Compensation Index

Pharma & Life Sciences Pay - 2026

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What's Inside

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A pay read of India pharma and life sciences for 2026. Where the money sits by role and city, what scarce skills cost, and what an offer needs to clear to land the hire.

The Big Picture

In pharma and life sciences, the scarce skill sets the price of the hire.

Sachith Kumar Rai

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- **Pharma and life sciences sit near the top of the 2026 pay table.** Pharmaceuticals are projected at a 10.1% increment and clinical research organisations at 10.2%, both ahead of the 9.1% India average.
- **The GCC is the price-setter for senior science and data roles.** Pharma GCCs run global R&D, clinical and regulatory mandates from India, and pay up to ~20% more than comparable IT-services roles for the same skill.
- **Regulatory, clinical, biostatistics and computational-bio talent commands the sharpest premiums.** Supply is thin at the senior end. A Director of Global Regulatory Affairs or a Principal Biostatistician now clears bands that mid-market domestic pharma cannot match.
- **Offers built around the scarce skill are the ones that land.** Brief each mandate by the specific capability and the band it sits in, then benchmark the offer against the GCC, where the domestic average reads low.

Source: Deloitte India Talent Outlook 2026, Aon India, NASSCOM, PayScale, AmbitionBox, Glassdoor (public, 2026), Recruise Intelligence, to June 2026.

Executive Summary

PHARMA & LIFE SCIENCES PAY AT A GLANCE

India pharma and life sciences enters 2026 as one of the strongest pay markets in the country. GCC expansion, global R&D mandates and a thin senior-science talent pool are pushing offers up, fastest in regulatory, clinical, biostatistics and computational roles.

PHARMA INCREMENT 2026

10.1%

CRO INCREMENT 2026

10.2%

LIFE SCIENCES INCREMENT

9.9%

INDIA AVERAGE INCREMENT

9.1%

GCC PAY PREMIUM OVER SERVICES

~20%

WHAT IS MOVING THE MARKET

R&D ownership

Moves to India. Novartis, Sanofi and Eli Lilly run drug-development analytics, clinical data and digital-health work from Hyderabad and Bengaluru hubs, lifting demand for senior science talent.

Skill scarcity

Sets the band. Biostatistics, computational biology, pharmacovigilance physicians and global regulatory affairs all run short at the senior end. Offers stretch to close.

City concentration

Hyderabad rising. Hyderabad is the fastest-growing pharma GCC base; Bengaluru holds the deepest data and analytics pool. Both carry a metro pay loading.

Source: Deloitte, Aon, NASSCOM, PayScale, Glassdoor (public), 2026, Recruise Intelligence.

The Market Read

Entry pay is rigid, but the senior end is where offers break.

Pharma pay has not risen evenly. The entry bands have held close to inflation, but the senior end, nine years and up, has widened fastest, and that is where offers now break. Across the science functions the pattern is consistent: a regulatory-affairs or clinical-research lead runs into the high twenties to mid-thirties in lakhs, biostatistics and computational roles higher still, while entry roles have barely moved. The widening is led by biostatistics, regulatory leadership and computational science, the three areas where India's supply is thinnest and global GCC demand is highest.

The bands themselves tell you where a candidate will sit. Senior science roles in GCCs and top CROs cluster at the upper end of the public range, while domestic mid-market pharma sits lower, and the gap between the two has grown with seniority. At the junior end an average band still works; at the senior end it reads as a low-ball to a scarce candidate.

What hiring leaders should act on:

The decision that follows is to brief every mandate by role and level, then anchor the offer to the senior public band rather than the midpoint. For a nine-year-plus science or regulatory hire, starting below that band is the single most common reason a search stalls before it reaches offer.

Salary Bands by Role and Seniority

FIXED CTC, INR LAKHS PER ANNUM (PUBLIC RANGES)

Role family	Entry 0-3y	Mid 4-8y	Senior 9y+
Regulatory affairs	4 - 6	**8 - 14**	**18 - 30**
Clinical research / CRA	3 - 5	**8 - 14**	**20 - 35**
Clinical data management	4 - 7	**8 - 14**	**16 - 26**
Biostatistics	4 - 7	**10 - 18**	**20 - 35**
Pharmacovigilance	3.5 - 6	**8 - 14**	**15 - 25**
Medical writing	4 - 7	**8 - 14**	**15 - 24**
Quality assurance / GxP	4 - 6	**9 - 15**	**18 - 28**
Computational bio / chem	6 - 10	**14 - 24**	**16 - 25**

Bands are fixed CTC in LPA, public market ranges. Senior science roles in GCCs and top CROs sit at the upper end; domestic mid-market pharma sits lower.

WHERE THE STRETCH IS

The senior end is where offers break

Entry bands have held close to inflation. The senior bands (9 years and up) — GCC senior / leadership bands — have widened fastest, led by biostatistics, regulatory leadership and computational science, where India supply is thinnest and global GCC demand is highest.

Source: Deloitte, Aon, NASSCOM, PayScale, Glassdoor (public), 2026.

The GCC premium decides who you can attract.

For senior science and data roles, the GCC now sets the market, and the domestic average reads low against it. Every life-sciences band clears the 9.1% India increment average this year, with the GCCs leading the table while IT services trail at 6.9%. On top of that increment sits a structural premium: pharma GCCs pay up to around 20% more than IT-services firms for the same skill, and that gap is what decides who a domestic employer can realistically attract.

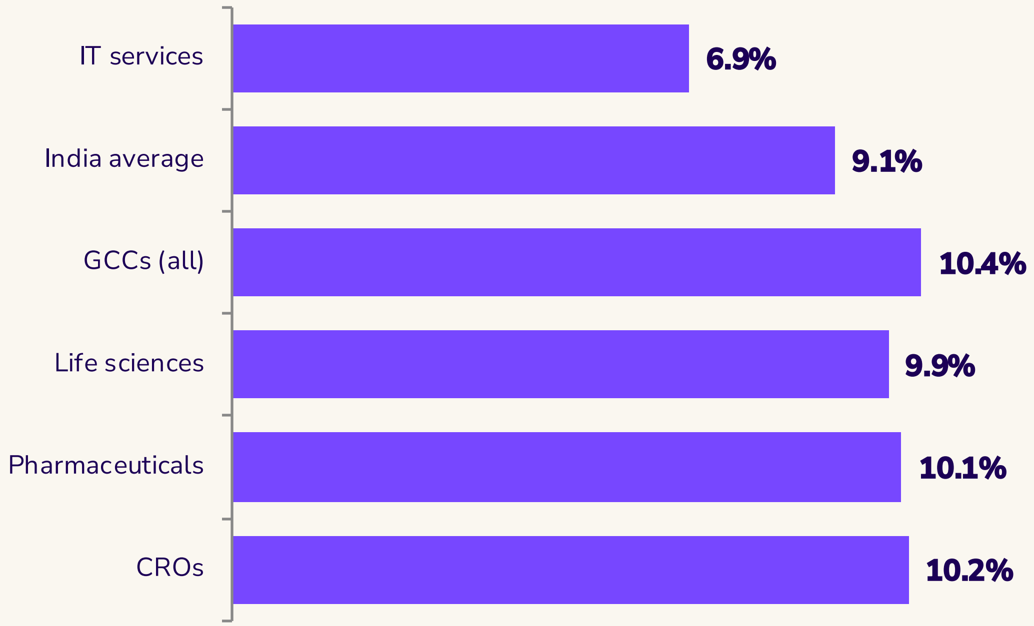
The scale is already meaningful. The largest pharma GCC in India now runs to about 8,000 people at Novartis in Hyderabad, and Hyderabad has become the fastest-growing pharma GCC base overall, anchored by Novartis, Sanofi and Eli Lilly investment in clinical data, regulatory and digital-health work. Bengaluru holds the deepest computational and analytics pool. Both metros carry a pay loading over the domestic pharma belt of Ahmedabad, Baroda and the Hyderabad bulk-drug cluster.

What hiring leaders should act on:

For any senior science or data mandate, benchmark against the GCC band rather than the domestic average. Where a global pharma GCC is competing for the same person, a domestic-pharma offer built off the sector midpoint will read roughly a fifth low, and you will either close that gap deliberately or lose the candidate to the centre next door.

The GCC Premium and Where Roles Sit

SECTOR INCREMENT, PROJECTED 2026



Pharma, life sciences and CROs all clear the 9.1% India average. GCCs lead the table; IT services trail at 6.9%.

THE GCC GAP & THE CITIES

GCC PREMIUM OVER SERVICES

~20%

TOP PHARMA GCC HEADCOUNT

8,000

Where the roles concentrate

Hyderabad is the fastest-growing pharma GCC base, anchored by Novartis, Sanofi and Eli Lilly investments in clinical data, regulatory and digital-health work. Bengaluru holds the deepest computational and analytics pool. Both carry a metro pay loading over the domestic pharma belt of Ahmedabad, Baroda and the Hyderabad bulk-drug cluster.

Source: Deloitte India Talent Outlook 2026 (sector rows); EY Future of Pay 2026 (GCC 10.4%); Aon, NASSCOM, PayScale, Glassdoor (public), 2026, Recruise Intelligence.

FINDING THREE

The scarce skill sets the premium

Within pharma, scarcity is concentrated in a handful of capabilities, and those are the ones that set the premium. Computational biology and cheminformatics, biostatistics and statistical programming, and global regulatory affairs for US and EU filings all run short at the senior end while GCC demand for them runs high. Clinical data science with SDTM and ADaM experience is close behind. Further down the scale, medical writing, QA and GxP sit in the middle, and clinical operations, where supply is deepest, stays nearer the sector norm.

The dynamic compounds because the GCCs chase exactly the profiles domestic pharma also needs. A pharma GCC hiring the same niche biostatistician or regulatory lead, and paying more for them, tightens an already thin senior pool further. The result is that a scarce skill adds a clear premium over the base band for the level, and the senior offer has to stretch to close.

What hiring leaders should act on:

Identify the one or two genuinely scarce capabilities a role actually needs, and price those specifically, rather than reaching for a generalist band. A generalist number will not land a principal biostatistician or a global regulatory lead, because the market for those skills has already moved past it.

What scarce skills cost

SKILL SCARCITY & PREMIUM PRESSURE (PUBLIC READ)

SKILL FAMILY	Supply scarcity	Senior premium	GCC demand
Computational biology / cheminformatics	High	High	High
Biostatistics / statistical programming	High	High	High
Global regulatory affairs (US/EU)	High	High	High
Pharmacovigilance physicians (MD)	High	High	Mid
Clinical data science / SDTM/ADaM	Mid	High	High
Medical writing (regulatory)	Mid	Mid	Mid
QA / GxP / CSV	Mid	Mid	Mid
Clinical operations / CRA	Low	Mid	Mid

Thinnest at the top

Computational biology, biostatistics and global regulatory leadership run shortest in India. Senior offers stretch to close.

The skill drives the uplift

A scarce skill adds a clear premium over the base band for the level.

GCCs absorb the scarce talent

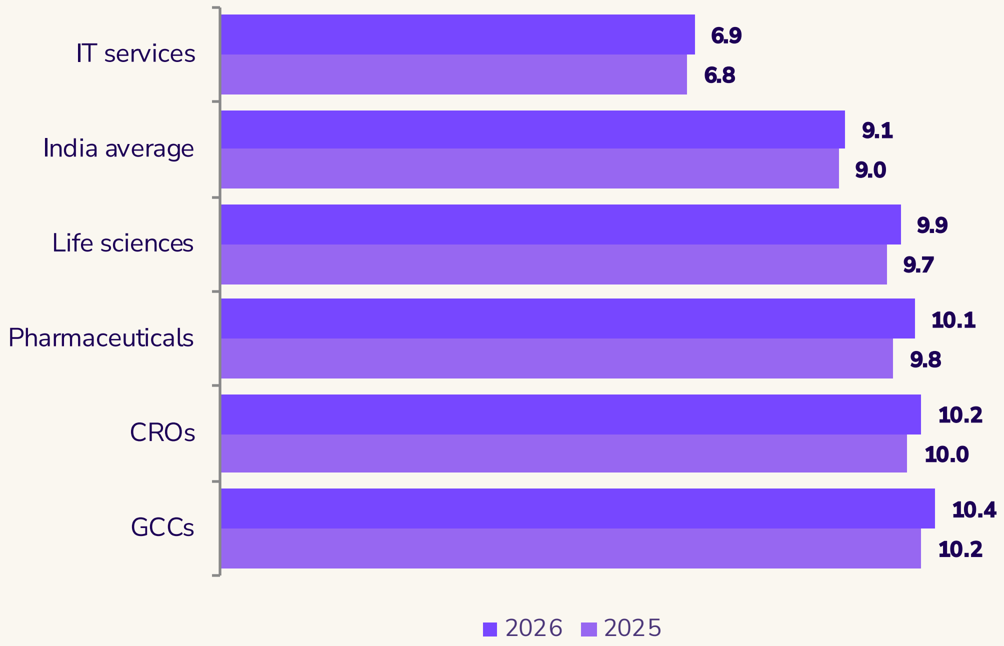
Pharma GCCs hire the same niche profiles that domestic pharma needs, and pay more, which tightens supply further.

Source: Deloitte, Aon, NASSCOM, PayScale, Glassdoor (public), 2026, Recruise Intelligence..

The Benchmarks

Pay Trends and Attrition

SECTOR INCREMENT, 2025 TO 2026 (PUBLIC)



Every life-sciences band rose year on year. The gap to IT services widened, which is why GCCs increasingly out-bid domestic pharma for the same senior science talent.

WHERE RETENTION IS HARDEST

Biostatistics & statistical programming. Counter-offers are routine. The scarce senior pool moves on a 20%-plus uplift.

Regulatory leadership. Few people carry US/EU filing track records in India. Once trained, they are heavily courted by GCCs and large CROs.

Computational science. Crosses into tech pay bands. Competes with AI/ML hiring across every sector, well beyond pharma, so retention costs run high.

Clinical operations. Higher supply keeps churn nearer the sector norm, but quick-joiner pressure raises the cost of any urgent backfill.

Source: Deloitte India Talent Outlook 2026 (sector rows); EY Future of Pay 2026 (GCC 10.4%); Aon, NASSCOM, PayScale, Glassdoor (public), 2026, Recruise Intelligence..

Winning the Hire

Six rules that decide whether an offer lands

1. **Anchor to the senior public band.** For 9-year-plus science and regulatory roles, start at the upper public range. The average band reads as a low-ball to scarce candidates.

2. **Benchmark against the GCC band.** A GCC premium of up to ~20% vs IT services sets the real market for niche roles. If you are domestic pharma competing for the same person, you close the gap or lose them.

3. **Price the scarce skill on top of the level.** Biostatistics, computational biology and global regulatory carry a premium over the base band. Pay for the capability the brief actually needs.

4. **Move fast on quick joiners.** Urgency has a cost. Short-notice candidates command more, and a slow process loses the strongest profiles to a faster GCC offer.

5. **Sell the work alongside the number.** Global mandate ownership, real R&D scope and a clear path matter as much as cash to senior science talent. Make the work concrete in the offer.

6. **Verify every band before you commit.** Public ranges set the structure; the tight, mandate-specific band is verified before any offer goes out.

Winning a senior science or regulatory hire comes down to pricing the scarce skill correctly.

The public bands give you a structure, but the same title can clear very different numbers once you price the regulatory, biostatistics or computational-bio capability underneath it. The GCC is the reference price now: pharma centres run global R&D, clinical and regulatory mandates from India and pay a clear premium over domestic and services roles for the same skill, so an offer built off the sector midpoint reads low wherever a global centre is competing. Anchor senior roles to the upper public band, then benchmark against the GCC rather than the domestic average.

Retention matters as much as recruitment, because the scarcest profiles move on counter-offers and cross into technology pay, so holding a hire is often cheaper than re-buying one into a market that keeps climbing.

Identify the one or two capabilities a role genuinely needs, price them against the GCC, and move quickly, because the finished profile is rare and heavily courted. Bring us the brief and we will tell you what it takes to land the hire and keep them.

Recruise Global

Want to hire talent that makes a real difference to your organisation?

Cut through the hype to get to what really matters.

About Us

Recruise is a global intelligence-led talent partner for enterprises, with offices in Bengaluru and Austin. For two decades, we have been a trusted partner to Fortune 2000 companies, scaling mid-market global capability centres, and the senior professionals who lead them — across Technology, Pharma, Life Sciences, and BFSI.

We combine deep sector expertise and proprietary hiring intelligence to deliver measurable impact across talent acquisition, executive search, and GCC transformation. Our work is reinforced by industry-leading research, deep market insights, and thought leadership across a wide range of sectors including Digital Services and ER&D, Enterprise Software, Internet of Things, Healthcare, Pharma, Lifesciences, Retail, Automotive, BFSI and Media & Telecom.

From scaling innovation to navigating disruption, global leaders turn to us to build, buy, and grow technology-led businesses that are ready for what's next.

Executive Search

Experienced Talent

Contract Staffing

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