

New skills and new ways of working crucial for future resilience

At its 2020 flagship conference today, EuroCommerce is bringing together high-level speakers from the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee, senior retail HR executives, and trade unions representatives, for an exchange on how retailers and wholesalers are keeping pace with the rapidly changing world of work. Retail and wholesale – Europe’s largest private sector employer – provide stable and fulfilling jobs for 29 million people. They have a strong track record in also equipping them with the skills they need to meet ever changing consumer demands and changes in how and what they want to buy.

Addressing the conference, European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit said to retailers and wholesalers:

“Reskilling and upskilling of your workforce are going to be key for the resilience of your sector. The EU is mobilised to support the necessary effort in partnership with member states and most importantly, the private sector.”

Emphasising the important role of social dialogue, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“Constructive social partnership can help the resilience of retailers and wholesalers and support and equip employees in a changing world of work. We have discussed examples of best practice today for attracting and retaining talent as well as up- and reskilling existing employees. These show that real change is often best made incrementally at the workplace level rather than through legislation. We are looking to the European Commission to leverage best practice in training to help SMEs up- and reskill their workforce. We also ask that they invest in the capacity of social partners to promote these examples through autonomous social dialogue throughout Europe.”

Retail and wholesale are a people business, serving people. Retail and wholesale companies and their workforce have worked hard in ensuring that consumers have a reliable supply of daily essentials during the Covid-19 crisis. The pandemic has massively accelerated the trend towards digitalisation and online sales, and those businesses with an online and physical presence have been those who have weathered the crisis best. Our sector is also actively engaged in supporting the green transition.

Together with our social partner UNI Europa we have asked for support in these challenging times to take the next steps in helping achieve the ambitious goals Europe has adopted under the New Generation EU plan. Autonomous social dialogue and education and training will be key factors in preparing our workforce for these challenges and the resulting new ways of working.

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 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.