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France's restaurants lost 12.2 points of meal-voucher spending in three years

A restaurant trade group says the shift toward supermarkets now costs the sector €1.22 billion a year before lawmakers weigh reforms

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France’s restaurant industry has lost a large share of spending made with meal vouchers in the past three years, according to figures cited by the Groupement des Hôtelleries et Restaurations de France, or GHR, as the country debates a bill to overhaul the system.

In a statement published on Thursday, October 29 by TendanceHotellerie, the trade group said the share of meal-voucher spending going to restaurants fell to 34.3% in the first quarter of 2026 from 46.5% in the fourth quarter of 2022. Over the same period, the share going to supermarkets and hypermarkets rose to 32.8% from 22.4%.

The change amounts to a drop of 12.2 percentage points for restaurants and a gain of 10.4 points for large food retailers. The GHR attributed the market-share figures to France’s National Commission for Meal Vouchers, known as the CNTR.

The GHR, which says it represents 12,000 establishments employing more than 150,000 workers in France, argues that the shift shows how spending has moved away from restaurants since meal vouchers were allowed to be used more broadly for food purchases. The organization said that, compared with the spending split at the end of 2022, the new distribution represents an annual revenue shortfall of €1.22 billion for restaurants. That estimate comes from the GHR.

The figures have entered a wider political debate over the future of France’s meal-voucher system, a long-standing employee benefit that helps pay for meals during the workday. A bill to modernize the system is moving through Parliament, and the GHR said its president, Catherine Quérard, and its general delegate, Franck Trouet, were heard by Senator Frédérique Puissat, the Senate rapporteur on the proposal.

The organization said it supports several parts of the reform, including full digitization of meal vouchers from January 1, 2028, a ban on discounts granted to employers, and greater transparency on commissions and related fees. It said those changes should reduce acceptance costs for restaurant operators.

But the group said that if the broader use of vouchers for food shopping is made permanent, new limits should be added to protect restaurants from losing more spending to mass-market retailers.

The GHR is pressing two main options. The first would create two daily spending caps: €25 for restaurants and specialized food stores, and €10 for supermarkets, grocery stores and convenience stores. The second would set a monthly split under which at least 50% of a worker’s meal-voucher balance would be reserved for restaurants and

no more than 50% could be used in large food retail. Under that proposal, any unused amount would be carried over while keeping the same assigned use.

The group said the monthly approach would give workers more flexibility because it would not impose a daily limit and would let them group purchases when they choose.

The French restaurant lobby is also asking lawmakers to remove a provision adopted by the lower house that would bar the use of meal vouchers on delivery platforms. The GHR said that change would hurt restaurant operators in a segment it estimates accounts for 10% of restaurant activity. It said eligible meals should remain payable with meal vouchers, excluding delivery fees.

The legislation is scheduled to be examined in committee on November 3 and in a public session on November 19.

The GHR’s campaign comes as the hospitality and food-service sector faces financial strain, according to data the group cited from other public sources. It said Banque de France figures showed 9,796 business failures in accommodation and food services over the 12 months through the end of August, up 8.5% from a year earlier. It also cited commercial court registry data showing daily averages of 174 business removals from the register and 72 new business creations over a 30-day period.

Those figures were included by the group to argue that the current spending pattern for meal vouchers is adding pressure to a sector already under stress. In material accompanying its statement, the GHR said the estimated €1.22 billion yearly shortfall was equal to more than 130,000 meals priced at €25 every day. That comparison was presented by the organization as an illustration of lost activity, not as official government accounting.

The dispute centers on the original purpose of meal vouchers. Restaurant groups say the benefit was designed to help workers buy meals during the workday and that a growing use in supermarkets has altered that role. Retailers and consumer advocates have argued in past debates that broader flexibility helps households manage food costs.

The statement published on October 29 did not indicate that any of the GHR’s proposed limits had been accepted. At this stage, they remain recommendations from the organization as lawmakers continue reviewing the reform.