



Consumer Protection Webinar

- A collaboration between UNESCWA and UNCTAD –

“Consumer protection in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, focus on digitalization”

03 August 2020

Time: 11:00 am – 01:00 pm (UTC+03:00, Beirut time)
You can add you’re your local time here:
<https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html?iso=20200611T180000&p1=34&p2=87>

Logistics: The webinar will be conducted in English on Webex, Speakers will need to:

[Join meeting](#)

Participants will be able to live stream the webinar on ESCWA’s YouTube channel:

<https://youtu.be/7a33JIE7qlc>

Facilitator: Ms. Nathalie Khaled, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCWA

Speakers: Experts from UNESCWA and UNCTAD and other International organizations
Representatives from consumer protection agencies

Target audience: National consumer protection agencies in the Arab region
The webinar will be open to the public and run live on YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/7a33JIE7qlc>

Background and relevance of the subject: The COVID-19 pandemic caused havoc in the health and economic welfare of consumers as markets were disrupted. Consumers did not always have access to a choice of essential goods and services and the vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers were affected even harder. Several consumers



have been the prey of unfair business practices. At the same time the pandemic has fueled a digital surge.

The digital economy has brought the largest opportunities to consumers amid the COVID-19 crisis. Electronic commerce of goods and services is booming as consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for online shopping, virtual meetings, and educational purposes. Online information campaigns are the fastest and most efficient means to reaching out to millions of consumers. Dispute resolution for consumers is swiftly transiting towards digital means.

However, the digital economy is also source of some of the greatest challenges to consumers in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Challenges include the proliferation of price gouging for medical equipment, such as masks and hand sanitizers, but also for basic consumer goods; the rise of misleading and deceptive online marketing techniques exploiting consumers by falsely claiming that a product can prevent or cure an infection of the virus; and other scams such as financial fraud and fishing schemes. Moreover, the digital divide increased the gap for vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers.

Consumer protection agencies play a central role in ensuring the welfare of consumers in times of the pandemic and in its aftermath. They are harnessing digital means to multiply their reach. Many Consumer protection agencies have increased information and awareness-raising campaigns regarding health and safety, unfair commercial practices, and consumers' right to refunds, and set up or updated online portals and other digital tools to support consumers to facilitate the filing of online complaints during this period. Some are engaging with online businesses to ensure that consumer rights are respected and that products are safe. Consumer protection agencies have also advocated for better online consumer protection before other relevant government institutions.

The cross-border nature of both the pandemic and the expansion of the digital economy calls for cooperation among national consumer protection agencies. This includes the exchange of information and experiences on



enforcement and policy issues such as best practices for consumer education, enforcement, dispute resolution and redress.

In this webinar we discuss consumers' increasing reliance on online mechanisms and the challenges faced by consumers and consumer protection agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. We will hear from national consumer protection agencies from Arab sub-regions (Mashreq, Maghreb, GCC and LDC) what have been their main challenges since the start of the pandemic and what remedial measures they have taken in response. The webinar will allow national consumer protection agencies to exchange information and best practices and identify possibilities for regional collaboration. Additionally, experts from regional and international organizations, including UNESCWA and UNCTAD, will provide Arab consumer protection agencies with recommendations from both a regional and international perspective.

Agenda:

Introductory remarks by:

- Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNESCWA
- Dr. Mohamad Haidar, Director General, Ministry of Economy, Lebanon
- Ms. Teresa Moreira, Head of the Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD

Panel 1 (each speaker is given 10 min to elaborate on his/her topic)

- Performance of the Arab region in the business environment with a focus on digital economy trends, products, and challenges in the region
Speaker: Ms. Nibal Idlebi, Chief of Innovation Section, UNESCWA
- How did the COVID-19 crisis impact consumers and what are the most common unfair business practices and challenges that emerged as a result of the pandemic?
Speaker: Ms. Teresa Moreira, Head of the Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD



Panel 2 (each consumer protection agency is given 10 min to present their case)

- What are the main challenges consumers have been facing since the start of the pandemic and what are measures taken by consumer protection agencies to protect consumers and moderate the impact of the pandemic?

Speakers: consumer protection agencies

- Ms. Sara Cherkaoui, Chief of Division of Consumer Protection, Morocco
- Mr. Ali Talafhah, Director, Consumer Protection Directorate, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, Jordan

Panel 3 (each speaker is given 10 min to answer his/her question)

- Is there a potential for a shift to digitization and more reliance on online activities in response to and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are possible post-COVID-19 digital economy solutions needed to facilitate this shift?

Speakers:

- Ms. Liz Coll, Former Head of Digital Change, Consumers International
 - Dr. Christine Riefa, Brunel Law School
 - Mr. Arnau Izaguerri, Economic Affairs Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD
- 10 minutes for questions from the public (participants are able to ask questions during the webinar through the chat function in YouTube but are advised to submit their questions in advance through the registration form)
- Final remarks by UNESCWA and UNCTAD (10 minutes): What are the main recommendations and priorities for the region?

Speakers:

- Ms. Nibal Idlebi, Chief of Innovation Section, UNESCWA
- Ms. Teresa Moreira, Head of the Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD