

Retail and Wholesale committed to making forced labour history, but needs consistent EU rules

Commenting on the Commission proposal issued today prohibiting products made with forced labour, EuroCommerce Director General Christel Delberghe said:

“The use of forced labour is not acceptable, be it inside or outside the EU. Retail and wholesale is committed to the observance of human rights and sustainable and responsible supply chains. We are fully aware of our role and wish to be part of the solution many companies are already committing to global alliances and use certification and verification schemes to address these issues and maintain responsible supply chains. It will be important for companies to have rules consistent with EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence legislation and clearly defined and proportionate obligations which they are realistically able to fulfil.”

EuroCommerce welcomes the Commission’s choice of a regulation, which reduces the risk of inconsistent implementation by the Member States, and that the Commission will seek to coordinate enforcement with national authorities. But the association warns that this regulation must be accompanied by clear guidance for those authorities and companies and regrets that the Commission plans to issue guidelines only some 18 months after the entry into force of this regulation.

EuroCommerce also remains concerned should the obligations in the proposal turn out to be inconsistent with proposed due diligence legislation already covering forced labour and requiring even small and medium-sized companies to provide proof that they may struggle to find.

This is an important initiative addressing a problem which has been an issue of public concern for many years. And EuroCommerce is disappointed to see the proposal being put together on a very short timescale and accompanied by none of the proper public consultation or impact assessment that the Commission’s own better regulation rules require.

Christel Delberghe added: *“There is a real determination on our part to make forced labour history and to do so globally. EU legislation needs to be accompanied by dialogue with trading partners and incentives for them to implement the fundamental ILO Conventions. The Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) has shown how such an incentive-based approach can benefit all involved.”*

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 27 countries and 5 million companies, including leading global players and many small businesses. Over a billion times a day, retailers and wholesalers distribute goods and provide an essential service to millions of business and individual customers. The sector generates 1 in 7 jobs, offering a varied career to 26 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.