pharma.be, the umbrella organisation for some 130 innovative pharmaceutical companies operating in Belgium, published its Pharma Figures 2022 on 30 June 2023, an annual overview of the sector's economic footprint. The figures show once again that the biopharmaceutical sector remains in full development. However, this is no guarantee for the future.

Competition and challenges

Competition with other countries is fierce, Europe needs to take steps to strengthen its position internationally, and the search for talent remains a challenge. The threat of introducing restrictions that make it more difficult for patients to access new therapies persists at national level.

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Some key figures for 2022:

- In 2022, 43,501 people were directly employed in biopharmaceutical companies in Belgium. This represents an increase of 18.8% over the last five years. The sector's impact on employment in our country goes even further: for every job in the Belgian biopharmaceutical sector, two other jobs are created in the Belgian economy.
- Investment in research and development (R&D) amounts to more than €15 million a day, for a total of €5.7 billion, up 14.7% on last year. The number of researchers working in the sector has risen by 25.5% over the last five years.
- For the first time, total exports of medicines and vaccines exceeded €100 billion,

representing 17% of total Belgian exports. Every day, the Belgian sector exports €275 million.
- Finally, the biopharmaceutical industry is one of the few sectors to generate a significant trade surplus (€19.4 billion) by exporting medicines and vaccines.

A fragile environment despite strong results

“Although the figures for 2022 show that the Belgian pharmaceutical sector is strong, this is no guarantee for the future. Our sector remains one of the most dynamic in the Belgian economy, but the environment remains fragile. The Belgian Pharma Valley is facing serious competition from other countries that are strongly supporting their own biopharmaceutical sector.

What’s more, we are seeing a worrying trend: more and more R&D activities in the pharmaceutical industry are leaving Europe for the United States or Asia. 25 years ago, around half of all new medicines came from Europe. Today, only a fifth remains. To halt this trend, Europe – and certainly Belgium – needs to take urgent action.

Health as a priority

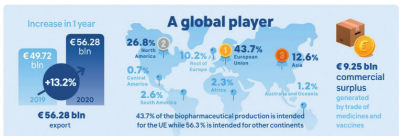
For pharma.be and its members, health is essential. Our mission is to transform knowledge into solutions and bring them to market so that patients can benefit from them. Although Belgian companies invest heavily in the research and development of innovative medicines, all too often these drugs are not available quickly enough for patients in our country.

This is a structural problem that places our country in the European average, far behind neighbouring countries where patients have obtained reimbursement for these innovations. An important detail in this respect is the fact that spending on drugs has increased much more slowly than other spending in the NIHDI INAMI-RIZIV health budget over the last decade.

Maintaining growth and innovation

The latest figures for the pharmaceutical industry demonstrate the importance of this sector for our country. We need to maintain this engine of growth, employment and innovation, because patients and society as a whole will benefit from it.”

Caroline Ven, CEO pharma.be



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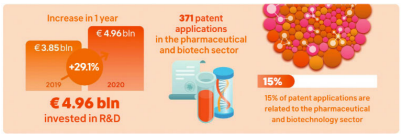

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