



NIIRTA
Northern Ireland Independent
Retail Trade Association

“STANDING UP FOR OUR LOCAL
RETAILERS AND TOWN CENTRES”



EU FIVE POINT PLAN

What is NIIRTA?

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) is the representative business organisation for the independent retail sector. Our members include Retailers, Wholesalers, Suppliers to the Sector, affiliated Chambers of Commerce and Traders' Groups. Our 1500 members come from every village, town and city across Northern Ireland.

NIIRTA is committed to standing up for our High Streets and local Town and City Centres to ensure our independent retail sector gets a fair deal from Government.

We have also established a Suppliers' Forum to support local companies who supply or wish to supply goods and services to our members.

Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association

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NIIRTA Supporting Local Producers

In an age of ever more clone towns and multiple stores, independents provide real choice to shoppers in our town and city centres. They have also been the route to market for many well known local companies such as Mash Direct and Genesis Bakery and continue to do so for many local producers and manufacturers.

To support local producers, NIIRTA has launched a **Suppliers' Forum** to ensure we as a business organisation do more to support our local suppliers and producers in seeking out new trading possibilities with our retail and supplier members. In recent years we have welcomed many local suppliers to the independent sector as members and want to encourage many more to do so.

The Suppliers' Forum involves regular events for producers and suppliers to meet with retailers and wholesalers to improve communication and provide greater opportunities to promote new products and services.

NIIRTA is fully behind the Agri-Food Board report *Going For Growth* and we believe our Suppliers' Forum is supportive of its aim of an improved supply chain, which supports ambitious growth targets in sales and employment.

Retail is Big Business in the EU –Introduction

The retail and wholesale services sector is one of the most important in the EU economy and should play an important part in stimulating growth and job creation under the Europe 2020 strategy.

It accounts for 11% of EU GDP and 29% of European SMEs and employs nearly 33 million people, offering job opportunities in particular for young people, women and people with lower skill levels or qualifications. However, a number of barriers remain that hinder the smooth functioning of cross-border sourcing, consumer access to cross-border retail services and market entry for retailers.

Across the EU, there are 355,000 independent retailers, generating 5 million EU jobs, and a combined retail and wholesale turnover of 960 billion euros.

In Northern Ireland, retail is the largest sector of business and makes up 1 in 10 of all local jobs. NIIRTA members employ over 30,000 and have a turnover to the local economy of over £2 billion.

As Commissioner for Internal Market and Services Michel Barnier said:

“Retailers play an important role in bringing the Single Market to EU consumers. However barriers to the creation of an efficient

and competitive single market in retail remain”

“We also want fair play. Unfair trading practices jeopardise the viability of businesses and make the retail supply chain inefficient. Consumers should have competitive prices but I also want suppliers to retail to receive fair prices for their products.”

NIIRTA welcomes the establishment of the European Retail Action Plan by the European Commission and urges our MEPs to support its five key priorities:

- Empowering consumers through better information
- Improving accessibility to retail services by promoting an exchange of good practices between Member States on commercial and spatial planning
- Fairer and more sustainable trading relationships along the food and non-food supply chain
- Ensuring a better link between retail and innovation
- Creating a better work environment, for example through better matching the needs of employers and staff skills.

It is our hope that our Five Point Plan will contribute to the strategic priorities of our three Northern Ireland MEPs.

The Five Points

(1) Waste and Packaging

NIIRTA has concerns with the impacts of the EU Waste Framework Directive, the landfill Directive and the Packaging Waste Directive on small and independent businesses in Northern Ireland, which are struggling to meet the targets outlined within these directives. MEPs representing Northern Ireland should ensure more is done to assess the need and feasibility of local traders' abilities to meet these targets.

NI MEPs should press for the removal of the requirements for SMEs to register as waste carriers if they only transfer a small amount of non hazardous waste, as this costs small businesses too much time and money.

(2) Think Small First

Thinking 'Small First' should be the essential bottom line for Northern Ireland's MEPs when they consider voting for new EU Directives or legislation and they should ensure better regulation principles are the common theme throughout all European Institutions.

The majority of NIIRTA members are small or micro businesses with fewer than 15 employees and they don't have the expertise to deal with ever changing regulations. When they should be running their shops, investing and creating employment, our members are needlessly distracted by the accumulation of red tape burden.

Progress has been made, particularly after the EU Small Business Act and the appointment by the European Commission of an SME Envoy, Daniel Calleja Crespo, as the contact point for small businesses and SME stakeholders at the European Commission giving them the chance to provide feedback on regulation, but also to get involved at an early stage in the conception of new policies and laws.

However we need to go further and recommend that the EU Commission reduces the number of Commissioners and creates a new **Commissioner for Small Business and Better Regulation**, who would also hold a position as Senior Vice President within the Commission, capable of strong resolute action for the EU's 23 million SMEs and their 75 million staff.

(3) Making Northern Ireland Town Centres a EU Priority -URBACT III Northern Ireland Application

Northern Ireland has not just the highest shop vacancy rate of the UK, but twice the UK national average. NIIRTA has published its Programme for Local Government, *Local First*, setting out eighty priorities for the new eleven councils to address this vital issue, but believes the EU also needs to act.

NIIRTA wants the European Commission to establish an EU NI Town Centre Taskforce to examine ways of harnessing new funding for local Town Centre Regeneration and identify good policy practise in other EU town and city centres which have successfully addressed dereliction and returned to vibrancy.

One possible funding stream is URBACT III, a European Territorial Cooperation programme jointly financed by the European Union (through the European Regional Development Fund) and Member States which will be delivered across the 2014-2020 programming period.

It is proposed that URBACT III will act as a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. It will enable European cities to work together to develop solutions to urban challenges and share good practices, lessons and solutions with all stakeholders involved in urban policy throughout Europe. The programme will cover all of the 28 Member States of the European Union as well as the two partner countries of Norway and Switzerland.

It is therefore proposed that URBACT III will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and good practice between cities and other levels of government in order to promote integrated sustainable development and improve the effectiveness of regional and cohesion policy.

In doing this, URBACT III will contribute to the Europe 2020 goals by providing a mechanism for stakeholders involved in developing and implementing urban policy to develop their knowledge and skills. The new knowledge and skills acquired from participation in the URBACT III programme will contribute to stronger and more vibrant European cities and help tackle a range of emerging urban issues linked to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (the three Europe 2020 priorities).

Belfast City Council has already been successful in gaining funding from URBACT II for the Open Cities Action Plan, which concluded in 2011.

NIIRTA wants our three MEPs to make a priority of working with our new Eleven Councils in preparing an application for URBACT III to support our local cities and towns in Northern Ireland.

(4) Peace IV Funding

Future European funding through the Peace Programmes **should have a greater economic focus – with the aim of ensuring participants are equipped with the skills and abilities to participate in the modern workforce.** Retail offers huge opportunities for people – both as employees and also potentially as entrepreneurs in their own right.

Many reports have concluded there is a significant educational and skills gap, especially amongst young people. Most often this occurs in those most directly affected by the Conflict, and therefore it is imperative that economically targeted funding streams focus on these areas. Such direction of funding would also encourage greater engagement between communities and businesses for mutual long-term benefit.

(5) Horizon 2020

It is widely accepted that Northern Ireland has punched below its weight in accessing the large scales funding programmes such as FP7. With this in mind it is vital that the capacity is in place to do better with its newest programme, Horizon 2020.

NIIRTA is encouraged by the positive noises to date from our elected representatives and the appointment of a series of key contact points, based in Invest NI, to improve business and research engagement.

The independent retail sector, with its strengths in entrepreneurship and creativity is well placed to ensure it is associated with the very many H2020 bids that will emanate from Northern Ireland, or indeed on an island wide basis.

NIIRTA wants to see the creation of a “one-stop-shop” for information specifically aimed at small retail firms where relevant information on innovation initiatives can be found and shared. This could be a collaborative platform based on engagement from all visitors.

Our MEPs should ensure that the simplifying process already developed for the Horizon 2020 programme (including attention to funding rates and shorter timescales for projects) is working to the benefit of the retail sector.

