

Investing in people for the future of retail

Speaking at the Commission Roundtable on Skills for the Retail Ecosystem with Commissioners Thierry Breton and Nicolas Schmit today, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschuere said:

“Retail is a people business, serving people. Everyone working in retail has worked hard in ensuring that consumers have a reliable supply of daily essentials during the Covid-19 crisis. Many non-food retailers have suffered badly under repeated and extended lockdowns in many countries. The pandemic has massively accelerated the trend towards digitalisation and online sales. EU and national authorities now need help our companies, especially SMEs, equip their employees with the skills needed to master these digital systems in the workplace.”

Together with EuroCommerce’s Director-General (as the recognised social partner for the retail sector), senior executives from 8 retail companies presented how their companies are investing in up- and reskilling of their employees amid a rapidly changing world of work and the digital transformation in retail. Retail provides stable and fulfilling jobs for 18 million people – and another 10 million in wholesale distribution. It has a strong track record in building up the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. Informal work-based learning ensures retail employees meet the ever-changing demands of their local customers.

EU and national government support is needed to invest in the resilience of retail after the pandemic, and its ability to embrace fully the digital and sustainability transformation. This includes targeted help to SMEs to go online to survive. With the endorsement of our social partner UNI Europa, we have proposed a [European Pact for Commerce](#), calling upon the Commission to help fund this transformation, and also help SMEs up- and reskill their workforce. This is not only about digital: it is about combining ‘*high tech and high touch*’. The future of physical retail will need employees able to deal with technology, and at the same time provide a top-quality service based on expert advice and customer service.

Retailers look to open a renewed dialogue with the Commission on skills in **four key areas**:

- **Vocational Education and Training:** Retail plays a key role as the largest provider of apprenticeships in many EU countries. These are quality job opportunities for young people and include curricula focused on e-commerce operations.
- **Upskilling:** The overall success of the digital transformation in retail depends on our entire workforce becoming digitally literate. It is important that SMEs in our sector can access expertise existing training programs teaching basic digital skills.
- **Reskilling:** The retail sector also has persistent skills shortages of its own. For example, it is difficult to find enough qualified butchers and bakers. Reskilling of the long-term unemployed or workers from inside or outside the retail sector is a priority.
- **Higher education:** Another example of skills shortages are data scientists (e.g. professionals working on AI and blockchain). These technologies are already impacting retail and retailers need European universities to train more ‘home-grown’ data scientists.

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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.