

Delivering a dynamic Single Market and sustainable growth

A Manifesto for Retail and Wholesale



Retail and wholesale:

A key driver for competitiveness in Europe

Our impact

We are present in **every city** and across each region



We contribute **10% of EU GDP**



European retail is a **leading sector** globally

We are a **proactive, reliable** and **innovative** sector



We are Europe's largest private employer, providing **26 million jobs**

We provide **1 in 7 jobs** in the economy and **1 in 5 jobs** for young people

We represent **5 million businesses** of all sizes. **99% are SMEs**



We need to invest up to **€600 billion** into our sustainability (€335 billion), digital (€230 billion) and skills (€35 billion) transformation

Call to action: Partnering for the future



Christel Delberghe
Director General



Juan Manuel Morales
President

/// We call on the incoming EU institutions to work together with us to create the conditions for success and to transform the challenges we face into opportunities for a stronger, more competitive and more resilient Europe.

We all need to focus on making the EU a global leader in attracting investment and in retaining and growing talent. This should be based on partnership and coherent, practicable policy, supported by a resilient and dynamic Single Market, delivering sustainable growth.

We stand ready to help strengthen the EU as one of its most essential sectors and to lead by example on the European and global stage. ///



Supporting Europe’s strategic goals

Retailers and wholesalers play a key role in Europe’s prosperity and are central to the colourful fabric of our communities.

We are a driver for competitiveness and sustainable growth

Our businesses have unrivalled reach and integration within communities across the EU. They support numerous industrial ecosystems and serve the whole population with a huge range of goods and services.

Retailers and wholesalers are very diverse. They bring vitality, social engagement and vibrancy to our towns, cities and villages. They support the European way of life and deliver choice and prosperity for Europe’s citizens. The economic activity we generate is delivered within people’s communities and is connected with their daily lives and to the local jobs they provide.

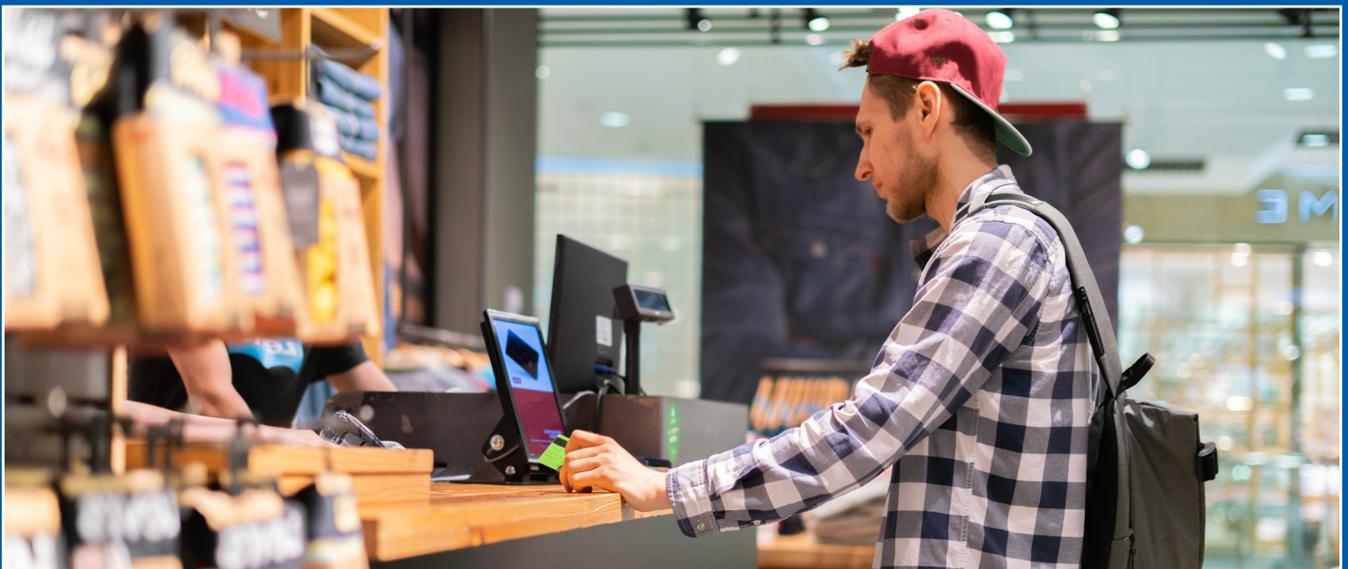
As a sector, we are resilient and we continue to adapt and evolve, constantly finding new ways to meet the needs of our customers. We form a key element of Europe’s world-leading economy.

We champion transition

Our focus on sustainable, digital, and skills transformation is making a key contribution to Europe’s strategic transition goals. In partnership with our employees, customers, and consumers, we are investing and developing increasingly sustainable business models year-on-year. We aim to deliver on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals while continuing to adapt, constantly responding to the changing needs and demands of our customers.

We are key partners in Europe’s future

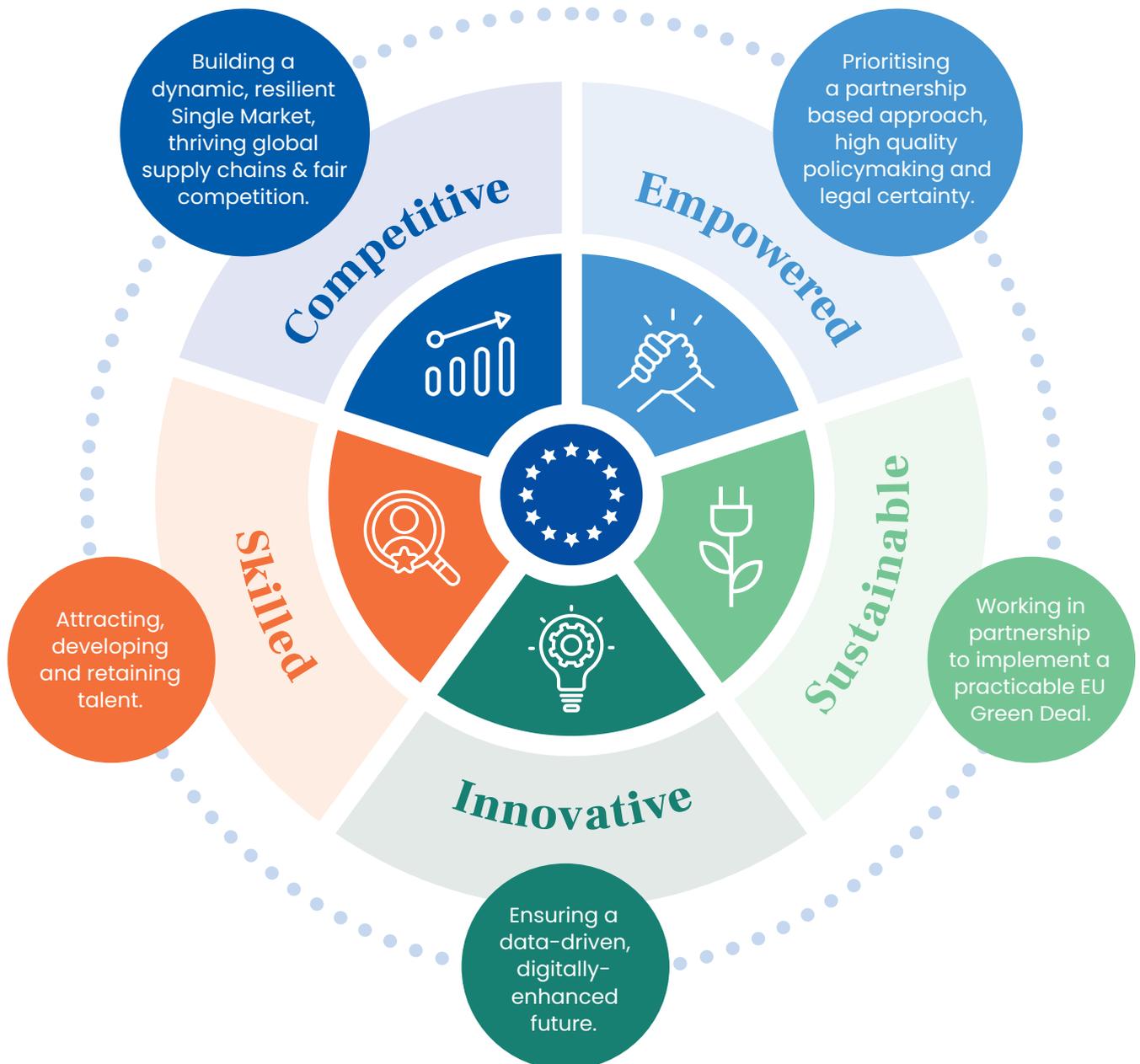
Our sector embodies commitment, resourcefulness, and drive. We foster innovation and investment and are committed to building a stronger, more resilient continent, that provides affordable, safe, healthy, and sustainable products and services for all.



What we need to succeed – co-creating the conditions for a more competitive and resilient EU

With the right political and regulatory support, retailers and wholesalers can deliver huge additional economic gains for Europe.

We call upon incoming EU institutions to work together with us to deliver an EU that is:





Competitive

Building a resilient, dynamic Single Market; supporting thriving global supply chains

The Single Market is the bedrock on which to build a Europe that is strong, competitive, and resilient. It brings greater choice, innovation and affordability to consumers. It fosters the development of a value-adding retail and wholesale ecosystem.

Retail and wholesale is recognised as a key sector with high potential for further Single Market integration but is still facing costly barriers that are holding back our sector's competitiveness. Slow infringement proceedings and political interference hold our sector back.

During the 2019–2024 mandate, we have seen a decrease of 80% in the number of infringement proceedings opened by the Commission related to the internal market.

Retailers and wholesalers need a Single Market that works for all businesses and consumers and policies that continue to facilitate trade across the world as our supply chains operate globally.



In the next mandate, retailers, wholesalers and consumers need support and stability to navigate a rapidly changing environment.

Our call for action:

- Prioritise the Single Market as key for resilience, new market development and competitiveness, and reconfirm the commitment to greater integration;
- Prioritise enforcement and improve the use of preventive instruments, such as notification procedures; the opening of infringement procedures should be more automatic, faster when necessary, and not subject to political dispute;
- Prioritise services, by further acting on and developing the Retail Transition Pathway to release untapped potential; addressing territorial supply constraints and supporting retail alliances to enable all to benefit from the Single Market and to reap benefits for consumers;
- Take steps to ensure equity between EU and international players on the EU market and develop continuous awareness campaigns for consumers and businesses, regarding their rights and obligations, while achieving relevant EU policy objectives;
- Secure global supply chains by ratifying and concluding new trade deals to ensure free trade and bring customs policy into the digital age;
- Support a competitive market for payments to bring down costs, including a cost-efficient introduction of the digital Euro, while promoting the safe, practical and affordable acceptance of cash.
- Provide a fair taxation framework that is complemented by VAT rules that are fit for the digital age.



Empowered

Prioritising a partnership-based approach towards quality policymaking that provides legal certainty

For retailers and wholesalers to deliver the transformation and to invest, we need higher quality, practical, coherent legislation, based on a sound understanding of our sector, which avoids unreasonable costs.

The volume of new legislation during the 2019–2024 EU mandate was overwhelming and has huge, ongoing implications for retailers and wholesalers. Its effects are also particularly keenly felt by SMEs and consumers, and ultimately have an impact on the EU's competitiveness.

We need to see a decrease in regulatory and reporting burdens, combined with an increase in supportive measures.

Our call for action:

- Focus on high-quality legislation, coherence and proper impact assessment, developing a partnership approach with those involved, ensuring ease of compliance for businesses, reducing and minimising reporting and administrative burden.
- Ensure new rules are enforceable, and incorporate an understanding of business models including the reality of supply chain relationships; apply the 'SME test' to assess the direct and indirect impact of new legislation on smaller businesses;
- Prioritise legislation that is outcome, rather than process, based to ensure flexibility and adaptability;
- Prioritise the Single Market to support the development of new markets and remove costs of fragmentation;
- Provide the necessary assistance and guidance for the implementation of legislation adopted during the 2019–24 mandate; allowing sufficient time for businesses to adapt to new provisions.





Sustainable

Working in partnership to implement a practicable EU Green Deal

Retailers and wholesalers have a key role to play in the EU's journey to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and a circular economy. Reducing scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions by up to 90% by 2030 will require an investment of up to €300bn, e.g. for refurbishing and modernising stores and fleets, investing in renewable and energy-saving solutions for our sector, rolling out electric charging infrastructure, and more.

A transition towards more sustainable food systems is also urgently needed to address the climate, environmental, societal and economic challenges that the agrifood ecosystem currently faces. This is what consumers expect, and it is also what our sector is committed to take further action on, together with supply chain partners.

Shifting towards more circular systems will deliver wide-ranging environmental, economic and societal benefits, but will also require investments of up to 35 billion euros into the circular infrastructure alone. Our sector helps reduce demand for virgin materials by finding new ways of sourcing and offering goods and services,

that include re-manufacturing, repair, reuse and recycling. We also recognise the huge potential for eco-design. For SME retailers and wholesalers, these initiatives present particular logistical and financial challenges.

At the same time, suppliers will be encouraged to use more sustainable materials. Equally important, are the investments needed to encourage a shift in mindset among consumers, towards circularity in their purchasing choices.

Our call for action:

- Facilitate dialogue and foster collaboration between all relevant actors throughout value chains, create a competition framework that provides legal certainty to promote sustainable development and propose definitions and standards for data exchange;
- Recognise the crucial role our sector plays in ensuring food security, including availability, affordability, and accessibility;
- Deliver coherent legislation, including setting definitions, criteria and standards and provide the necessary support mechanisms.
- Support companies in their transformation towards a low-carbon economy, e.g., by defining measures in a technology-neutral way, while providing strong incentives for energy efficiency or investments in renewables;
- Develop an EU legal framework for digital labelling in consultation with stakeholders;
- Guarantee affordable energy for Europe and ensure a greener energy infrastructure by simplifying and digitalising necessary licensing procedures for installing and upgrading infrastructure;
- Ensure that company donations to charity are economically viable by removing existing VAT obligations.





Innovative

Ensuring a data-driven, digitally-enhanced future

By 2030, 90% of the growth in retail and wholesale is expected to be driven by online sales. Retailers and wholesalers compete with technology companies and, to remain competitive, will need to invest up to €230 billion in IT and technology by the end of the decade. This is needed for the development of digital channels, automation, robotisation and cybersecurity.

The digitalisation of SMEs is particularly important, and finding ways to enable them to use digital tools should be a priority.

A channel-neutral approach will be critical to ensure that existing rules are applied consistently. We will need support and guidance to safeguard fairness online and to improve compliance with consumer protection requirements.

Our call for action:

- Provide a framework for data exchange and AI to preserve competitiveness, to support the innovation capacity of European businesses and to create the right conditions for data-sharing, based on voluntary arrangements;
- Promote the digitalisation of companies, particularly SMEs, support the use of AI solutions and access to and/or use of data through capacity building programmes;
- Ensure balanced enforcement of digital legislation, including the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act; improving enforcement of existing rules and test whether existing rules are fit for purpose;
- Work with national, regional and local retail and wholesale associations through dedicated programmes for SME digitalisation, to boost adoption and online presence;
- Map all existing consumer information requirements in all EU legislation and discuss with stakeholders how to ensure consumer information remains meaningful, understandable, and manageable.





Skilled

Attracting, developing, and retaining talent

Retailers and wholesalers are the EU's largest private employer and need to train half of their 26 million employees every year. Between now and 2030, the sector will need to invest up to an additional €35 billion in upskilling and reskilling. SMEs alone will need to double their investment in skills. This is essential to support the sector's future.

Developing a skilled and competitive workforce goes hand-in-hand with sustaining vibrant and dynamic village, town and city centres. The pandemic saw many people leave the workforce, and shops and town centres shut down. The loss of retail has a far-reaching impact on individuals, communities, and the wider economy, and threatens the EU way of life. Demographic changes are also a huge challenge, given that we have an ageing population, while fewer young people are entering the labour market.

Our call for action:

- Ensure fact-based discussions on demographic change foster EU exchanges, and encourage constructive discussion with social partners to prepare for the evolving landscape of labour market needs;
- Collaborate with Member States and support social partners to ensure current and future employees are prepared for the world of work by being guided towards an educational pathway that encourages entrepreneurship and matches skills with needs;
- Provide resources to support the Large Skills Partnership for Retail and promote the outcomes from the #Skills4Retail project as a best practice for other Member States to support the sector's transformation;
- Ensure that the Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages in the EU secures skilled workers by promoting intra-European mobility and focuses on vocational education and training targeting retail and wholesale;
- Develop the EU Talent Pool, and similar initiatives, to support establishing skilled labour partnerships with third countries where there is potential to recruit skilled labour.





Retail and wholesale

An essential service for a more resilient EU



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