

Retail and wholesale as a strategic pillar of EU competitiveness

Ahead of the European Tripartite Social Summit and European Council, and as the European social partners representing employers and workers in the retail and wholesale sector, we jointly call on the EU institutions to give **greater strategic attention to services, and in particular retail and wholesale in the EU's competitiveness, Single Market and social agenda.**

Retail and wholesale is **Europe's first private employer, providing 26 million jobs**, that is one in seven jobs in Europe. Our sector brings together 5 million businesses, which generate 10% of the EU's GDP and provide an essential service to consumers and their business customers.

Together we call for a stronger recognition in policy making: Quality jobs, workers' rights, collective bargaining and competitiveness reinforce each other. A strong social dimension requires strong and competitive companies that can continue investing in their workers.

Our sector is deeply anchored in Europe, supporting territorial cohesion and keeping cities and rural areas attractive. It plays a vital role in labour market inclusion, skills development and career progression. Working environments that facilitate learning, skills development and vocational training are essential for the sector's competitiveness.

Yet, the sector's competitiveness is challenged on many fronts, and this can have a dramatic impact on employment and social cohesion.

From a shared employer-worker perspective, we underline that **the competitiveness of retail and wholesale companies depends first and foremost on innovation, quality jobs and the capacity to invest in skills, productivity and sector transformation.**

Retail and wholesale needs to be recognised for its crucial and strategic contribution to the EU's green, digital and skills objectives. Our sector offers the potential to scale demand for sustainable products, circular business models, low carbon logistics and digital solutions across value chains — provided that EU policy provides a stable and predictable framework that ensures fair competition and legal certainty.

We believe that innovation, investment and quality employment are best supported by regulatory predictability and practicable legislation — legislation that is clear in its objectives, proportionate in its design, and effective in its enforcement. It also **requires actions to strengthen the Single Market and a genuine level playing field, for all business models and workers.**

Workers in brick-and-mortar retail are particularly affected by unfair competition from third country marketplaces and traders selling directly to consumers in the EU often with no regard to EU standards and regulation. Unfair competition is distorting the market and placing businesses — particularly SMEs — and their workers under unsustainable pressure, leading to restructuring, closures and job losses. These damage the sector's economic contribution to the social fabric, lively shopping areas and local communities. A genuine level playing field requires effective enforcement of existing EU rules for all operators accessing the EU market. Fair competition must be based on respect for labour standards, workers' rights and social protection.

The race to the top means an EU where companies can compete on the basis of quality, innovation and skilled labour. This means that **social dialogue needs to be a core component of Europe's competitiveness model**. Involving social partners is essential to managing transitions in a fair, predictable and effective way.

Retail and wholesale are central to delivering competitiveness, resilience and social cohesion in Europe. We call on the EU institutions to reflect this reality more clearly in the EU's strategic priorities, and we stand ready, as European social partners, to contribute constructively to this agenda.

On behalf of the European social partners for retail and wholesale



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