

TEXTE

Biggest fall in UK retail sales since 1995 despite online boom

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Impact of Covid lockdowns and shifting spending habits result in 0.3% drop from 2019 level



UK retail sales suffered the biggest decline in 25 years last year as the closure of non-essential shops during lockdowns more than outweighed the online spending boom fuelled by Covid-19.

5 The British Retail Consortium (BRC) said total sales fell by 0.3% last year from the level in 2019 – the worst performance since records began in 1995 – reflecting the impact of government lockdowns and shifting consumer spending trends.

However, the overall drop in spending masks an explosion in sales for some shops, and a dramatic collapse for others. Amid a decline in spending in pubs, restaurants and hotels during the crisis, sales of food bought from shops increased by 5.4% on the year. However, sales of all other products fell 5% from a year earlier.

10 While online sales were boosted during lockdown as consumers largely stayed away from the high street, sales of non-food items in physical shops collapsed by 24%.

The decline in sales volumes comes after the first annual fall since 1995 in 2019, when years of weak wage growth hurting households' finances and Brexit fears led to a 0.1% drop in retail sales compared with 2018 levels.

15 Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the BRC, said Christmas had offered little respite for retailers, as many shops were forced to shut during the peak trading period. Calling on the government to provide fresh financial support for the sector, she said: "With shops still closed for the foreseeable future, costing stores billions in lost sales, many retailers are struggling to survive."

20 Despite the sharp drop in non-food sales, the latest figures from the BRC showed that total retail sales rose by 1.8% in December compared with the same month a year ago. It said there was a rise in the purchase of food-based gifts at Christmas, as many shoppers bought what they could from shops that remained open. The volume of food and drink sales was the highest for festive spending on record.

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Nom de l'épreuve : Anglais	Code : NDRC/ANG/ORAL/OBL	Page 1 / 1