



Belgium & Luxembourg



Nederland

# The Benelux retail industries support the worldwide transition to the **GS1 next generation barcodes**

The purpose of this declaration is to announce the intention of the signatory partners to support the global transition to the GS1 new generation of barcodes.

## From linear barcodes to the next generation barcodes

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2024 marks the 50th anniversary of the first product barcode scanned in a grocery store. In the early 1970s, retailers and manufacturers worked together with GS1 (the global organization for standards) to adopt the barcode as the universal way to identify products.

The GS1 linear barcode is used today on millions of products worldwide and is great for enabling many processes like scanning at checkout, category management, fulfilment in distribution centres, and much more.

Placing the GS1 next generation barcodes on product packages worldwide will enable manufacturers and retailers to provide new powerful digital experiences, engaging consumers and shoppers as they interact with products, whether in store, at home or out in the world. It will also enable brands to comply with the tsunami of new legislation that is on the way.

## Why a new generation of barcode?

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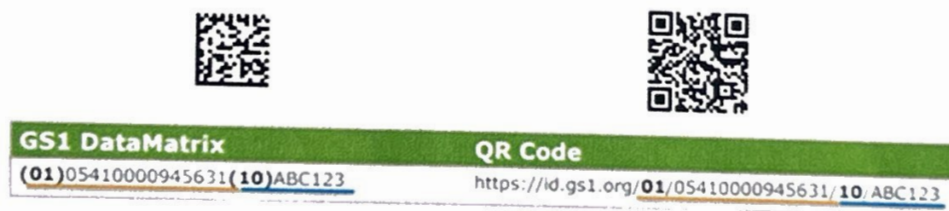
Today, more than ever, consumers and regulatory bodies are demanding more product information, such as usage instructions, safety, ingredients, nutrition, certifications, recycling, etc. and there is an ongoing need for enhanced product traceability and transparency through the supply chain to mitigate risks and improve customer service. However, the traditional barcode that has served us so well doesn't have the capacity to support these future needs.

To meet these new demands, the industry will be best served by transitioning to a GS1 new generation barcodes, as they can store extensive amounts of product information and are easily accessible via smartphones. This would open a range of new possibilities, providing all the information consumers need and desire, improving traceability and driving efficiencies through the supply chain, while still enabling scanning at check out.

## What is the next generation of barcode?

The GS1 next generation of barcode refers to 2D barcodes powered by the GS1 Digital Link standard. 2D barcodes are capable of carrying much more information than traditional linear barcodes, are smaller and more readable. The **GS1 DataMatrix** and the **QR code powered by GS1** are the most commonly used 2D barcodes. Both have their specificities and advantages, which is why we want to give brand owners the freedom to choose which best applies to their needs.

The Do It Yourself, Garden & Pet sector is positioning itself more in favor of the QR powered by GS1, offering a link to online data, meaning more opportunities in terms of consumer engagement (since a QR code can be scanned with a consumer smartphone). However, the GS1 DataMatrix could be more beneficial for products where the (smaller) size of the barcode and/or the encoded (offline) data is more important, such as (animal) pharmaceutical products or very small products. A GS1 DataMatrix cannot currently be scanned by a smartphone camera.



In both types of barcodes, you can encode the same information, but admittedly in a different way (a different "syntax"). In the example below, GTIN 05410000945631 and lot number ABC123 are encoded.

The GS1 Digital Link – the syntax used for the QR code in the above example – is a standardised syntax for a link to a website (URL) in which product information such as the GTIN, the lot number or, for example, the best-before date is included. Thanks to this standardised syntax, a scanner at the Point Of Sale can retrieve the product information for price look-up from the URL itself.

More information can be found on the GS1 websites:

- [GS1 Belgium & Luxembourg](#)
- [GS1 Netherlands](#)

## Ambition 2027 initiative

The companies of the GS1 Board have aligned on a goal that all retailers will have the ability to scan the next generation barcodes (with Digital Link) by the end of 2027 as a minimum standard, known as 'Ambition 2027' for 2D barcodes. The ambition of this initiative is that, by the end of 2027, the next generation barcodes (with Digital Link) should be widely adopted: used by manufacturers on their product packaging and retailers around the world having the ability to scan these barcodes at Point of Sale (POS).

For 'Ambition 2027' to succeed, industry must once again come together to adopt a unified approach, requiring changes from both retailers and manufacturers. We expect that this transition would happen gradually and believe that those that lead this transformation will be best positioned to unlock valuable new capabilities and provide more benefits to their customers, shoppers, and consumers.



## Retailer and manufacturer changes needed

This major industry shift has already begun, with pilots in all over the world. This is a strong foundation, and a collective effort is now needed from the entire industry to make ambition 2027 happen:

- **Retailers** would need to ensure their POS systems are equipped with scanners capable of reading both traditional (one-dimensional/1D) barcodes and two-dimensional/2D barcodes (QR codes powered by GS1 and GS1 DataMatrix)
- **Manufacturers** even if there is no obligation to switch to the next generation of barcode, we would recommend the manufacturers to consider switching to next generation of barcodes because it will offer them more added value.

## Transition phase until ambition 2027

By the end of 2027, GS1's ambition is for all retailers worldwide to be able to scan the next generation of barcodes at checkouts.

There is a transition period to help brand owners and retailers slowly but surely adapt to the next generation of barcodes. During this transition period, brand owners can - *but are not obliged to* - add the next generation of barcode *alongside* their linear barcode. This allows suppliers and retailers to already enjoy the benefits of the next generation of barcodes without posing scanning difficulties at the retailer's checkouts.



### Note:

This transition period is temporary and by the end of 2027, it is the ambition to have **only one barcode** on the label. It is important to notice that this next generation of barcode is not an obligation for suppliers so the traditional linear barcode can and certainly will continue to be used in some cases.

## Additional sectoral agreements

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The following additional sectoral agreements have been made in the Benelux retail sector:

- Retailers will need to modify their scanning hardware and software to be able to scan and interpret the next generation of barcodes (both the QR code with GS1 Digital Link, and the GS1 DataMatrix) from 31 December 2027 onwards.
- Retailers will at least need to be able to process the GTIN/EAN from the next generation of barcode from 31 December 2027 onwards.
- Dynamic information such as batch/lot number, expiry date, serial number, etc. is not mandatory to be encoded. However, suppliers are free to integrate it for the retailers that are able to treat it (upon mutual agreement).
- Suppliers in the Benelux retail sector commit to integrating the next generation of barcode on their packaging according to their capacity and interest and according to the transition period described above. Suppliers are under no obligation to do so, but the sector encourages them to do so to support the general effort and to explore more added value.
- If a supplier chooses to implement a next generation barcode, GS1 recommends implementing the QR code with GS1 Digital Link. For (animal) pharmaceuticals or smaller products, the GS1 DataMatrix might be the preferred option over the QR code since these products (sometimes) already have a GS1 DataMatrix now. Furthermore, the sector agreements described above apply.

## Mutual commitments

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### **GS1 Belgium & Luxembourg and GS1 Netherlands declare that they will:**

support activities related to the implementation of next generation barcodes, including:

- Supporting pilots
- Providing training
- Conducting 2D barcode quality checks
- Conducting communication and promotional activities

### **The retailers declare that they will:**

- Be able to scan and process GS1 2D barcodes (both QR with GS1 Digital Link and the GS1 DataMatrix) at least the GTIN/EAN at points of sale by December 31, 2027.
- Develop an implementation plan as soon as possible after signing the letter of intent.
- Cooperate in conducting pilots.
- Participate in communication and promotional activities.

### **The suppliers declare that they will:**

- Internally promote and explore the use of next generation barcodes.
- Ensure that those new consumer units launched on the market from December 31, 2027, that are equipped with a QR code with GS1 Digital Link, must contain at least the GTIN/EAN.
- Between now and end of 2027, the suppliers that wish to migrate to next generation barcodes, need to respect and execute the transition phase (= the next generation barcode alongside the classic EAN-barcode). As from end of 2027, the supplier aims to have only one remaining (next generation) barcode on the label.
- Cooperate in conducting pilots.
- Participate in communication and promotional activities.



## Together, let's start the transition to the next generation barcodes now!

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Together, let's start the transition to the next generation barcodes now! This significant industry shift has already begun with pilots in 48 countries across all regions. A collective effort from the entire industry is now needed to achieve ambition 2027.

By signing this declaration, retailers, suppliers, GS1 Belgium & Luxembourg and GS1 Netherlands commit to making maximum efforts to achieve the sector-wide implementation of GS1 new generation barcodes with Digital Link in the retail sector in the Benelux.

**Company**

Eltra

**Name**

Kevin Kickens

**Position**

Director Category Management

**Date**

17/03/25

**Signature**



**Company**

HEMA BENELUX. VZW.

**Name**

P. DE WINTER.

**Position**

CEO BENELUX.

**Date**

11/03/2025

**Signature**



Company

Trendig B.V.

Name

Jan Willem Valk

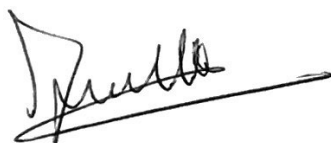
Position

Manager Supply Chain

Date

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Signature



Company

PPG

Name

Marco Zwart

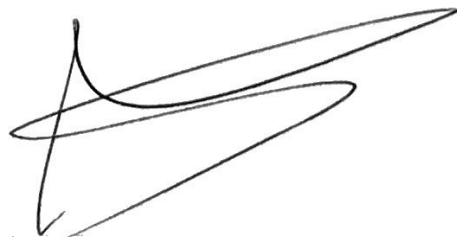
Position

Business unit director Retail BNL &  
Trade BE

Date

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Company

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DAVID HANSEN.

Position

DATA MGT Director -  
Haxpeda. m

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