



PACT for SKILLS

Report from the roundtable

Pact for Skills Roundtable for the Retail Ecosystem with Commissioners Schmit and Breton

The high-level roundtable on skills with the retail ecosystem, chaired by both Commissioners on 15 April 2021, brought together executive representatives of industry, sectoral organisations, social partners, as well as educational and training organisations and local authorities. The discussion aimed at mapping the challenges the ecosystem is facing in terms of skills, sharing already applied best practices in re- and upskilling and mobilising relevant stakeholders to work towards a partnership for skills.

Setting the scene, the Commissioners reminded that retail is a crucial ecosystem for Europe's economy and consumers as well as a major reservoir of employment creation in the EU. The ecosystem however has been severely hit by the COVID crisis and currently millions of jobs are considered at risk in retail and wholesale. The digital transformation is also having immense consequences on the labour market. It can lead to job cuts, but it can also help create new types of jobs. The Commissioners stressed that digital skills are crucial for SMEs, accounting for 99% of companies in the ecosystem. To continue its green and digital transformation, the ecosystem will need talented and skilled workforce, targeted investments and a partnership under the Pact for Skills.

The social partners stressed the human dimension of retail and its importance for consumers. They underlined that the ecosystem is an important employer of women and young people as well as a crucial local employer. The social partners should make sure that training and education systems match current skills needs and employers are able to identify and forecast such needs.

Representatives of employers and employees called for a sectoral skills strategy with sector-specific skills solutions, to match the demand and supply of skills and help the sector grow for the benefit of both workers and companies. They declared ready to activate a skills blueprint for the retail ecosystem, but highlighted that a partnership should help translate best practices from the EU level to the local level and from big companies to SMEs.

Retailers highlighted digitalisation and automation as the main trends transforming the retail ecosystem and stressed that relevant skills are crucial for the ecosystem to follow the transition path. Skills needs are changing due to changing consumers' needs and expectations, this is why the future will increasingly require soft skills such as social influence, agility, adaptability and resilience, as well as a mindset of continuous life-long learning. It was also emphasized that in particular SMEs need support and access to funds to be able to re- and upskill their workforce and that preserving local entrepreneurship was crucial for retail diversity and local consumers.

A number of best practices was presented, including cooperation with national authorities to put in place comprehensive end-to-end reskilling programmes, practical solutions to improve employees' or business customers' digital skills including remote coaching and online learning platforms as well as digital skills training programmes leading to professional certification. Retailers also highlighted how they have been using digital tools to adapt their internal communication processes and the training offer to the COVID situation.

A local authority gave an example of a successful public-private partnership put in place to raise awareness among retail businesses of the importance of digital skills and ensure that local retail is future-proof. In this project, educational institutions, local administration and retailers collaborate to provide innovative solutions for local businesses.

A vocational education and training provider stressed the importance of values and an honest approach to the customer. Consumers turn to companies which have a sincere mission and abide by values. The competitiveness of the retail ecosystems depends on its ability to understand the consumers and the Pact for Skills should not ignore this aspect.

Overall the discussion has shown that the retail ecosystem is in rapid transformation and that the lack of digital skills needs to be addressed urgently. The representatives of the social partners, businesses, educational institutions and public authorities have expressed support for the Pact for Skills and have declared ready to act together to ensure that retail employees are equipped with the right skills for the future.

In conclusion, the Commissioners stated that while there is a clear urgency to start work on

skills in retail, it is encouraging to see the work already being done. They have called for the Pact for Skills in the retail ecosystem to be a collective effort by all actors, including SMEs, and the very important contribution of the Social Dialogue.

