pivotal drivers in tackling this critical challenge and fostering a resilient future for community pharmacy practice and better patient care.

Introduction

In recent years, Europe's healthcare landscape has undergone a significant transformation, catalysed by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demographic shifts, technological advancements, and evolving healthcare needs of the population. As a result of these new challenges, the contribution of community pharmacists to the sustainability of healthcare systems has been highlighted, providing essential services and acting as frontline healthcare providers at the heart of communities. However, parallel to what has been witnessed with other classes of healthcare workers, the shortage of community pharmacists has become a pressing concern across Europe, with significant implications for public health, patient care, and the long-term sustainability of healthcare systems.

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), there is a projected shortfall of 10 million health workers globally by 2030, particularly pronounced in low- and lower-middle-income countries but also evident across Europe. Countries across all socioeconomic levels seek to tackle challenges related to the education, employment, retention, and performance of the healthcare workforce. WHO has highlighted through reports concerning indicators such as adverse working conditions, mental health issues, burnout, and overwhelming workload pressures that highly contribute to the dissatisfaction of the professionals and that ultimately lead them to leave the field altogether.

In Europe, the situation has been further elucidated in literature and healthcare workers in several European countries organizing protests to highlight difficult working conditions and insufficient resources, among

other complaints. In addition to the persistent staffing shortages, Europe faces challenges in adequately replacing retiring healthcare workers. Furthermore, the evolving role of pharmacists, which includes expanded responsibilities in some countries such as advanced medication therapy management, vaccination, point of care testing, screening for certain infectious diseases and their management, requires further training, specialized skills and competencies, that also has represented a burden when enough resources are not available to perform these tasks. As countries expand the role of pharmacists in providing new services and widen their scope of practice, effective workforce planning must be considered, in order not to overstretch the current limited resources. The shortage of community pharmacists in Europe is starting to reach concerning levels, with data from various sources highlighting the severity of this issue, whilst also affecting other pharmacy staff.

According to the WHO Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023-2030, to retain health and care workers, especially in rural and underserved areas, urgent action is required. Furthermore, protecting healthcare workers' mental and physical health and well-being; enhancing their recruitment; optimizing their performance; and ensuring that there is a supply of health and care workers to meet future needs, is crucial to maintain the efficacy and quality of care that the healthcare system can provide.

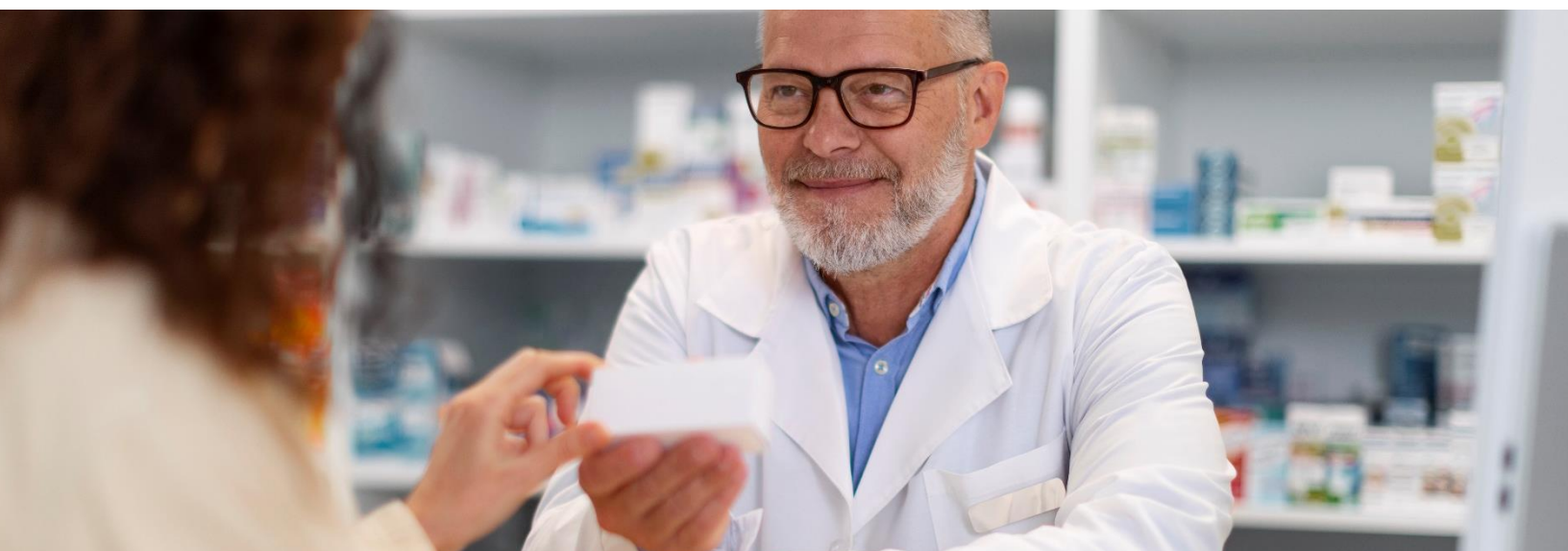
Even though the EU statistics indicate an overall increase in the number of pharmacy graduates from 2010 to 2020, Europe stays behind the average with only a 3% growth compared to the 20% growth in other areas of

the globe. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in healthcare systems, particularly regarding human resources. Many countries in Europe have reported difficulties in recruiting frontline personnel, which includes pharmacists working in primary care. The repercussions of pharmacy workforce shortages on healthcare provision in Europe would be critical, given that patients often rely on community pharmacists for timely access to medications, counselling on proper medication use, and management of chronic conditions. As the healthcare professional most accessible to the population, and often the last one that patients have contact with before taking their medication, they are crucial to support patients in their health journey. Furthermore, a triage role for the whole healthcare system is played by community pharmacists, that are able to provide immediate care in limited circumstances (e.g. minor ailments) or refer to other levels of care, making use of their clinical skills. Pharmacists are an accessible gateway to the primary healthcare services. Therefore, the shortage of pharmacists compromises the ability of pharmacies to meet patient needs effectively, leading to longer waiting times, reduced access to services and increased pressure and dissatisfaction on the remaining pharmacy staff.

In light of these challenges, PGEU focuses on identifying effective policies and planning

responses to address the shortfall of the community pharmacists' workforce across Europe as the matter has also gathered political attention. From putting the topic amongst the priorities of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, to the recognition by the European Commission of this problem and proposal of initiatives, the issue of healthcare workforce shortages has been increasingly present in the international discussions. Nonetheless, there is a clear need to make more visible the shortage of pharmacists, as currently some European countries are already experiencing recruitment difficulties, in a trend that is expected to grow over time and expand.

This position paper aims at exploring in depth the root causes of the problem, proposes points of reflection and potential solutions to mitigate this crisis and shares some of PGEU members' experiences. Targeted interventions, policy reforms and collaborative efforts among stakeholders can ensure the sustained availability of high-quality pharmacy services and meet the evolving healthcare needs of European patients. Through collective action and innovative approaches, a resilient and sustainable future for community pharmacy practice in Europe can be built, as well as ensuring a more efficient healthcare system.



Community pharmacists' challenges

The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted the shortcomings of the healthcare systems and pushed for the development of coordinated actions from all member states of the European Union to tackle that crisis including the raising investment on the healthcare sector. One fundamental point that should be highlighted is the increased investment in healthcare during that period. This investment increase addressed the chronic underfunding of this sector over the years - which had taken a toll on the healthcare capacity to answer to this type of emergency - and a substantial effort was needed from all member states to scale up investment and improve the services available to the communities.

At the current point, there is a need to strategically invest in healthcare, including community pharmacy, so that pharmacists and pharmacies are prepared and equipped with the resources and personnel to answer future crises, and to deal appropriately with aging population and increased chronic disease burden, and other challenges of the primary healthcare system. The future investment should be tailored to the population's needs and the healthcare workers' demands to deliver quality and effective care.

Investment in education

A greater investment in education is needed to increase the number of pharmacy graduates to meet the population's health needs without straining the existing community pharmacy workforce. This can be achieved through increasing the number of student places. Furthermore, pharmacy education places and curricula should not be static, and they should move to match the needs of the profession, population and healthcare system.

However, some issues need to be addressed so as to provide a skilled and capable workforce. First, there is a need to tackle the current skill mismatch caused by the insufficient alignment between basic education and continuous or lifelong education which ultimately makes it harder to meet the evolving population's needs. It is fundamental to implement a core curricula that is focused on patient care and in the development of clinical skills that are a

foundation for the primary care work of community pharmacists as healthcare professionals. This point is critical to encouraging future pharmacists to pursue a career in community pharmacy as there will be the prospect of continuous education and development in this field. It would also be pivotal to improve the academic capacity of the institutions, and the intercollaborative training, building on the education proximity with other healthcare providers. Leveraging interprofessional education will aim to provide a better coordinated response from the healthcare system in the future, fostering skills-mix and coordinated practice.

More importantly, it is necessary to reform and innovate the pharmaceutical curricula, providing competency-based learning tools, introducing innovative and new practices in the field, which encompasses digitalization and training opportunities that create a purposeful education and training pathway. To

achieve this, the development of standards and guidelines at European and member state levels could be a potential point to actively advocate for curricula adaptation and development.

In some countries, the recurrent migration of their national talent to other countries after graduation (brain drain) has become a concern and it is currently transforming into a trend among many European countries. Therefore, so as not to lose the return on the investment allocated into training and educating skilled professionals, investment should be also allocated into making the profession more attractive and engaging in the long term.

Investment in retention and employment initiatives

Retention and employment strategies must be implemented to support the career advancement and well-being of community pharmacists. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify the distinction that exists amongst countries between problems of retention of pharmacists rather than a supply issue.

Even though there is a clear need to endorse the current workforce with more resources, institutions should not ignore the needs of the existing workforce. Therefore, the current employment conditions need to be addressed and better working conditions provided to mitigate the reported lack of mental health support, burnout, and overwhelming workload pressures (e.g. the increasing amount of medicine shortages), that highly contribute to the dissatisfaction of the professionals. Reducing bureaucracy and non-pharmaceutical tasks as well as tackling medicine shortages is essential to alleviate the workload in community pharmacies. Appropriate remuneration of the existing workforce, together with career prospections and professional development plans are some of the best investments that can be made to solidify the pharmacy workforce.

Additionally, recognition of the career and the value of community pharmacists through the attribution of benefits and salary raises should also be considered when justified. A system of career progression for the profession should be implemented so it keeps the workforce motivated to invest in their career within the community pharmacy field as well as retain recent graduates who see the potential of a career in community pharmacy. When correctly applied, these incentives are fundamental to create new jobs and improve retainment, particularly in rural areas, thus



supporting the allocation and work conditions of pharmacists in these areas and improving the services provided to the population. Finally, developing new working models to better meet the demands of different generations of professionals is desirable, prioritizing a better work-life balance.

Countries need to strengthen intersectoral governance mechanisms in order to properly coordinate the funding, development, mobilization and retention of an effective healthcare workforce, including community pharmacists. Additionally, intersectoral collaboration and investment in relationships among key elements of the sector could be crucial to building more effective funding strategies, that answer better to the demands of patients and professionals.

Investment in career development

Coupled with the protection of the existing workforce, it is essential to also support professional career development based on the patients' needs and foreseeing an integrated health service with clear and identifiable elements of collaboration among healthcare providers.

As the scope of practice for pharmacists continues to broaden, it requires a workforce equipped with specialised skills and competencies. This underscores, as previously mentioned, the importance of investing and expanding education capacities and regularly reviewing the pharmaceutical curricula. This encompasses the need for national workforce planning and a governmental strategy or policy for the pharmacy sector.

There is also a critical need to keep investing in ongoing education for professionals and the provision of adequate resources and support

structures to facilitate the highest quality of practice. These entails, in particular, digital tools that allow pharmacists to better perform their duties in their daily practice.

Ultimately, continuing professional development can be used to improve individual and team performance and keep community pharmacists updated on emerging practices such as medicine use reviews and other advanced medicine counselling services, vaccination, extended prescription for chronic medications, compounding, generic and therapeutic substitution, point of care testing, medicines optimisation, screening and referral, and other advanced pharmacy services.



Mobilizing resources and retaining talent

Policymakers should have an active role in securing and mobilizing enough resources, retaining talent as well as motivating pharmacists and other healthcare workers to better perform and be aware of the developments that can be made to improve their practice.

International organizations and governments should work together to increase the available funding from external and domestic sources to develop the pharmacists' workforce. Ultimately, it is key to advocate for optimized funds and /or funding strategies through innovative approaches and policies within the health sector, to achieve all the changes and investments needed in education, retention of the current workforce, and career development. Effective engagement among all stakeholders is crucial to prioritizing the areas that need to be addressed first and

formulating strategies for investment in mid- and long-term.

Policymakers must promote initiatives to address workforce shortages and ensure long-term sustainability in the pharmacy profession. Transparency, data collection, analysis and consequent planning are essential to produce solutions to address this matter and prepare the workforce of the future.

Furthermore, European and national stakeholders, policy makers and lawmakers should maintain the workforce shortages topic high in the political agenda, thus averting a future crisis.

Finally, governments, supported by pharmacists' organisations, should promote the development and implementation of designated plans for pharmaceutical care, to facilitate better workforce planning across both primary and secondary levels of care.



Policy Recommendations

PGEU recognizes the urgency of the community pharmacists' workforce shortage and retention in some European countries and calls for:

Prioritizing Collaborative Efforts

Institutions must prioritize intercollaborative efforts among relevant stakeholders, educational institutions and professional associations to attract a larger pool of candidates to pursue careers in community pharmacy and to ensure that there are progressions within these careers and collaboration among healthcare providers.

Implementing retention and employment strategies

To support the well-being and career advancement of community pharmacists, retention and employment strategies must be enacted. This includes establishing transparent career progression pathways, reducing bureaucracy and non-pharmaceutical tasks, tackling medicine shortages, ensuring manageable workloads, and enhancing salaries and benefits to retain talent within the profession. By prioritizing pharmacist well-being, burnout can be mitigated, retention rates are elevated, and a sustainable workforce is ensured.

Early adoption of technological solutions

Successful integration of technological solutions on the daily practice of community pharmacy is fundamental to automate, digitalize and alleviate certain administrative tasks that pharmacists face. The use of Artificial Intelligence, predictive models and tailored softwares are examples of tools that are useful and helpful to decrease the administrative burden for healthcare professionals. The successful utilization of robotics for receiving

and storing medicines in community pharmacies has been proved to make consultations with patients more efficient, diminishing medication errors and overall making a more efficient pharmacy practice. Technological solutions can be beneficial in reducing bureaucracy in pharmacy and addressing medicine shortages, areas with a significant impact on pharmacy workload.

Effective use of skills-mix strategies

All healthcare professionals should be provided conditions to work to their full scope of practice, utilizing their skills to the full extent. As countries struggle with issues in relation to healthcare workforce, policies should ensure that all healthcare professionals are allowed and facilitated to practice to their full scope, evolving from traditional models of care that need to be disrupted.

Expanding the role of pharmacists has been shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely through the contribution to COVID-19 testing and vaccination campaigns, prescription renewals, and other pandemic responses. However temporary actions, countries should assess whether these strategies should become a more permanent feature of their health service delivery models, contributing to a more resilient and flexible workforce in the future. The experience reveals that when these services were integrated with other healthcare professionals, it contributed to the resilience of the healthcare system.

Expanding educational resources and showcasing the pharmacy career

Investing in expanding pharmacy education programs and leveraging innovative teaching methods are crucial steps in meeting the escalating demand for cutting-edge pharmacists. Furthermore, regularly reviewing the curricula to integrate the evolving roles of the profession is essential to ensure that pharmacists are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the changing healthcare landscape. Bridging the gap between theory and practical training will ensure that academia responds quickly, adapting curricula to the pharmacy practice, thus better equipping pharmacists to today's challenges.

By actively showcasing the profession to students, building a bridge between theory and practice through university cooperation, the early interest in community pharmacy careers can be cultivated, thus addressing workforce shortages at their roots.

Preparing the workforce transition and transformation

Building up a resilient pharmacy workforce involves pharmacists engaging in continuous education, namely in the digital and green transition. Supporting pharmacists' continuous professional development and continuous education, through investment in training and integration of those skills in practice, is crucial for the sustainability of pharmacies as healthcare units. Pharmacists play a key role in the triage and management of the population's needs that do not require a medical consultation, thus relieving congestion in emergency departments and doctors' surgeries, in inter-professional collaboration and in personalised medicine.

Recognizing the key role of community pharmacists in healthcare

Recognizing the indispensable role of community pharmacists in healthcare provision, including through appropriate remuneration of pharmacy services. Policymakers must promote initiatives to address workforce shortages and ensure long-term sustainability in the community pharmacy profession. Stakeholders must advocate for supportive policies, that can create an enabling environment for community pharmacy practice while addressing the needs of pharmacists and patients alike. Addressing the shortfall of community pharmacists requires action and unified commitment from all healthcare stakeholders. Through focused initiatives aimed at attracting, retaining, empowering and valuing the community pharmacy workforce, it would be possible to secure ongoing access to higher-quality pharmacy services and effectively adapt to the changing healthcare landscape.

Collaboration and solidarity at European and national levels can contribute to building a stronger and more sustainable community pharmacy sector, that meets the needs of patients.

Annex: National experiences from PGEU members



Belgium: How to make the pharmacist's profession more attractive

[Click Here](#)



Estonia: Navigating through a shortage of pharmacists

[Click Here](#)



France: A Roadmap to anticipate demographic trends

[Click Here](#)



Germany: A campaign for young people

[Click Here](#)



Ireland: Strategic Workforce Planning as a basis to counteract shortages of professionals

[Click Here](#)



Italy: New pharmacy services driving the need for more

[Click Here](#)



The Netherlands: Engagement with stakeholders and deriving evidence from practice

[Click Here](#)



Portugal: Retaining, attracting, and developing professionals in community pharmacy

[Click Here](#)



Spain: Exploring ways to make the profession more visible

[Click Here](#)



Switzerland: Actions to develop the role of pharmacists in primary care

[Click Here](#)

Belgium

The National Pharmacists Association (APB) developed 3 working groups aiming at discussing the matter of pharmacy workforce shortages. The working group on “Offer” worked and liaised with the universities, with the objective on working on the conditions for pharmacy studies. The working group on “Demand”, explored the topics of automatization, delegation to technicians, and other topics directly linked with the pharmacy practice. The working group dealing with the “Attractiveness” of the profession, searched on how new services have been explored.

Currently APB is trying to put into place new services to value the profession and promote it through the new generations, so that high school students would feel more inclined to choose a pharmacy degree. The early integration in pharmacy teams through internships and appropriate remuneration have been discussed as possible tools to increase uptake of new professionals.

Estonia

Estonia is currently experiencing a shortage of pharmacists. The condition is becoming more critical as the demographic situation is quite difficult, since 50% of the profession is older than 50 years old, and 20% of the profession is older than 65 years. In general, it is noted that the profession is not so attractive for young people, as there are long working hours, shifts, and other professions have much more appealing conditions. This is also conditioned by the fact that many pharmacies are located in shopping centers, with extended period of working hours (e.g., from 10:00 to 21:00).

In Estonia there are 2 Universities that offer degrees in the pharmacy field – one degree that comprises a 3-year course (*farmatseut*), and one degree that comprises a 5-year study cycle (*proviisori*). Currently there is a collaboration with the Universities in Estonia that offer pharmacy degrees, so they can offer both three- and five-years pharmacy degrees in order to attract more students.

The National Pharmacists Association is also helping universities to find students to fill the available vacancies, so the workforce can be further strengthened. Data from 2023 shows that only 3 out of 25 students were accepted at the university for the pharmacy degree.

France

In France, all branches of the pharmacy sector experience shortages of pharmacists. Over the last three years, the pharmacy sector has consistently ranked amongst the five sectors where it is most difficult to recruit personnel, and, in the 2024 survey, 83% of recruitments were considered difficult. Ministerial statistics show it is expected that the number of pharmacists will decrease until 2027.

The relevant institutions in France are currently working in numerous directions, on the evolution of the profession, by promoting pharmacy amongst young people and students, on a recruiting programme that includes community pharmacy. **In this context, the French Chamber of Pharmacists adopted a specific [roadmap](#) with two key goals: to make the profession more attractive, and to**

anticipate demographic trends. This is implemented in connection with other interested parties, such as students and pharmacists' representatives and deans of faculties of pharmacies.

The first key goal of the roadmap is to make the profession more attractive. To this end, the Chamber promotes pharmacy amongst young people and students, collaborating with national information bodies on presentations of the profession, and creating various communications material to reach the young audience, including:

- A [website dedicated to pharmacy professions, as well as](#) dedicated accounts on [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#),
- A three-year campaign called “Pharmacist, the least well-known of well-known jobs”, explaining the variety of activities in the pharmacy profession, including video spots about Paul, a character that is [in high-school in the first year of the campaign](#), then [a pharmacy student in the second, ongoing year](#),
- A video campaign about [a day in the life of a pharmacist](#) (self-filmed videos by young practicing pharmacists, one for each pharmacy setting: industry, wholesale, community, hospital, clinical biology).

[These actions may be starting to make an impact](#), as the proportion of empty pharmacy students' seats is dropping (1,100 seats out of 3,800 at the beginning of the University year 2022/2023 vs. 293 in 2024/2025).

Making the profession more attractive also entails actions to simplify professional retraining, and to build bridges between the different branches of pharmacy, including through the ongoing reform of pharma studies. Another path that is explored is to simplify the recognition of pharmacy diplomas in France. As for practicing pharmacists, the Chamber also recently created a [specific committee](#) made of and for pharmacists newly authorised to practice.

To anticipate demographic trends, the Chamber also commissioned a qualitative and quantitative prospective study of pharmaceutical demographics. It will use micro-simulation to model trends in pharmaceutical demographics up to 2050, as a whole but also more precisely for each branch of the pharmacy profession; it also aims at identifying and assessing factors that will influence these projections.

Germany

The ABDA – Federal Association of German Pharmacists' Associations – is launching a new type of [campaign](#) for young people in the pharmacy professions. The main target group of the campaign are young people who are undecided about their careers. The diverse content of the campaign will be shown primarily on social media channels. ABDA expects that by the end of this decade there will be a shortage of up to 10,000 pharmacists in pharmacies in order to maintain the supply of medicines to patients close to home.

Ireland

Ireland has been experiencing a shortage of pharmacists for a long time now. Despite the fact that the number of pharmacists on the register is average when compared to OECD statistics. The register

of pharmacists in Ireland does not distinguish the number of full-time equivalents or their availability to work so it is difficult to ascertain the true availability.

The number of pharmacy students trained in Ireland is quite low in comparison. The Higher Education Authority in Ireland has commenced a process to increase both the number of pharmacy student places and the number providers with plans set to double the places available for students to take a pharmacy degree.

The pharmacy regulator in Ireland commissioned in 2023 a [Report on the Pharmacy Workforce](#), drawing recommendations to ensure the future sustainability of the pharmacist workforce in Ireland. The report is the culmination of significant work and commitment by the PSI and other stakeholders during 2022 and 2023 as part of the 'Emerging Risks to the Future Pharmacy Workforce' project.

This report made several recommendations and associated actions following extensive consultation and engagement through triangulation of evidence from a literature review, workforce survey and focus groups. The evidence presented sets out the basis for the recommendations and the need to address the identified risks to ensure the sustainability of the future pharmacy workforce. The challenges expressed by pharmacists and other contributors, as outlined in the report, are invariably interlinked, and require strategic and policy leadership at a national level.

The recommendations are outlined below and are now in the process of being implemented with a multi-stakeholder workforce working group meeting regularly to track progress across all six areas.

1. **Strategic Workforce Planning:** A national strategy for pharmacy workforce planning in Ireland should be designed to align with national and international best practice, taking a multi-agency, data driven approach as part of an integrated healthcare system.
2. **Leadership of and for the Profession:** There must be clear strategic direction for the contribution of pharmacy to the future health system, and appropriate professional leadership for pharmacists.
3. **Innovation and Technology:** The development and integration of process innovations and digital solutions should be expedited to benefit patients, pharmacists and the wider health system.
4. **Attracting and Recruiting Pharmacists:** Access to the pharmacy profession and the proportion of those selecting patient-facing roles should be monitored to ensure sufficient numbers are available to meet the needs of the sector.
5. **Career Sustainability and Progression:** Patient-facing pharmacy roles must be sustainable and appropriately supported, with diverse career development and progression opportunities.
6. **Working conditions:** Working conditions for those in patient-facing roles must ensure that pharmacists are enabled to deliver safe, consistent, high-quality services.

Additionally, pharmacists have been put on the [Critical Skills Occupation List](#) to speed up the process of recruiting pharmacists.

Italy

Italy is currently experiencing a shortage of pharmacists, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. It is noteworthy to mention that in Italy there are only pharmacists, and no technicians.

Comparing to pre-pandemic times, in which unemployment of pharmacists was registered, now the situation is the opposite, with the country registering a general lack of pharmacists. The increase in the demand of pharmacists is tied with an increase in hiring pharmacists to perform pharmacy services, and also because more new pharmacies opened.

Despite there are currently more students graduating from pharmacy studies (about 3.000 pharmacists graduate every year), than pharmacists needed, pharmacies are experiencing shortages of staff shortage of the profession being experienced.

The Netherlands

The Royal Dutch Pharmacists Association (KNMP) follows the developments of the collective agreement between pharmacists and pharmacies, a very important mechanism to keep the profession attractive. KNMP actively engages with the government and political power to signal emerging problems in the workforce. Furthermore, they contribute to maintaining an accurate picture of the pharmacy workforce situation in the Netherlands, which can be seen in [public databases](#).

Portugal

The average number of pharmacists per pharmacy in Portugal has doubled in the last twenty years. Today, pharmacy teams have an average of 4.1 pharmacists. Despite this high number, which supports the various pharmaceutical services that have recently been implemented (e.g. vaccination, renewal of chronic prescriptions, dispensing of hospital medicines, etc.), there are still difficulties in recruiting new professionals. This is related to a generalised shortage of professionals, which is also felt in other health professions

Retaining, attracting, and developing professionals in community pharmacy is a priority to enable young professionals and current team members to see community pharmacy as a place to work where they feel valued and fulfilled. The initiatives designed to address workforce shortages are underpinned by the pharmacy role's added value from a scientific and employment standpoint, highlighting the investment in life-long learning and the possibility for development and innovation in technical-scientific fields. In general, there have been improvements in minimum wage conditions, in rewarding performance, and in training team managers to adopt the best people management practices, providing manuals and support tools for these areas.

The Young Pharmacists Council, an advisory body of the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society, conducted a study in 2023 on the dynamics and challenges of the pharmaceutical profession in Portugal. This study ends with a set of recommendations that aims at promoting the retention and

attractiveness of pharmacists in the country. Additionally, since 2012, the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society has given the possibility for 4th and 5th year students of the Master's Degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences to register for free at the society, to involve them early with the profession.

Community pharmacy in Portugal is facing important transformations with pharmacists taking a more active role. Improving the experience of the curricular internship in community pharmacy, in collaboration with universities, was one of the needs identified. This is a critical moment for young professionals when deciding on their professional careers. Likewise, the development of new clinical services, as well as the reinforcement of these interventions at the pharmacy level, has made it possible to consolidate a vision of a healthcare space in which the scientific skills of these professionals are fully scoped. The development of new pharmaceutical services makes the profession more appealing from a clinical point of view. Complementarily, we have fostered professional differentiation by developing specialized competencies, such as oncology competency for pharmacists.

One of the main issues in retaining and developing talent is the lack of competitive and attractive career models. The National Association of Pharmacies (ANF) also signed a new progression model contract with the Unions, which provides for an overall improvement in working conditions and encourages performance in pharmaceutical services, e.g., common ailments and dose-dispensing services, since career growth is directly linked to those activities. This model also values life-long learning through allowing pharmacists who invest in training to shorten the time needed to advance in professional levels.

The Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society is developing a new image for the professional identification card that creates a clearer distinction between the pharmacist and other members of the pharmacy team. This professional identification card mentions specific pharmacist skills, such as competence in administering injectables and vaccination, as a way of valuing pharmacists. Both ANF and the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society have launched campaigns, essentially targeted to future and current students, to address this issue and better understand pharmacy curricula and career expectations in community pharmacy. Particularly, the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society has launched an unprecedented campaign in partnership with all higher education institutions to promote the Master's in Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Spain

Spain does not register at this point a shortage of pharmacists – and there are up until now some positive results worth mentioning. The number of students applying for a pharmacy degree has increased since 2020 and continues to increase. Overall, pharmacy studies are quite successful, and they register a 92.9% of employment rate.

Currently there are 1,300 foreign pharmacists established in Spain, that have had their diploma recognized. However, it has been noted that younger generations are not so interested in working in community pharmacy, due to mainly the working conditions, which encompasses extended period of working hours and mandatory shifts, and probably the lack of career promotion opportunities within this field.

This has led to dedicating a session of our 2024 Congress to how to make more attractive working in community pharmacy. The aim of this session was to find out as much as possible about the current situation and the aspects that influence in generating demotivation or lack of attractiveness for pharmacists to work in community pharmacies. Indeed, in recent times there has been a certain loss of interest in this activity as a professional career path among new graduates and there may even be a certain demotivation of pharmacists who do not see clear opportunities for professional development that could be stimulating.

On 25 September 2023, on the occasion of World Pharmacists' Day, the General Pharmaceutical Council of Spain sponsored the publication of a short story dedicated to our profession ([here](#) you can find a copy of the story in English). This story, entitled "A secret mission", written by the renowned writer and journalist Sergio del Molino, tells the story of Nico, a city boy spending the summer vacation on a rural area. One day Nico is asked to run an errand for his grandmother at Carmen pharmacy's.

Thanks to the collaboration of the Ministry of Education, which makes the text available to teachers so that it can be used as a teaching resource, this story is allowing us to reach primary school students - between 10 and 12 years old -. In addition, teachers are provided with a guide that helps them to discover other aspects of pharmacy or to carry out a small laboratory experiment at the end of the reading.

Therefore, the story, in addition to promoting the pharmacy profession and its values, creates interest among young people, and helps fostering new vocations that will become fellow pharmacists in the future.

Switzerland

Switzerland is a federal country (with 26 highly autonomous cantons) and a liberal society. It has around 1,850 pharmacies employing almost 23,000 people, including pharmacists (medical profession, tertiary level training, master's degree in pharmacy and federal diploma, federal postgraduate specialist qualification in community pharmacy mandatory to lead the pharmacy) and pharmacy assistants (3-year vocational training leading to a federal certificate of competence CFC). Each public pharmacy employs an average of 12 people, including around 3 pharmacists, many of whom work part-time.

The profession of pharmacist is experiencing a major shortage of staff in Switzerland, which on average is greater than that of all healthcare specialists, in second position after that of doctors and before that of carers. As a result :

- 1/4 of working pharmacists will retire in the next 10 years (baby boomers).
- 37% of practice authorisations (under their own responsibility) are held by pharmacists aged 56 and over (including those over 65, the official retirement age).
- Women are heavily represented, with 3/4 of all self-employed licence holders, and their overall employment rate is lower than that of men (part-time work).
- The number of trained pharmacists is not sufficient to meet needs. In 2023, 187 federal pharmacist diplomas were awarded, and 303 foreign diplomas were recognised.
- The immigrant workforce for pharmacists (17.5%) is higher than the average for healthcare specialists (14.2%) and also compared to the Swiss economy as a whole (11.2%).

The Swiss Society of Pharmacists (pharmaSuisse) and the cantonal pharmacy societies are working closely together to take action at various levels to stem the shortage of staff:

- action at federal policy level to develop the role of pharmacists in primary healthcare and enhance the skills of pharmacists and their teams.
- action at federal and cantonal policy level to improve the resources available to increase the number of pharmacists trained, at both pre-graduate and post-graduate levels.
- lobbying the federal and cantonal authorities to speed up the administrative process for recognising foreign diplomas, and to standardise and facilitate the process of obtaining licences to practise.
- communication campaigns to encourage young people to train in the pharmaceutical professions.
- actions to raise awareness and share experiences on what can be done within the pharmacy company itself in terms of working conditions that are more favourable to the aspirations of young people, particularly in terms of reconciling professional and personal life and personal development.

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About Us

The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) is the association representing community pharmacists in 33 European countries. In Europe over 400.000 community pharmacists provide services throughout a network of more than 160.000 pharmacies, to an estimated 46 million European citizens daily.



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