

Safe, trusted AI based on European values vital for Europe's future

Marking today's publication of the draft EU Regulation on a European approach for Artificial Intelligence, Christian Verschueren, Director-General of EuroCommerce said:

"Retailers and wholesalers have been using artificial intelligence (AI) and automation technologies for many years to improve the service they can provide to their customers. AI can support faster deliveries, better predictions of demand, stock management, fraud detection, safer payments and help make our operations more sustainable. AI embraces a lot of different areas, and regulation needs to reflect that. The applications used by retailers and wholesalers carry little or no direct risks for individuals, as they focus on improving operational efficiencies and more personalised offerings. We are therefore pleased that the draft regulation concentrates on building safety and trust by particularly addressing higher-risk applications."

In its contribution to the consultation on the Commission AI white paper published last year, EuroCommerce welcomed the inclusion of retail and wholesale among the safe sectors and highlighted the need to secure a future-proof framework to support innovative and competitive use of AI in Europe. We are pleased to see that the draft regulation establishes an application-based AI framework and regulates those applications according to their intended use, i.e. on whether they will be used for internal business processes, decision tools, or uses which hold physical safety risks or other impacts on individuals. This is very much in line with the approach which we advocated in the consultation.

We also pleased to see the provision for sandboxing schemes to allow the development and testing of innovative AI systems under strict regulatory oversight to help businesses explore their potential and identify any drawbacks before they are placed on the market. Verschueren added:

"Our sector sees AI technologies as a prerequisite for Europe's competitiveness and, in these uncertain economic times, also as a boost to economic recovery. With the added challenges of rapid AI developments outside Europe, a clear legal framework providing trust and certainty is vital for investment in AI technologies which can be accessible to all Europeans and based on European values."

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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.