

## EuroCommerce Position Paper on the future Quality Jobs Roadmap

### Introduction

Retailers and wholesalers think it is important for the future Quality Jobs Roadmap to address the current context and challenges faced by retailers and wholesalers, while also supporting the competitiveness of companies in the EU, ultimately leading to job creation.

It is essential to reconcile the economic and social agendas. The needs of workers - especially those of new generations - are evolving, with preferences and expectations changing rapidly. Clinging to outdated narratives risks making our approaches ineffective and out of touch, particularly amid the labour shortages the EU is facing.

Defining what constitutes a “quality job” is challenging, as it is highly subjective. It is important to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach, since attempting to define a “quality job” may not be realistic in every context. For example, part-time contracts, which are sometimes criticised, can offer valuable benefits and flexibility that should be considered within a broader perspective.

Quality employment also exists beyond collective agreements, and any approach should reflect the diverse labour market arrangements across Member States and sectors. Social dialogue - grounded in its voluntary nature and mutual trust - is central. Social partners are uniquely positioned to understand the specific needs and challenges of their sectors or companies.

To prepare workers, social partners play a crucial role in managing the change brought by the digital and sustainability transition, as well as the need for new skills<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, they can play a role in ensuring that AI serves as a tool for empowerment, not just for business efficiency, but also for workers’ well-being.

The principle of subsidiarity is crucial, as many aspects of employment - such as wages, training, social protection, and the enforcement of labour standards - fall under the competence of EU member states. This will also help manage expectations and feasibility, to ensure a fair balance to fit with the different sizes of companies and proximity to those making decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> EuroCommerce and UNI Europa have prepared a joint submission in relation to skills, which considers the necessary action to anticipate and prepare for evolving skills needs. It should be read in conjunction with this position paper.

## Key Areas of Focus

The Commission should focus the Quality Jobs Roadmap on:

- **Implementing and effectively enforcing** existing legislation at both EU and national levels, rather than proposing new rules.
- **Raising standards and capacity building** of social dialogue, through best practice exchange, encouraging voluntary initiatives, and supporting Member States reach the targets of social dialogue coverage in the Minimum Wages Directive.
- **Raising awareness** of existing rights to information and consultation, the rights of workers to organise, and expected changes to the way of work including demystifying AI.
- **Improving skills**, particularly digital skills.
- **Focussing on horizontal enablers** including childhood education, improving support networks, and supporting research.

## Who we are

Retail and wholesale sector is present across every territory, region and community, retail and wholesale offers huge potential to support the EU's competitiveness, labour and skills agenda. We are the EU's largest private employer, providing 26 million jobs. 1 in 7 are young people. We account for 5 million businesses, over 90% of which are micro companies. These collectively contribute 10% of EU GDP.

Retail and wholesale offers flexibility, opportunities for career development, first jobs, managerial roles, and specialised positions, such as technical advisors in wholesale<sup>2</sup>. We are responsible employers committed to investing in skills and training.<sup>3</sup> They are involved with training and upskilling and reskilling their workers. Our companies know that training needs to be adapted to the rhythm of work. We engage with EU initiatives focussed on skills.<sup>4</sup>

Many SMEs in retail and wholesale offer opportunities for connection to the local area. Enabling entrepreneurs and workers to contribute to their own community and also enable them to remain connected to their local area and relevant support networks.

## The current context and future outlook

**Retailers and wholesalers operate in a complex commercial and social economic environment. They ensure that consumers have access to a wide choice of affordable food, non-food products, and ancillary services. Many of these consumers are also workers within the sector. Certain trends and external factors are impacting retail and wholesale in their day-to-day operations.**

Our sector has distinct characteristics that set it apart from other industries. Employment in our sector is closely tied to customer demand and the flow of goods, requiring services to be delivered in real

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<sup>2</sup> [Support Europe's Wholesalers - EuroCommerce](#)

<sup>3</sup> See 'Project 5: Building and Developing Skills' in our position paper: <https://www.eurocommerce.eu/2022/10/transforming-the-retail-and-wholesale-sector-key-measures-to-support-europes-largest-private-sector-employer/>

<sup>4</sup> [Skills4Retail - EuroCommerce](#), [Social partners in retail and wholesale join forces in Skills Partnership - EuroCommerce](#)

time. This dynamic necessitates careful and responsive workforce planning, where having the right number of workers at the right moment is critical for maintaining both service quality and operational efficiency.

Societal trends that impact shopping behaviour and create fluctuations in demand also affect the level of service expected. There is a growing trend towards making multiple shopping trips per week to neighbourhood stores and “on-the-go” stores, at the expense of large purchases in big supermarkets. There are increasing numbers of single-person households (including single parents)<sup>5</sup>. Evening and Sunday shopping are also on the rise, driven by the increasing number of working individuals and dual-income households. Overall, the EU population is ageing, which will also affect consumer preferences and behaviour. Seasonal patterns - such as holidays, weekends, or promotional events - create frequent fluctuations in demand.

Wider geopolitical events and crisis also impact the sector. Fierce competition from third country platforms which are circumventing tax and consumer protection legislation are a massive threat to EU retailers and wholesalers.<sup>6</sup> The recent announcements of tariffs between the EU and the US will have massive impact on the companies in the retail and wholesale sector due to the wide range of products they provide (food, textiles, consumer goods, industrial goods, pharmaceuticals)<sup>7</sup>. As well as adaptations retail and wholesale had to implement during the COVID crisis as part of the critical infrastructure. Events such as the electricity blackout in Spain and Portugal<sup>8</sup> on 28 April of this year showed retail has a role to play in EU preparedness, avoiding panic buying or practically ensuring EU consumers can still find and pay for food, fuel and medicine.

On top of this, the cost of compliance has increased immensely in the last years. As well as labour market shortages, which have been pronounced in the sector for many years, with specialised skills lacking (e.g. butchers, bakers) as well as general shortages and high attrition rates. The cost of transformation is huge, estimated as up to €600 billion between 2022 and 2030.<sup>9</sup>

**We believe it is important for the future Quality Jobs Roadmap to address the current context and challenges faced by retailers and wholesalers, while also supporting the competitiveness of companies in the EU, ultimately leading to job creation.**

**Are we going in the right direction for addressing the challenges and taking on the opportunities arising from the changes in the world of work?**

**We need to balance competitiveness and social inclusion**

**We believe it is essential to reconcile the economic and social agendas. Just as workers benefit from strong, competitive companies, businesses should also benefit from the goals set out in the future**

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<sup>6</sup> [#Compliance4All – Retailers call for a level playing field - EuroCommerce](#)

<sup>7</sup> [State of Grocery Retail 2025](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Critical importance of the retail and wholesale sector – Learnings from the electricity blackout in Spain and Portugal - EuroCommerce](#)

<sup>9</sup> McKinsey & EuroCommerce: [Transforming the EU retail and wholesale sector: Sustainability, Digitalization, Skills](#)

**Quality Jobs Roadmap. These objectives are deeply interconnected and should be pursued in a balanced way.**

We need to appreciate what we have in the EU in terms of high protection for workers and a commitment to values. This needs to be balanced as Mario Draghi recognised in his report<sup>10</sup> with competitiveness. The announcement of measures regarding psychosocial risks in the workplace as part of the roadmap's publication at the end of 2025 may be premature. It also pre-empts the important work of the ACSH working group "Mental Health and Psychosocial Risks at Work", which is not expected to present its results before mid-2026.

#### [Opportunities to combine work with family life and/or studies](#)

Retailers and wholesalers provide flexible job opportunities, with about a third (32%) of workers in part-time roles. This flexibility can play a pivotal role in supporting women's financial independence and 62% of the workforce are women. When women can access flexible work arrangements, they are more likely to remain in the workforce, manage caregiving responsibilities, and pursue career advancement.<sup>11</sup>

The flexibility can also meet the evolving needs of a new generation of young workers. For instance, in Finland, retail is the largest employer of people under 25, with many of these workers in part-time roles. The primary reason is their desire to pursue education while gaining work experience.

Young workers particularly value flexibility, often preferring to take on additional shifts as their schedules allow, rather than committing to fixed hours. Numerous Collective Agreements already regulate Sunday and shift work, ensuring fair pay and adequate rest.

Strict regulations on part-time work can unintentionally discourage younger workers from seeking employment, particularly when only full-time, fixed-hour positions are available. This issue is evident in Finland, where the Finnish Collective Agreement mandates a minimum of 4 hours per week in part-time contracts - a condition that many young workers are reluctant to accept. It is important to keep in mind that we are facing labour shortages, and this challenge will only become more acute with the aging population in the EU. As such, we also need to respond to the evolving needs of workers- especially new generations-whose preferences and expectations may be shifting.

This shift is also shown by the fact that as labour demand (indicated by job vacancies<sup>12</sup>) rises, involuntary part-time employment declines. While more job vacancies (a measure of labour demand) help to reduce it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [The Draghi report on EU competitiveness](#)

<sup>11</sup> Our members are deeply committed to advancing women's rights. They are actively engaged in a broad range of voluntary initiatives aimed at empowering women, including efforts to increase their participation in the labour market, ensure equal opportunities for career advancement, and promote inclusive work environments.

## What is necessary for quality jobs to be future oriented and future-proof? What is better done at EU and national level?

### What is best done at national level

Anticipation and management of transitions become increasingly crucial in navigating the evolving world of work. This requires the active involvement of social partners at all appropriate levels who understand the unique challenges of their specific sectors or companies.

Social dialogue - grounded in its voluntary nature and mutual trust - is central. Social partners are uniquely positioned to understand the specific needs and challenges of their sectors or companies. This makes them especially effective in addressing critical issues such as work flexibility, job quality, and evolving skill requirements. Their close connection to the realities of the workplace allows for practical, tailored solutions that support both the well-being of workers and the competitiveness of companies in the EU.

**The most effective solutions are developed at the local level - whether at the national, sectoral, or company level - through non-legislative, collaborative approaches. These solutions are tailored to the specific needs of different sectors and companies.**

The principle of subsidiarity is crucial, as many aspects of employment - such as wages, training, social protection, and the enforcement of labour standards - fall under the competence of EU member states. Therefore, EU legislation is not the right tool to achieve the aim of the initiative.

### Where there could be EU added value

**The Commission should focus on implementing and effectively enforcing existing legislation at both EU and national levels, rather than proposing new ones.**

The Commission could **support voluntary initiatives, as well as the good practices established by social partners and businesses**. This could take the form of encouraging the exchange of existing good practices and voluntary initiatives, enabling peer learning and the diffusion of effective, practical approaches across sectors.

We think that **investing in quality early childhood education and care** is vital for both social and economic development. Childcare availability, especially in rural areas, remains a significant challenge.

In Austria, for example, only 30% of children under the age of three are in childcare, and fewer than 50% of childcare facilities are compatible with full-time employment. As a result, 71% of women in Austria with children under six work part-time, which restricts their career growth.

In Germany, traditional childcare institutions typically operate only Monday to Friday, often failing to accommodate the needs of retail workers, especially on weekends or during late opening hours (e.g., until 8:00 p.m.).

## Do you agree with the proposed key areas linked to job quality identified?

We agree with the key areas identified – fair working conditions, digitalisation, and fair transitions, as well as the horizontal enablers. While we recognise the important role of collective bargaining in ensuring quality jobs, it is also important to acknowledge that quality employment can exist outside of collective bargaining agreements. A comprehensive approach should reflect the diversity of labour market arrangements across Member States and sectors.

There are a few elements that could be better reflected as horizontal enablers:

- Access to finance, which will also enable investment in people as well as improve overall competitiveness (e.g. to deploy training programmes at scale through online learning platforms) and support upskilling and reskilling.
- Supporting SMEs and encouraging entrepreneurship (e.g. through education, reducing paperwork).
- Support for research and innovation to encourage new business model and areas for growth, to encourage competition and enhance competitiveness.
- Improving policies to ensure that no area is left behind, to address labour shortages in under-served, remote or rural areas that are also linked to the lack of attractiveness or lack of essential services for workers.
- Preparing for demographic shifts.

It should be noted that many of the issues identified are currently under negotiation by social partners and the co-legislators.

## In your view, which area(s) should be prioritised at the EU level, and why?

What specific measures and tools should be used? Please distinguish between legislative, non-legislative and funding.

We see **AI as an “enabler”** - a powerful tool that can empower both workers and consumers. By integrating AI into daily operations, businesses can significantly enhance operational efficiency while improving the quality of jobs. This is especially important for workers in vulnerable groups, such as **older workers**, those with **disabilities**, and **lower-skilled workers**. AI has the potential to assist in handling more complex tasks by:

- **Simplifying repetitive tasks** (e.g., stock tracking, inventory management).
- **Automating physical labour** (e.g., heavy lifting, hazardous tasks).
- **Providing real-time support** for decision-making and performance (e.g., identifying when rest breaks are needed).
- **Analysing large amounts of data** (e.g., dynamic pricing for excess inventory, chatbots for standard customer service inquiries, self-service checkouts with AI-supported product recognition).

Our study, “The State of Grocery Retail 2024”<sup>14</sup>, highlights some key trends shaping the future of work. By **2030**, time spent on **social and emotional skills** is projected to rise by **32%**, and time spent on **technical skills** is expected to increase by **64%**, while **physical and manual labour** is predicted to decline by **17%**.

**To prepare workers, social partners play a crucial role in ensuring that AI serves as a tool for empowerment, not just for business efficiency, but also for workers’ well-being.** Focussing on sharing best practices in EU level fora can encourage similar actions in other sectors or countries.

An example of effective collaboration between **social partners** can be seen in **Finland**, where a recent round of **negotiations on the collective agreement** included a new provision for consultation regarding the integration of technological systems in the workplace. This provision requires the parties involved in **occupational safety and health cooperation** to address several key issues:

- The technological systems available to employers,
- Workers’ access to information about these systems,
- Workers’ ability to influence the design and use of these systems.

These parties are also tasked with **monitoring and assessing** the impact of these systems on workers, ensuring that workers have the ability to disengage from work when necessary.

Similarly, in **Denmark**, the **general agreement** covering all companies under collective agreements includes rules on information and consultation. This ensures that when AI is implemented in the workplace, it will be discussed and communicated in accordance with the terms of the collective agreement, facilitating transparency and collaboration.

As technological advancements reshape the labour market, **retailers and wholesalers** have already taken steps to comply with **existing labour laws** and **data protection regulations**, including **GDPR** and other relevant EU directives, to ensure workers’ rights and privacy are safeguarded. [Article 50\(1\)](#) of the AI Act establishes that an AI system that is intended to interact directly with natural persons needs to be designed in a way that the natural person concerned are informed that they are interacting with an AI system. Therefore, new legislation is not needed to ensure that companies can adapt in a stable regulatory environment. We think that one of the main challenges in AI deployment in retail and wholesale is also the workforce perception. **Some workers still perceive AI as a threat to their jobs rather than a tool that could support them. Demystifying AI and improving digital skills are therefore essential to enable all sectors across the value chain to fully embrace AI.**

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<sup>14</sup> [The State of Grocery Retail 2024](#)

## What specific measures can be implemented to increase collective bargaining coverage and to implement the Council recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the Member States?

From the point of view of legislative initiative, we think that the Minimum Wage Directive<sup>15</sup> sufficiently emphasises the importance of collective bargaining.

It is essential to strengthen the role of social dialogue at all levels, especially at the national, sectoral, and company levels. A key aspect here is that social dialogue **must be voluntary** - it should be driven by mutual trust and cooperation between social partners who know best the specific needs and dynamics of their sectors or companies. **The focus should be on supporting social partners to enhance their capacity for meaningful dialogue, rather than imposing one-size-fits-all solutions.**

The right to organise and freedom of association are fundamental in strengthening social dialogue and enabling collective bargaining. Workers and employers should have the freedom to engage in negotiations that address their particular needs and challenges. As the Commission mentioned in the conclusion document, the Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue<sup>16</sup> further emphasises the importance of fostering an environment where collective bargaining can thrive.

We welcomed the new Pact for European Social Dialogue<sup>17</sup>, which will strengthen the role of social partners in shaping labour market, employment, and social policies and we are ready to collaborate emphasising the vital role of sectoral social partners, to make its implementation a success.

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<sup>15</sup> [Minimum Wage Directive](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Pact for European Social Dialogue](#)