



European Consumer Summit 2022

February 10, 2022

Discussion paper

Workshop 3: Consumer information and green claims

In order to achieve the ambitious climate and environmental objectives set out in the European Green Deal, consumers must be empowered to contribute to the green transition. If given the choice, many consumers are expected to choose the more sustainable option. While consumers are aware of the need to act in favour of the green transition, they need access to more environmentally friendly products, regardless of their income level or where they live. Above all, they need clear and reliable information on goods and services and protection against greenwashing practices i.e. misleading environmental claims.

Therefore we need to create conditions under which consumers are empowered to make this choice. Lack of information, or trust in provided information, such as in environmental claims, are considered by consumers among the main obstacles to adopt more sustainable consumer behaviour. Therefore, it is essential consumers receive better and more reliable information on sustainability aspects of goods and services, while avoiding information overload. For the transition to be fair and just, all consumers, regardless of their socio-economic status, should also be able to participate in sustainable consumption. Therefore the traders should not translate the entirety of the cost of 'greening' in the price, putting the burden on the consumers.

The New Consumer Agenda sets out 22 actions which the European Commission is undertaking. These include the initiative to empower the consumer for the green transition; the initiative on sustainable consumption of goods, promoting repair and reuse, and; the Green Consumption Pledge. These actions are complementing other EU initiatives in the context of the Circular Economy Action Plan to promote a more sustainable consumption and production, such as the Green Claim Initiative and the Sustainable Products Initiative.

Also in France, several legal initiatives have already strengthened consumer information obligations in environmental matters and regulated environmental claims. The French law on the fight against waste and the circular economy (AGEC law) contains numerous provisions that make it compulsory to provide information on the environmental impact of certain product categories and thus responds to a growing demand from consumers to have more complete and regulated environmental information on the products they consume. In addition, the law also introduced an obligation to calculate and display a reparability index for certain electrical and electronic equipment, in the form of a label on the product, with a score out of 10. This obligation is already in place for five product categories and will soon be in place for several others. The same AGEC law also complements the existing provisions on the display of availability of spare parts.

Fighting against greenwashing has been a priority of national consumer authorities of the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network already for some years. Under the coordination of the Commission, the CPC Network has been engaging in numerous enforcement activities in this area. In the 2020 sweep, authorities examined 344 environmental claims online and asked the companies concerned to rectify the claims which were considered misleading. The Commission has continued to support capacity building activities to promote best practices amongst enforcers and the CPC Network is currently working on coordinated enforcement actions against major industry players to prevent the use of claims which cannot be substantiated. The efforts to step up enforcement within the Union must continue and they will be further supported by the legislative initiatives in preparation.

In this session, the speakers will briefly introduce the scope of their current work, they will identify the enforcement challenges and provide concrete examples of projects and of good practices on information provision to consumers and on enforcing green claims. Participants will be invited to put forward ideas for joint projects that could address effectively the issue of consumer information and fight against green washing. Participants will cast a vote to select the most viable and useful to work on. The selected proposals will be subject to a second vote in the plenary of the Consumer Summit to become part of 2022 common actions.