

Consumer Day

Consumer policy in the service of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda clearly outlines the interdependencies between combating climate change, protecting the biosphere, creating sustainable prosperity, overcoming poverty, and maintaining (social) peace and cooperation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda provide guidelines for the sustainable transformation of all policy areas and thus also of consumer policy.

In the European Union, household consumption expenditure accounted for at least half of GDP in 17 Member States in 2018 (at current market prices).¹ Given this high share of private consumption in GDP, European consumer policy has great potential to align consumer markets and consumption styles with the SDGs. At the same time, however, this high proportion is indicative of an economic system that is still geared towards over-consumption. Indeed, if all the people in the world were to consume as much as we Europeans did last year, we would need 2.8 planet Earths to support our lifestyle.² Only if consumption and production change fundamentally will the available natural resources be sufficient. The goal of European consumer policy must be to support sustainable consumption.

In the shift towards sustainable consumption, digitalisation can play a supporting role. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have experienced an acceleration of the process of digitalisation. On the one hand, this has helped consumers in managing day-to-day tasks in this time of crisis and shows what potential there is for greater support in future. On the other hand, the pandemic calls into question how responsibly the operators of online platforms are acting – be it in terms of tackling unfair business practices or disinformation. Digitalisation should be seen as an opportunity to shape digital life according to European values.

The transition towards sustainable consumption and digital transformation must be achieved through socially responsible processes. In view of the recession in many countries and the loss of income experienced by many – which are only being aggravated by COVID-19 – consumer policy must also commit to the promise of the 2030 Agenda: “Leave no one behind”.

The European Commission's New Consumer Agenda will address these challenges and provide a multi-annual framework for the development of consumer policy in Europe. Consumer Day 2020 aims to highlight the measures set out in the New Consumer Agenda and discuss them in the context of the following four SDGs:

- **SDG 10:** Reduce income inequality within and among countries
- **SDG 12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- **SDG 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- **SDG 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

¹ See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=National_accounts_and_GDP

² See: EU Overshoot Day, Living Beyond Natures' Limits, 10 May 2019, WWF and the Global Footprint Network

In five workshops, the participants at Consumer Day will draw up recommendations for political action in order to implement the Agenda. The following questions will be explored:

1) A sustainable and fair platform economy – “Free markets, free shipping, free returns or: free of CO2?”

How platform services, which are now in even greater demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, can move from being part of the problem to part of the solution” (*SDGs 10, 12*)

- What new regulations or legal developments are necessary for the transition towards a sustainable and fair platform economy?
- How can platforms assume more (social) responsibility and what role should users play?

2) Transition to sustainable lifestyles – “Leaving no one behind – how can the transformation of society in the post-COVID-19 era benefit everyone?” (*SDGs 10, 13*)

- Which obstacles and drivers hinder or promote the transition towards sustainable lifestyles?
- What aspects must be regulated in order to ensure sustainable lifestyles by 2030?

3) Transformative potential of consumer research – “Science matters?! How modern consumer research can contribute towards greater sustainability in society and the economy” (*SDGs 10, 12, 13, 16*)

- How can we address the discrepancy between knowledge and action (mind-behaviour gap) when it comes to sustainability?
- Viewed from the perspective of various research disciplines, which political and economic incentives have the greatest potential to bring about a green transition (possibly from a comparative European perspective)? How might research findings be translated into consumer law?

4) Sustainable finance – “Sustainable finance in consumer policy – consumers as a driving force for a sustainable financial market” (*SDGs 10, 12, 13*)

- How can consumers be persuaded and empowered to demand sustainable financial products (green empowerment)?
- Will the European regulatory framework and the introduced reform measures be capable of transforming the existing financial market into a sustainable one?

5) Digital consumer tools – “New approaches using artificial intelligence and legal tech” (*SDGs 10, 16*)

- How can digital consumer protection tools be effectively used to help consumers obtain information and advice regarding their rights and how to enforce them?
- What risks are associated with the use of digital consumer protection tools and how can they be effectively countered?