



# Retailers demand action over theft and anti-social behaviour

## Rash of shoplifting sees retailers call for new law to bar repeat offenders

**AZMIA RIAZ**

Irish retailers are speaking up about how a surge in theft and anti-social behaviour has "crippled" their sector.

Earlier this month the Central Statistics Office (CSO) reported that theft in shops surged by 3,034 cases in the third quarter of last year – accounting for more than half of the overall increase in theft-related crimes.

Director of Retail Ireland, Arnold Dillon, said retailers are calling for a new retail crime strategy to tackle this.

"We're engaged with the government to make sure it's a political priority – a crime strategy would see more tech being used in stores, greater co-operation with gardaí and new measures to ensure the safety and security of staff," he said.

"We have insisted that it should bring an exclusion order into the law – so those found convicted of these offences can be banned from stores when they cause problems repeatedly."

A study by Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) last year found that crime in retail can cost businesses over €1.62bn a year.

"Right now, retailers have to take things into their own hands to try and prevent theft – you might have seen shops move their stock behind padlocks and barriers recently," said Mr Dillon.

"A big challenge facing the sector is that the fear of crime is forcing some retailers to change how they present stock in their stores. It's undermining their businesses, and the shopper's experience as well."

Excel Recruitment, a recruitment firm which works with Irish retailers, said crime has "crippled" small businesses.

"Retailers from across the country came together in response to what they classed as a state of emergency for their safety, their employees' safety, and the continuous attacks on their livelihoods," said Nikki Murran of Excel Recruitment.

"This forum provided a safe space for retailers to share their experiences. Many of the stories were harrowing, but one remains particularly striking – a female store owner who was physically trapped inside her shop, holding the door closed while hooded youths attempted to force their way in to attack her manager."

Jean McCabe, CEO of Retail Excellence, a non-profit company that supports and works with more than 2,000 Irish retailers said much crime was going unreported and unpunished.

"Ireland's crime situation has gotten

completely out of hand and is grossly under-reported, due to the fact that so many retailers are frustrated because there are no consequences for thefts we see in stores," she said.

"Even when people are arrested, they'd be out inside minutes – and they head back into the same shop an hour later. While the gardaí are doing their best, they are highly under-resourced and frustrated by the justice system."

The increase in crime has meant a concern for the safety of staff and customers who frequent these shops.

"The loss of stock is a major issue for retailers – but there's also the cost of increased insecurity among staff and the people who work in these shops," said Ms McCabe.

"It's a double loss for a lot of Irish business, especially at a time when the cost of doing business is so high – this just compounds an already terrible situation."

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