



Presented by WBII

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Politicised Sourcing, Fair
Trade, Competition, and
Anti-Discrimination in UK
Retail



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The growing trend of politicised sourcing and selective retail boycotts—particularly those targeting Israeli goods—poses a significant and multifaceted challenge to the United Kingdom’s legal, ethical, and regulatory frameworks. These practices, often driven by activist campaigns aligned with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, blur the line between ethical consumerism and discriminatory exclusion. While businesses may legitimately seek to align their operations with broadly accepted human rights or environmental standards, the selective and ideologically motivated boycott of a single nation raises serious concerns. Such actions risk distorting fair trade practices, undermining competitive neutrality in the marketplace, and breaching long-established protections against discrimination based on nationality or ethnicity. Moreover, by singling out the world’s only Jewish state for economic exclusion, these campaigns frequently manifest or enable antisemitic undercurrents, particularly when framed in inflammatory or exceptionalist terms. UK policymakers must now confront the question of whether the commercial space is being co-opted for political warfare—and whether existing legal safeguards are sufficient to prevent that co-option from eroding public trust, economic fairness, and the principles of non-discrimination that underpin British democratic values.

Key Concerns

- 1. **Discriminatory Practices in Retail**
 - Selective boycotts that target goods from Israel while ignoring comparable or worse abuses in other countries risk breaching the Equality Act 2010, especially where exclusion is based on national origin (Sections 13, 29) or fosters a hostile environment (Section 26).
 - Such practices echo anti-Zionist ideologies which, when institutionalised, have been recognised by government and Parliament as often antisemitic in effect.
- 2. **Anticompetitive Behaviour**
 - Politically motivated boycotts may violate the Competition Act 1998 where they result in collusive conduct, restrict consumer choice, or constitute abuse of market dominance.
 - Coordinated or parallel refusals to trade with Israel-related suppliers—often driven by external activist groups—risk functioning as de facto cartels.
- 3. **Undermining Ethical Trade**
 - The selective application of human rights standards (e.g., singling out Israel while ignoring China or Iran) undermines the consistency and credibility of ethical sourcing.
 - Boycotts that penalise entire national groups—such as Israeli farmers, businesses, or kosher product providers—contradict the inclusive aims of Fair Trade and may breach DEFRA/BEIS trade expectations.
- 4. **Antisemitism and the Normalisation of Hate**
 - Retail endorsements of anti-Zionist rhetoric (e.g., referencing “apartheid” or “racist endeavour” in relation to Israel) are deeply offensive to British Jews, the majority of whom identify with Zionism.
 - The IHRA definition of antisemitism, adopted by the UK Government, explicitly warns against holding Israel to double standards or denying Jewish self-determination.

Case Study: The Co-operative Group Boycott (2025)

In 2025, the Co-op announced a boycott of Israeli products following a BDS campaign. This action:

- Singled out Israel among 17 “countries of concern” with no clear or consistent criteria.
- Applied politically charged language in public messaging.
- Ignored commercial or quality-based justifications.
- Prompted concern among Jewish communities and legal analysts about discrimination and exclusion.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks at Stake

Law/AgencyRelevance

Equality Act 2010

Bars nationality-based discrimination and harassment (ss.13, 26, 29).

Competition Act 1998

Prohibits anti-competitive agreements, collusion, and market abuse.

CMA, DEFRA, BEIS

Can investigate sourcing distortions, inconsistent ESG claims, and supply chain discrimination.

ASA (CAP Code 4.1)

Prohibits offensive or misleading marketing based on nationality or religion.

Policy Recommendations

- 1. **Voluntary Code of Conduct**
- 2. **Develop a Retail Sourcing Ethics Code with non-discrimination clauses, global consistency standards, and transparency mechanisms.**
- 3. **Regulatory Clarification and Oversight**
- 4. **Encourage the CMA, ASA, DEFRA, and Groceries Code Adjudicator to publish guidance on political boycotts and their legal/market consequences.**
- 5. **Consumer Reporting Tools**
- 6. **Launch an official platform for public complaints about politically motivated and potentially discriminatory sourcing decisions.**
- 7. **Public Accountability Measures**
- 8. **Institute a public report or “Fair Trade Scorecard” naming retailers engaged in politicised or discriminatory sourcing practices.**
- 9. **Recognition of Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism**
- 10. **Encourage Parliament and regulators to apply the IHRA definition when evaluating anti-Israel campaigns and their social impacts.**

Conclusion

Retail-driven boycotts that target Israel on ideological grounds undermine fairness, distort markets, and may foster antisemitism. Parliament is urged to:

- Investigate these practices.
- Ensure regulatory bodies uphold the principles of non-discrimination, fair competition, and ethical consistency.
- Reinforce that foreign policy is a matter for government, not activist-influenced commercial policy.
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The UK must not allow its ethical commerce landscape to be distorted by political agendas or hostile narratives cloaked in rights-based language.