

# RLC Global Forum Launches First Industry-Led NextGen Retail Initiative in Saudi Arabia

RLC Global Forum has announced the launch of the NextGen Retail Challenge, the first industry-led national initiative of its kind aimed at strengthening Saudi Arabia's retail sector as a key driver of economic growth.

The initiative seeks to address the growing gap between the rapid expansion of the retail sector and the availability of skilled talent by creating a structured national platform to develop the future workforce and leadership pipeline for the industry.

The NextGen Retail Challenge has been developed and is governed by RLC Global Forum in partnership with the Saudi Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority (Monsha'at) and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU). It aligns with Saudi Vision 2030 goals, particularly in workforce development, economic diversification, and private-sector growth.

Speaking on the launch, Panos Linardos, Chairman of RLC Global Forum, said retail is one of Saudi Arabia's most critical economic engines but requires deliberate, industry-led efforts to prepare future leaders.

"The NextGen Retail Challenge reflects a shared commitment by the industry to treat retail as a national economic system and ensure future leaders are prepared for its scale, complexity, and strategic importance," he said.

Dr. Maram Sabri, Director of the Innovation and

Entrepreneurship Center at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, highlighted the role of academic institutions in driving retail transformation.

“By positioning academic talent at the center of innovation and entrepreneurship, we aim to develop future-ready leaders who can translate knowledge into practical solutions and advance national priorities,” she said.

The initiative will include several key milestones. Participant registration will take place from 15 to 31 December 2025, followed by the NextGen Retail Hackathon from 18 to 22 January 2026. The program will culminate in a final competition and showcase during the RLC Global Forum, scheduled for 3–4 February 2026 at Fairmont Riyadh.

The NextGen Retail Challenge forms part of RLC Global Forum’s broader efforts to promote talent engagement, structured industry dialogue, and long-term ecosystem development within Saudi Arabia’s retail sector.

The RLC Global Forum is an international platform bringing together leading retail executives, innovators, and policymakers to address the long-term forces shaping the global retail industry. Building on the Retail Leaders Circle’s twelve-year legacy, the Forum organizes high-level events worldwide, including the Annual Retail Meeting in Riyadh, the CEO Summit in New York, and the RLC Fashion Summit in Milan.