

European Retail Action Plan

Key messages

- 1. A vital and competitive sector:** As Europe's largest private sector employer, retail could create yet more jobs and growth. Commerce is highly competitive and dynamic, constantly innovating.
- 2. Action Plan:** A European action plan for retail should address the barriers to growth, often regulatory, facing retailers and so unleash their potential to create jobs and growth. First and foremost, the Single Market must become a reality.
- 3. Championing retail:** The action plan and the High-Level Group on Retail Competitiveness are a unique opportunity to build a better understanding of retail and its contribution to the EU economy.

Background

Retail is a European success story, employing 19 million people and accounting for 4.2% of EU Gross Value Added. Nearly one in three European SMEs are retailers. Retail efficiency keeps prices down for consumers and ensures choice. This strong and competitive sector offers potential to grow even further, employ more people and provide even better value for consumers.

In response to a call from the European Parliament and EuroCommerce, the Commission issued a European Retail Action Plan in January 2013¹. The plan, consisting in a set of 11 soft law measures, was followed in 2014 by the establishment of a High-Level Group on Retail Competitiveness.

The implementation of the plan spans over two years. Most of the measures are a compilation of existing policy initiatives developed by various Commission's DGs and grouped under 5 headings:

- Consumer empowerment
- Improved access to more sustainable and competitive retail services
- Fairer and more sustainable trading relationships along the supply chain
- More innovative solutions
- Better working environment

What is EuroCommerce's position?

EuroCommerce welcomed an action plan that would support sustainable growth in the sector and improve the perception of retail at EU level. The action plan should:

¹ Communication "Setting up a European Retail Action Plan" COM(2013) 36 final

- Enable a fully functioning internal market for goods, services and capital;
- Make the digital agenda a reality for business and consumers;
- Support employment, skills development and entrepreneurship;
- Support expansion beyond EU markets.

We fed into the processes behind the 11 soft law measures set down in the plan and support the work of the sub-groups under the High Level Group on Retail Competitiveness.

Retail reflex

Just as SMEs' needs are considered through the SME test, the action plan should generate a "retail reflex" when considering changes to or new legislation affecting retailers. This should include proper assessment of the impacts on different distribution channels.

E-commerce

The retail sector wants to see the completion of a real Digital Single Market, so consumers have a wider choice of goods, whether by shopping at home or across borders using online channels. Policy makers should ensure a level playing field for all forms and channels and apply an omni-channel test for all legislation applicable to retail and wholesale. Other proposed measures include the establishment of a single digital portal providing user-friendly information on legislative requirements in every Member State. We also call on the EU authorities to swiftly implement the consumer rights directive and address barriers such as infrastructure and skills.

Innovation

Retailers are prolific innovators. However retailers innovate differently as they are more likely to engage in open and incremental innovation and focus on both technological and non-technological innovation. EuroCommerce supports a better understanding of retail innovation in EU policy-making and access to funding.

Payment systems

EuroCommerce calls for a swift adoption and implementation of the Regulation on interchange bank fees as well as of the Payment Services Directive.

Consumer information and labelling

EuroCommerce supports the design of a database of EU food law requirements as a means to help businesses access labelling information in a centralised manner.

Employment/skills

Retail is the largest private employer in Europe and a highly competitive and fast-moving sector. EuroCommerce supports action towards anticipating skills needs especially as Europe is going through a fundamental digital revolution.

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For more information visit www.eurocommerce.eu