

PRESS RELEASE

Medicine shortages persist across Europe as pharmacies absorb growing pressure, new PGEU report shows

Medicine shortages remain a structural and systemic problem across Europe, with community pharmacies increasingly absorbing the operational and human cost. At an event held in the European Parliament, co-hosted by MEP Nicolás González Casares (S&D) and MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP), and alongside the launch of the new *PGEU Medicine Shortages Report 2025*, PGEU calls for coordinated EU and national action to move from reactive management of shortages to predictive prevention and supply resilience.

Based on responses from 27 EU and EFTA countries, the report confirms that shortages are no longer episodic disruptions but a persistent feature of Europe's pharmaceutical landscape. 96% of responding countries report medicine shortages, and in 70% the situation has stagnated at an unacceptably high level. In more than one third of countries, over 600 medicines are currently in shortage.

Shortages increasingly affect clinically critical therapies, including cardiovascular medicines, antibiotics, oncology treatments, insulins, GLP-1 receptor agonists and medicines for the nervous system. In several Member States, a significant proportion of shortages concern medicines listed as critical at EU or national level, demonstrating that critical medicines are not shielded from supply instability.

The impact on patients is significant. All responding EU Member States report patient distress and inconvenience, and nearly 9 in 10 report treatment interruptions. For the first time, reduced patient trust emerges as the most frequent consequence of shortages reported by pharmacists, signalling an erosion of confidence in medicines and in the healthcare system itself. In addition, countries report sub-optimal treatment, increased co-payments, medication errors linked to switching, and in some cases adverse events.

Community pharmacies are increasingly acting as shock absorbers within fragile supply chains. On average, pharmacies now spend around 12 hours per week managing shortages: more than double the level recorded just 5 years ago. This includes sourcing alternatives, contacting prescribers, counselling patients, preventing medication errors and navigating administrative requirements. 81% of countries report increased administrative duties and financial losses linked to the time invested in mitigating shortages.

PGEU President Mikołaj Konstanty said: *"Medicine shortages have stabilized, but at an unacceptably high level. They are no longer isolated incidents; they are a chronic strain on patients, pharmacists and healthcare systems. Community pharmacists are ensuring continuity of care every day, but resilience cannot rely on frontline professionals absorbing systemic failures. We must strengthen supply security, improve predictive capacity and empower pharmacists with the legal and operational tools to act swiftly and safely."*

While some governance improvements are visible (81% of countries now have a definition of shortages and 74% have reporting systems accessible to pharmacists) significant gaps remain. Predictive and early warning systems are uneven or under development in many Member States, pharmacist reporting is not always possible and seldom digitally integrated, and legal flexibility to manage shortages varies considerably across countries. Only 15% of responding countries allow therapeutic substitution by pharmacists, limiting their ability to ensure continuity of care when alternatives are clinically appropriate.

To address the growing and systemic nature of medicine shortages, PGEU calls for:

Strengthened EU coordination and supply resilience: reinforce implementation of the Critical Medicines framework, address manufacturing vulnerabilities, diversify production capacity and ensure that pricing and procurement policies support market sustainability.

Predictive and interoperable monitoring systems: establish EU-level early warning mechanisms, ensure universal and digitally integrated reporting, and include pharmacist-level reporting in national monitoring frameworks.

Legal empowerment of pharmacists: expand and harmonise substitution frameworks under defined protocols, enable swift, patient-centred responses during shortages.

Protection of patient trust and pharmacy sustainability: recognise and compensate pharmacies for the time invested in managing shortages and prevent additional financial burden on patients resulting from shortage-driven substitutions.

Medicine shortages are a test of Europe's ability to guarantee equitable access to essential therapies. Moving from managing shortages to preventing them must now become a shared European priority.

For more information, see the [PGEU Medicine Shortages Report 2025](#).

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