

Action needed urgently on rents for closed shops and a post-crisis recovery strategy

After several weeks of major restrictions on people's movements, and, the closure, either as a direct result of government orders or indirectly due such restrictions, of millions of businesses selling non-food products, many of these face imminent bankruptcy and the prospect of never reopening. While governments have acted with a varying range of support measures, particularly in relation to short-term employment and temporary unemployment, many non-food businesses with no, or almost no, income are still facing monthly rent bills, and no prospect of being able to pay them.

On behalf of the millions of companies in the non-food retail and wholesale sector, many of them SMEs, EuroCommerce calls upon the Commission and national governments to urgently consider the following actions to avoid a wave of permanent closures of businesses whose disappearance will have an immediate negative effect on the rest of the economy, on employment, on local communities and town centres. We ask:

- the Commission to recognise the importance of the issue and call on national governments to provide adequate resources to ease the burden on retailers and wholesale tenants, and, under their national support initiatives, include resources to cover rent payments during the present crisis.
- commercial landlords and retail and wholesale tenants to act in solidarity and dialogue to find mutually beneficial solutions to the present challenges facing shops and wholesaler businesses closed during this period. Such solutions may include rent cancellation, reduction, suspension, payment deferral, or specific amendments to commercial leases.

To ease the tensions and burden on rents, we invite the Commission and member state governments to look at exit strategies from the present restrictions when the crisis subsides. We fully support the overriding imperative of reversing the spread of the COVID-19. But we ask that governments, acting in coordination with one another, look at ways to allow a gradual reopening of non-food stores. The increased availability of tests, protective equipment, and tracking, and using the effective distancing measures currently applied in food shops and pharmacies, can all be applied to non-food businesses and should allow governments to consider getting the non-food trade started again, with click and collect as a possible first step. Many consumers and professional users will increasingly need those products after many weeks of shutdown.

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