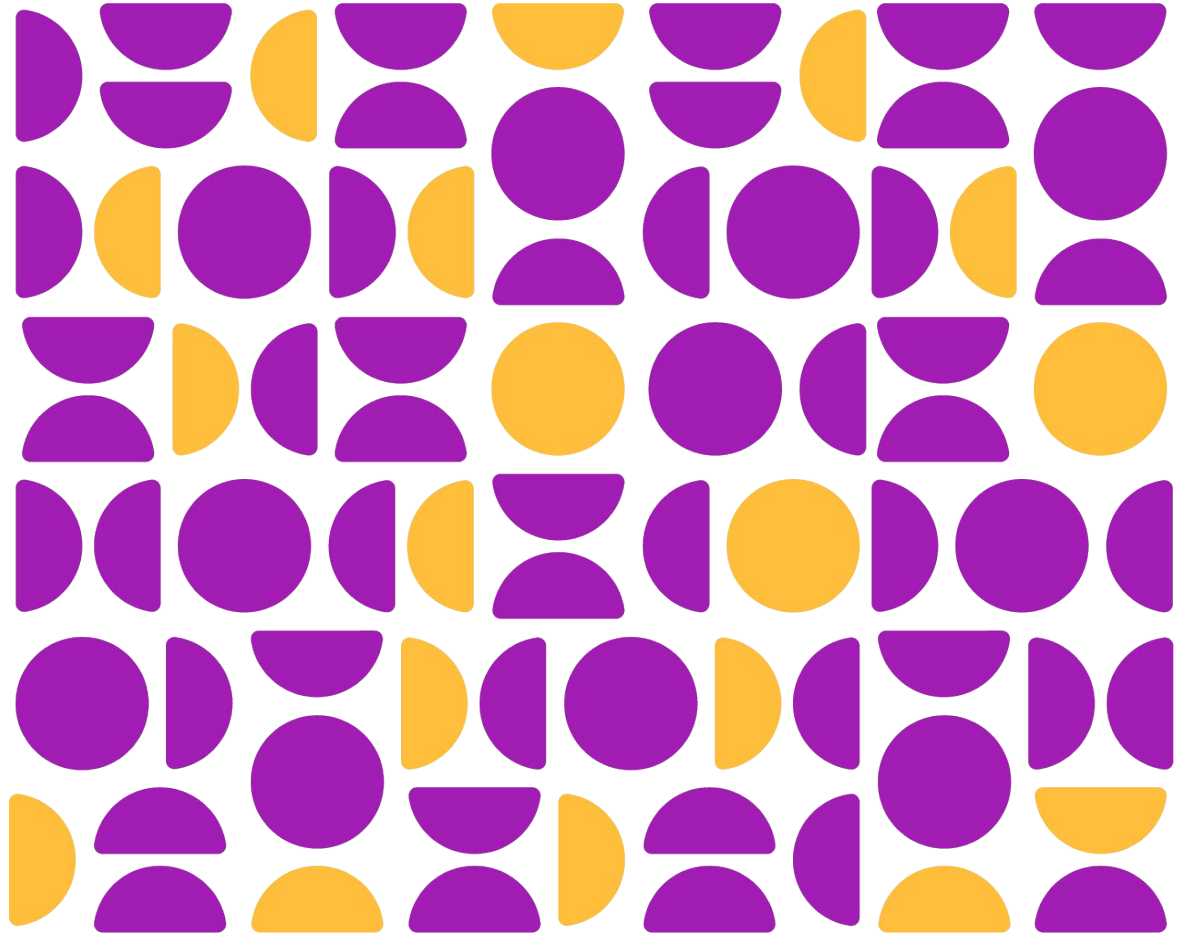


Cascale Brand & Retail Forum Brussels

December
4-5, 2024

Executive
Summary



Key Takeaways

With shifting regulations and evolving consumer expectations, collaboration among brands, retailers, manufacturers, supply chain partners, stakeholders and policymakers has never been more critical. The Brand & Retail Forum: Brussels played a significant role in bridging this gap. Here are some of the day's key takeaways.

- Alignment across the supply chain is key to presenting a unified industry voice to effectively address regulatory challenges. At the EU level, the Policy Hub remains a crucial platform for industry stakeholders to collaborate and influence policy decisions.
- A harmonized regulatory framework is crucial to ensure a level playing field for all industry players.
- Knowledge and data are power. Supply chain transparency and understanding product composition are crucial for compliance and sustainability.
- The Higg Index tools can support companies in meeting regulatory requirements and will keep evolving to support members in their compliance journeys. However, there isn't such a thing as a tick-box approach. Brands and manufacturers must actively work to ensure compliance.
- The voice of manufacturers is vital in legislative discussions to ensure their perspectives are considered.
- While there remains a significant gap in awareness about regulatory developments and their implications, the Brand & Retail Forum and side events provided initial opportunities for manufacturers to participate in discussions and make their voices heard.

Welcome to Brussels

Gabriele Ballero, Manager, Public Affairs, Cascale

Emcee Gabriele Ballero kicked off the Brand & Retail Forum: Brussels by welcoming attendees to Belgium and by emphasizing the commitment to equipping Cascale members and users of Cascale's Higg Index tools with the resources needed to navigate evolving EU legislation.

He introduced the day's theme, "Policy Dialogue in Action: Finding Common Ground for a Sustainable Consumer Goods Industry", and highlighted the importance of collaboration between industry leaders and policymakers.

Ballero also provided an overview of the day's logistics, including interactive tools like Slido for audience engagement. Finally, he extended a warm welcome to Cascale's valued technology partner Worldly, the most comprehensive sustainability data insights platform and exclusive licensee of the Higg Index, and knowledge partner Policy Hub, whose support was integral to the Forum's success.



Opening Address

Andrew Martin, Executive Vice President, Cascale

Andrew Martin presented his opening address with a call to action, emphasizing the importance of connection, collaboration, and preparation as the consumer goods industry faces evolving regulations and shifting consumer expectations. "Today is all about connecting, learning, and equipping ourselves to tackle the challenges and opportunities shaping our industry", he said, highlighting the importance of Cascale's role in uniting stakeholders across the value chain.

Martin highlighted the importance of gathering in Brussels, and underscored the collective commitment to keeping sustainability at the forefront of the day's discussions. He acknowledged the frequent disconnect between regulation, regulators, and industry, stressing the need to bridge this gap to ensure evidence-based policy initiatives align with practical business realities.

Brand & Retail Forum





“As industry leaders, we have the unique opportunity to contribute to evidence-based policy initiatives that not only drive sustainable practices but also create a future where businesses give back more than they take to people and planet. In fact, it’s a responsibility”, Martin said, urging participants to engage proactively.

He then talked about the Forum’s theme and sessions, addressing the uncertainty surrounding policy and regulation while encouraging attendees to download Cascale’s 2024 [Policy Priorities](#) paper. With the day’s agenda designed to foster dialogue and actionable insights, Martin called on participants to seize the moment and help shape the future of the consumer goods industry.

Opening Keynote

Dr. Amaryllis Verhoeven, Acting Director, European Commission (DG GROW)

Dr. Amaryllis Verhoeven welcomed the opportunity to engage with the industry on a recurring basis, emphasizing the need for “sustainable competitiveness” as a cornerstone of the EU’s future, as highlighted by President Ursula von der Leyen. She expressed the Commission’s commitment to working with industry to align sustainability with competitiveness, praising Cascale’s Higg Index and Decarbonization Program as examples of industry leadership.

Acknowledging the textiles sector’s critical role within the EU—not only as an essential industry but as home to major global brands—Dr. Verhoeven addressed the sector’s challenges, including its energy-intensive processes, environmental impact, and fast fashion dynamics. She noted the need to bridge the gap between policymakers and industry, stating, “We are here to help you, but we need to hear from you how to best do so”.





Dr. Verhoeven highlighted the EU's Transition Pathway for Textiles, designed to identify priorities, share best practices, and co-create solutions. She also shared updates on regulatory developments, including the Digital Product Passport (DPP), expected by 2027, and upcoming e-commerce guidance to combat non-compliant online sales.

Closing with key initiatives such as the Clean Industrial Deal and partnerships under Horizon Europe, she underscored the EU's commitment to supporting innovation, digitalization, and access to finance for the sector's sustainable transition.

Panel: EU Policy State-of-Play for the Textiles and Apparel Sector

Elisabeth von Reitzenstein (Moderator), Senior Director, Public Affairs, Cascale; António de Sousa Maia, Legal & Policy Officer, DG GROW; Isabelle Maurizi, Director General, European Branded Clothing Association (EBCA); Marina Prados Espínola, Director of Public Affairs, Policy Hub





Moderated by Cascale's Elisabeth von Reitzenstein, the panel explored the European Commission's evolving policy priorities as the new Commission takes office, addressing the challenges and opportunities for the textiles and apparel sector.

The EU's three-pillar legislative approach—encompassing global sustainability (CS3D, CSRD, forced labor), consumer empowerment (right to repair, green claims), and product legislation (ecodesign, waste, labeling)—was outlined by de Sousa Maia. He emphasized the need for harmonized frameworks to create a level playing field and highlighted initiatives aimed at enhancing competitiveness, streamlining reporting, and ensuring legislation remains adaptable and future-proof through collaboration with industry.

Maurizi stressed the need for brand alignment to present a unified voice to policymakers and called for the EU to build on international standards like OECD guidelines. She also highlighted the importance of ensuring compliance through robust customs enforcement and fair implementation timelines for global partners.

Espínola emphasized the interconnected nature of priorities such as ESPR, Green Claims, and transparency, warning against siloed approaches. She highlighted the importance of data-driven decision-making and collaboration across brands, manufacturers, and recyclers, noting that the complexity of the global textile value chain demands inclusive, holistic solutions to achieve both sustainability and competitiveness.

In closing, de Sousa Maia called for “green competitiveness,” Maurizi for impactful policies that avoid fragmentation, and Espínola for ambitious yet implementable legislation to guide the next five years.



Video Message from MEP Lara Wolters

*Lara Wolters, Member of the European Parliament,
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and
Democrats in the European Parliament*

In her video message, MEP Lara Wolters highlighted the importance of recent legislative efforts aimed at fostering sustainability and accountability in the textile and apparel sector. She emphasized the role of initiatives like the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D) and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) in advancing transparency and harmonization across the industry.

Wolters stressed the need for collaboration between policymakers and industry stakeholders to ensure regulations are both practical and impactful. She acknowledged the challenges these directives pose but framed them as opportunities for businesses to lead in sustainability and innovation.



Calling on companies to engage with policymakers and align their practices with evolving regulations, Wolters reiterated that legislative efforts are designed not only to address systemic challenges but also to create a fair and competitive playing field. Her closing message encouraged the industry to embrace these changes as a pathway to a more sustainable and equitable future.

Panel: Advancing Sustainable and Fair Supply Chains – The Role of CS3D and the Higg Index

Lisa Süß (Moderator), Head of Industry Alignment, Fair Wear Foundation; Dan Dionisie, Head of Unit, Company Law, European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers; Jeremy Lardeau, Senior Vice President, Higg Index, Cascale; Greta Koch, Parliamentary Assistant to Axel Voss MEP, European Parliament; Tom Mason, Senior Manager, Public Affairs & Stakeholder Engagement, SLCP





Fair Wear Foundation's Lisa Süss began by introducing the session and its focus on the implementation and implications of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D), emphasizing its role in advancing sustainability and competitiveness in the textile and apparel sector.

Dionisie presented the timeline for CS3D, with full adoption expected by July 2029, and ongoing consultations to develop EU and national-level guidelines. While emphasizing that CS3D is not a reporting directive, he highlighted accompanying measures to simplify reporting. The envisioned Omnibus Regulation is intended to further harmonize frameworks. He noted that CS3D reduces unnecessary burdens for industry by building on international standards, creating a level playing field, and supporting partners in the supply chain.

Lardeau discussed Cascale's commitment to adapting the Higg Index to support CS3D and CSRD implementation. He stressed the importance of a risk-based approach to due diligence and highlighted partnerships with Fair Wear and SLCP as critical for supporting manufacturers and ensuring meaningful impact.

Koch welcomed the Omnibus initiative as an opportunity to reduce bureaucratic burdens and stressed the importance of maintaining the directive's accountability principles. She emphasized that "due diligence and competitiveness should go together," advocating for sustainability as a driver of long-term competitiveness.

Mason highlighted the growing need for better supply chain data and collaboration, pointing to SLCP's alignment with international standards to collect and share data through Cascale's tools. He emphasized the importance of holistic approaches to streamline efforts and drive impact.



Panel: Navigating the Future of Sustainable Products – ESPR & the Green Claims Directive

Marina Prados Espínola (Moderator), Director of Public Affairs, Policy Hub; Carsten Wenten, Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Environment; Katarzyna Sulisz, Senior Policy Officer, Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry (FESI); Romane Malysza, Public Affairs Strategist, Textile Exchange; Quinten Geleijnse, Manager, Higg Product Tools – LCA, Cascale





This panel delved into the complexities of the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), Green Claims Directive, and the critical role of data and certification in driving compliance and innovation.

The European Commission's Wenten explained the complementary nature of ESPR and Green Claims: ESPR mandates product requirements, while Green Claims governs voluntary communications. He emphasized the need for industry collaboration to address ESPR's technical requirements, with clarity on data formats expected in 2025. He also highlighted ongoing preparatory studies and stakeholder consultations as key steps toward implementation.

Next, Sulisz stressed the importance of scalability and trade-offs in ecodesign, noting that durability and recycled content must be balanced for specific product uses. She called for greater clarity on ESPR's data needs, particularly on product destruction, and verification standards for Green Claims.

Acknowledging challenges remain amid incomplete legislation, Malysza discussed the potential for certifications to align with EU rules. She emphasized the importance of including small players in the textile sector and integrating global standards to enhance compliance and innovation.

Finally, Geleijnse underscored the importance of detailed product data, particularly Bills of Materials (BOMs), for meeting ESPR and Green Claims requirements. He highlighted Cascale's efforts to improve traceability through a forthcoming handbook and PEF-aligned calculations.

The panel agreed that harmonized definitions, interoperable data systems, and robust collaboration will be essential for effective implementation of these regulations and their impact on sustainability.



Panel: Navigating the CSRD – Best Practices for Effective Sustainability Reporting

Adrián Branco (Moderator), Senior Manager, Higg Index Brand & Retail, Cascale; Mary Kate Frisby, Legal Analyst on Corporate Sustainability Reporting and Sustainable Finance, European Commission (DG FISMA); Magnus Dorsch, Head of Corporate Sustainability, About You; Adele Stafford, Executive Vice President of Growth Initiatives, Worldly; Bernhard Frey, Sustainability Reporting Senior Technical Manager, EFRAG





Cascale's Adrian Branco began by introducing the panelists before introducing the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), highlighting its implications for businesses, the need for global collaboration, and its potential to drive sustainability practices.

Frisby outlined the CSRD timeline, noting that the first reports will be available in 2024. She emphasized the need for predictability, guidance, and simplification to ease implementation. Collaboration with EFRAG and Member States is ongoing to provide guidance documents and reduce burdens for SMEs. She highlighted CSRD's global impact, particularly in value chains, while recognizing the challenges of collecting data from non-EU partners.

From a brand perspective, Dorsch shared About You's experience with CSRD compliance, emphasizing the importance of early double materiality assessments to prioritize actions and identify gaps. He noted that CSRD requires internal disruption but also drives innovation, including the potential use of AI for reporting solutions.

Worldly's Stafford then explained how the Higg Index supports CSRD compliance by providing aligned primary data. She emphasized that Cascale's tools, such as the Higg BRM, help brands identify material impacts and streamline sustainability reporting, while Worldly is working on a new dashboard launching May 1.

Addressing sector-specific nuances in regulating high-impact industries, Frey described EFRAG's efforts to align ESRS with textiles. He stressed that the ESRS are not a box-ticking exercise, but a tool to provide decision-useful information to stakeholders and that can also drive sustainability management, with double materiality at its core.

The panel concluded that collaboration, data alignment, and clear guidance are essential to realizing CSRD's potential to foster global sustainability leadership.



Panel: Waste and EPR: What's on the Horizon?

Julia Riss (Moderator), Director, Government and Public Affairs, Nike; Jeannette Baljeu, MEP, VVD delegatie in het Europees Parlement/Renew Europe; Dr. Sarah Gray, Lead Research Analyst – Textiles, WRAP; Stephanie Schretlen, Head of EU Public Affairs, H&M Group





Nike's Julia Riss introduced the topic and the objective of this session: to examine the potential of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies to drive circularity in the textile industry, focusing on challenges, opportunities, and implementation pathways.

Baljeu, an MEP who acknowledged she was new to EPR in textiles, shared insights on the legislative process, noting the importance of harmonized definitions across regulations. While the European Parliament has a position on EPR, ongoing discussions on technical issues mean the final text may not be completed until 2025. She emphasized the need for industry engagement throughout the value chain and encouraged active participation in the EU platform on EPR.

Highlighting EPR's established success in industries like batteries, Gray stressed its potential for textiles. She advocated for exploring universal EPR schemes that consider end markets and urged companies to identify desired outcomes and improvements. Collaboration between industry and regulators will be critical for success.

Schretlen shared H&M's proactive approach to EPR, working with Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs) in France and the Netherlands and preparing for Spain. She emphasized the importance of harmonizing EPR requirements across the EU to avoid inefficiencies. Additionally, she highlighted the need to enhance textile-to-textile recycling and develop robust markets for secondary raw materials.

The panel agreed that EPR policies offer significant opportunities to advance circularity in textiles but require collaboration, early alignment, proactivity, and scalability to achieve meaningful impact across the value chain.



Breakout Sessions: Partnerships in Progress

Carolina van Loenen (Moderator), Director of Stakeholder Engagement, Cascale; Lisa Süß, Head of Industry Alignment, Fair Wear Foundation; Hannah Lennett, Stakeholder Engagement Director, Open Supply Hub

These interactive sessions, moderated by Cascale's Carolina van Loenen, focused on the transformative potential of partnerships between Cascale, Open Supply Hub (OS Hub), and Fair Wear Foundation to advance supply chain transparency and human rights due diligence (HRDD). Van Loenen introduced the strategic collaboration, emphasizing its alignment with Fair Wear's HRDD Academy and OS Hub's open data platform to support brands in navigating complex legislative requirements, such as the CSDDD.





Fair Wear's Süss highlighted the Academy's practical guidance on equitable sourcing relationships, stakeholder engagement, and access to remedy. With its extensive network and systematic data collection, Fair Wear equips brands to implement impactful HRDD and prepare for future legislative demands.

Then OS Hub's Lennett demonstrated the importance of open data and transparency in fostering accountability across supply chains. By integrating data from OS Hub with Cascale's Higg Index, the partnership supports scalable due diligence efforts and advances innovation.

The session featured dynamic group discussions and audience engagement activities, encouraging attendees to reflect on their own challenges and share ideas for implementing HRDD practices. Table work and live polling enabled participants to explore practical applications of the tools and frameworks presented.

Concluding with a call to action, the session inspired attendees to leverage partnerships, sign up for Fair Wear's HRDD Academy, and integrate OS Hub data into their supply chain strategies to drive transparency, sustainability, and collaboration.



Panel: Global Perspective – Examining Key Policy Developments Worldwide

Andrew Martin (Moderator), EVP, Cascale; Dorothy Lovell, Garment and Footwear Lead, OECD Centre for Responsible Business Conduct; Krishna Manda, Vice President of Corporate Sustainability, Lenzing Aktiengesellschaft; Chelsea Murtha, Senior Director, Sustainability, AAFA





Martin began the session by setting the scene for an exploration into global policy developments shaping sustainability and due diligence, highlighting challenges, opportunities, and the need for harmonization across markets.

Lovell provided an overview of the OECD's guidelines, emphasizing their role as a foundation for fostering responsible business conduct. She noted that while legislation like CS3D, Germany's Supply Chain Act, and France's Duty of Vigilance build on these standards, they often vary in scope and application. She underscored that responsible due diligence is about continuous improvement rather than perfection and called for early engagement with suppliers to ensure successful implementation.

Manda emphasized the importance of understanding on-the-ground realities to make supply chain regulations effective. He pointed to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as a proven framework for incentivizing global action and called for financial support across the value chain, highlighting Lenzing's €300 million emissions reduction plan as an example of the need for investment. He urged Cascale to invite more manufacturers to engage EU regulators directly.

Murtha discussed the complexities of navigating North American legislation, which often lacks harmonization with EU standards. She noted the challenges of engaging US regulators on global issues like due diligence and the proliferation of state-level laws that complicate compliance.

Final remarks encouraged brands to avoid overcompliance, focus on tailored due diligence practices, and engage collectively with policymakers to drive harmonized legislation globally.



Fireside Chat: Bridging Sectors – Stewarding Sustainability Performance Tools in a Changing Regulatory Landscape

*Jeremy Lardeau (Moderator), Senior Vice President,
Higg Index, Cascalé; Amanda Soler Guzmán, Advocacy
& Engagement Advisor, amfori*





This fireside chat explored how organizations like Cascale and amfori, both stewards of sustainability management tools, are responding to the influx of global sustainability regulations. Moderated by Jeremy Lardeau, the discussion addressed the critical role of tools and advocacy in supporting compliance and driving meaningful change across industries.

Amfori's Soler Guzmán highlighted the “legislative hurricane” sparked by the EU Green Deal, noting that much of the new regulation builds on existing international standards, such as those from the OECD. She emphasized that while these standards are voluntary, the experience they provide can ease compliance and trigger internal company changes beyond regulatory requirements.

Lardeau discussed Cascale's efforts to ensure that sustainability legislation is practical, effective, and harmonized, in line with Cascale's mission to reduce audit duplication across the supply chain. He stressed the importance of engaging manufacturers, who are often unaware of how regulations impact them directly, and explained how Cascale is evolving its Higg Index tools to better support compliance.

Both speakers agreed on the importance of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and leveraging core principles across sectors to ensure new regulations strengthen responsible business practices. Soler Guzmán concluded by emphasizing that the journey doesn't end at compliance—legislation should inspire broader transformation within organizations.

Closing Fireside Chat: Embracing Industry Change and Legislative Readiness

*Elisabeth von Reitzenstein (Moderator), Senior Director,
Public Affairs, Cascale; Pascal Brun, Vice President of
Sustainability and D&I, Zalando SE*





This final fireside chat reflected on the day's key takeaways. The discussion emphasized the opportunities and challenges posed by the wave of regulatory changes shaping the future of the consumer goods industry. Moderated by Elisabeth von Reitzenstein, the discussion focused on collaboration, transparency, and proactive engagement as key drivers of success.

Von Reitzenstein highlighted the transformative potential of current policies, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between regulators and industry to ensure meaningful and sustainable change. She underscored the need for knowledge and data to drive compliance, innovation, and transparency, framing Cascale's public affairs strategy around education, alignment, and advocacy.

Echoing the need for industry-wide collaboration, Brun urged stakeholders not to view legislation in silos but as interconnected frameworks that create opportunities for progress. Drawing on Zalando's experience with CSRD, he stressed the importance of preparation and proactivity. He pointed to Zalando's unique position as a platform connecting brands, consumers, and regulators, enabling compliance and fostering trust.

Both speakers encouraged the audience to embrace legislation as a pathway to a level playing field, greater transparency, and measurable progress. Concluding with a call to action, Brun stated, "We've been fighting for more legislation—now let's embrace what is coming and get it right". In a closing remark, von Reitzenstein urged attendees to "make it count, make an impact".

Closing Remarks & Farewell

Gabriele Ballero, Manager, Public Affairs, Cascale

In closing the Forum, Ballero thanked everyone for attending and reiterated the importance of collaborating and openly embracing regulation. He then provided details for Cascale's "EU Immersive Experience" the following day, and teed-up attendees for a cocktail reception, co-hosted by Worldly.



Networking Moments





Networking Moments

Art Tour



EU Immersive Experience

On December 5, attendees from the Brand & Retail Forum: Brussels participated in the "Immersive EU Experience", co-hosted by Cascale and Policy Hub–Circularity for Apparel and Footwear, with support from European Parliament policymakers. This exclusive event provided a unique opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the EU's legislative processes and sustainability-focused policymaking, while fostering direct engagement with policymakers.



The day began with a guided tour of the European Parliament, led by a parliamentary representative, offering a comprehensive overview of the EU's legislative framework. Participants explored the structure of EU departments, the legislative process, and the historical foundations of the European Union. A highlight of the tour included a visit to the hemicycle, where attendees learned about the collaborative voting system among member states.

Following the tour, a private meet-and-greet session featured MEP Thomas Bajada, Antoine Demarche, Director of Public Affairs at Policy Hub, and Andrew Martin, Cascale's Executive Vice President. Joining the discussion were Katerina Oosterijk, Assistant to MEP Danuše Nerudová, and Sofie Grande y Rodriguez, Assistant to MEP Jeanette Baljeu (Renew, NL). Andrew Martin opened with a message of gratitude, setting a collaborative tone and encouraging active dialogue.

MEP Thomas Bajada provided an overview of key legislative priorities, focusing on sustainability in the consumer goods sector, climate action, and supply chain accountability. The session concluded with an engaging Q&A, where attendees discussed challenges and opportunities directly with policymakers.

This immersive experience deepened attendees' understanding of the EU's policy making environment and reaffirmed Cascale's role as a leader in fostering meaningful dialogue between industry and policymakers.



Thanks to Our Partners

worldly[™]

**POLICY
HUB**



Thank You!



About the Brand & Retail Forum

The [Cascale Brand & Retail Forum: Brussels](#) was a pivotal event uniting EU policymakers and industry leaders from across the value chain to explore actionable strategies for a sustainable transition in the consumer goods industry. Scheduled for December 4–5, 2024, at the Sofitel Brussels Europe Hotel, the Forum offered attendees a unique opportunity to engage in policy-focused discussions, gain insights into the latest EU legislation impacting textiles and apparel, and collaborate on solutions that drive sustainability and equity across the industry. An exclusive Immersive EU Experience at the European Parliament on December 5 provided deeper legislative insights and networking opportunities with policy experts and industry leaders.

About Cascale

[Cascale](#) is the global nonprofit alliance empowering collaboration to drive equitable and restorative business practices in the consumer goods industry. Formerly known as the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, Cascale owns and develops the Higg Index, which is exclusively available on Worldly, the most comprehensive sustainability data and insights platform. Cascale unites over 300 retailers, brands, manufacturers, governments, academics, and NGO/nonprofit affiliates around the globe through one singular vision: To catalyze impact at scale and give back more than we take to the planet and its people.

Learn More About Our Upcoming Events or
Enquire About Sponsorship Opportunities

www.cascale.org



Contact the Events Team