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**Review of capacity-building in and technical
assistance on competition law and policy**

Review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on competition and consumer protection laws and policies

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

Summary

UNCTAD provides capacity-building in and technical assistance on competition and consumer protection laws and policies to developing countries and economies in transition, in accordance with requests received and available resources. These activities include national and regional projects related to drafting competition and consumer protection laws and implementing guidelines, as well as strengthening institutional capacities and advocacy for the creation of a competition culture and the promotion of consumer welfare. In 2020, UNCTAD activities were linked to the problems generated by the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in both the health and economic fields. Numerous meetings were organized with remote participation to promote exchanges of views and experiences and of practices carried out by competition and consumer protection authorities to mitigate the consequences of the crisis and to protect consumer rights in different countries and regions.



I. Introduction

1. UNCTAD is the focal point for competition and consumer protection laws and policies within the United Nations system. UNCTAD aims to assist developing countries in improving their participation in the global economy, and technical assistance is a core activity for this purpose.
2. The Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 35/63 of 5 December 1980 states that collaboration at the international level should include “implementation within or facilitation by UNCTAD, and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system in conjunction with UNCTAD, of technical assistance, advisory and training programmes on restrictive business practices, particularly for developing countries”.¹ The Set plays an important role in encouraging the adoption and strengthening of laws and policies in this area at both the national and regional levels.
3. The revised United Nations guidelines for consumer protection adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 70/186 of 22 December 2015 include a chapter on international cooperation that states that member States should cooperate to promote and facilitate capacity-building; and establish the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy under UNCTAD to “provide capacity-building and technical assistance to developing countries and economies in transition in formulating and enforcing consumer protection laws and policies” (paragraph 97 (e)). This conferred on UNCTAD a formal mandate in this area, confirmed in the Nairobi Maafikiano adopted at the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2016.²
4. The Eighth United Nations Review Conference to Review All Aspects of the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices, held in October 2020, in its resolution A, underlined “the essential role of UNCTAD in providing technical assistance and capacity-building in the fields of competition and consumer protection through cooperation with beneficiary countries and by employing a multi-stakeholder approach to foster a culture of competition and consumer protection and raise awareness among consumers and businesses” and requested UNCTAD “under its technical cooperation pillar, to: (a) conduct follow-up and an impact assessment of technical cooperation activities to improve and better adjust them to beneficiaries’ needs and priorities; (b) further explore and develop joint and complementary work with other international and regional organizations for more effective and stronger assistance to developing countries and transition economies”.³ In addition, at its closing plenary, the Conference approved the provisional agenda of the nineteenth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy and that of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, each of which included an item on the review of capacity-building in and technical assistance on these issues.
5. This note provides information on the capacity-building and technical assistance activities of UNCTAD with regard to competition and consumer protection laws and policies in 2020–2021, taking into account information received from member States. Due to the pandemic, activities could not be carried out in the field during this period and those activities conducted were affected by restrictions related to the pandemic. UNCTAD has focused on supporting member States and regional and international organizations in addressing the challenges generated by the crisis and directly related to economic recovery.⁴

¹ TD/RBP/CONF.10/Rev.2, section F, paragraph 6.

² TD/519/Add.2.

³ TD/RBP/CONF.9/9.

⁴ For more information on competition and consumer protection issues with regard to economic recovery from the pandemic, see chapter 5 of UNCTAD, 2020, *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trade and Development: Transitioning to a New Normal* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.D.35, Geneva).

II. Review of activities implemented in 2020–2021

6. In accordance with the above-mentioned mandates, UNCTAD provides a wide range of technical assistance services, such as assisting in the preparation, adoption, revision and/or implementation of competition and consumer protection laws and policies and building institutional capacity for the effective enforcement of competition and consumer protection laws, as well as raising competition and consumer protection awareness among stakeholders. UNCTAD technical assistance is also provided as a follow-up to the implementation of recommendations deriving from voluntary peer reviews of competition and consumer protection laws and policies. This chapter briefly describes the capacity-building and technical assistance activities delivered in 2020–2021 at the national, regional and international levels. There were two major impacts of the pandemic on technical assistance activities, namely, most planned activities were delivered virtually due to restrictions on travel; and most requests from authorities in developing countries were related to the effects of the pandemic.

A. Activities in the field of competition

1. Regional and international levels

7. UNCTAD has held numerous events on competition law and policy, globally and targeting a variety of different regions. In 2020, UNCTAD organized or co-organized 13 events in the field of competition law and policy, some addressing pandemic-related topics, as follows:

(a) First joint competition forum for the Arab region, aimed at strengthening competition law and policy in the region and promoting knowledge-sharing, dialogue and networking between high-level competition officials, policymakers, regulators and the broader competition community; organized by UNCTAD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia under a trilateral cooperation agreement signed in 2019 (January);

(b) Istanbul Competition Forum, workshop; UNCTAD and Competition Authority of Turkey (March);

(c) Relevance of competition policy in the face of the effects of the economic crisis generated by the pandemic, webinar; UNCTAD and Institute of Competition Law of Ecuador (May);

(d) Competition during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, Istanbul Competition Forum, workshop; UNCTAD and Competition Authority of Turkey (June);

(e) Competition policy in times of COVID-19: Is there a role for international cooperation?, webinar; UNCTAD (June);

(f) Key competition and consumer protection priorities for regional integration in Africa, webinar; UNCTAD (June);

(g) Competition law and policy during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflections in the Arab region, webinar bringing together the experiences and expertise of the three international organizations; UNCTAD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (July);

(h) Impact of the pandemic on the economy: The role of competition policy in crisis management and economic recovery, webinar; UNCTAD and Guatemala (July);

(i) Why it is convenient for Guatemala to adopt a law for the promotion and defence of competition, webinar; UNCTAD and Guatemala (July);

(j) Validation of draft merger regulation, regional workshop; UNCTAD and West African Economic and Monetary Union (July);

(k) Competition policy in the face of the crisis generated by the pandemic in Central America, Central American Competition Forum XIV; UNCTAD and Competition Authority of the Dominican Republic (July);

(l) Competition policy on the COVID-19 crisis and reactivation, with a focus on the microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises sector, webinar; UNCTAD and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (August);

(m) Istanbul Competition Forum annual webinar; UNCTAD and Competition Authority of Turkey (December).

8. In 2020, the 18-month United Nations Development Account project “Global initiative towards post-pandemic resurgence of the microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises sector” was launched, aimed at providing advice, capacity-building and support, under five clusters, to Governments and microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries, to strengthen their resilience during and following the pandemic. Under the cluster on enhancing access to markets, UNCTAD drafted a report on the role of competition in improving competitiveness and access by microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises to markets in the post-pandemic era, to be followed by national studies in Brazil, South Africa and Thailand, which will be discussed at regional dialogues among competition authorities and the authorities of such enterprises.

9. UNCTAD has been cooperating with the Competition Authority of Turkey and authorities in neighbouring economies in the organization of activities for the Istanbul Competition Forum. Three events were held in March, June and December 2020, at which competition officials, practitioners and academics discussed timely topics related to competition law and policy, such as digital platforms, cross-border cases and the pandemic.

10. UNCTAD has continued to provide assistance, since 2019, to the West African Economic and Monetary Union in the preparation of a regional merger regulation. The draft regulation was presented and validated at a workshop in July 2020. In addition, UNCTAD has been providing advisory services on competition policy to the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area, as the protocol on competition of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement is in negotiation. In Africa, the “competition regime remains patchy”⁵ and technical assistance is required to facilitate the negotiation and implementation of an Africa-wide competition policy. In June 2020, UNCTAD held a webinar on key competition and consumer protection priorities for regional integration in Africa to discuss and share key issues and experiences with regard to regional integration in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which included participants from national authorities; regional networks such as the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the West African Economic and Monetary Union; non-governmental organizations; and academia. In addition in 2020, UNCTAD launched a regional technical cooperation project on competition and consumer protection policies for Portuguese-language countries in Africa, which builds on commonalities to promote competition and consumer protection policies as important instruments within the development strategies of these countries.

11. UNCTAD continued work with the secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its member States, in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Japan–Association of Southeast Asian Nations Integration Fund, with the cooperation of the Japan Fair Trade Commission. UNCTAD has shared experiences in international best practices in competition and consumer protection laws and policies, facilitated training workshops and seminars, supported new initiatives and provided substantive inputs to new instruments, such as the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations Competition Law and Policy Peer*

⁵ See chapter 5 of African Union, African Development Bank, Economic Commission for Africa and UNCTAD, 2019, *Next Steps for the African Continental Free Trade Area: Assessing Regional Integration in Africa IX* (Addis Ababa).

Review: Guidance Document, a framework for peer reviews in member States, published in 2020.⁶

12. UNCTAD has continued to devote attention and resources to technical assistance activities for competition authorities in Latin America. Four of the above-mentioned 13 events held in 2020 targeted this region. For example, UNCTAD provided support to Guatemala, where a national competition law is in the process of approval, organizing workshops advocating the importance of competition law and economic analysis. In addition in 2020, UNCTAD published the evaluation report of the impacts of the performances, within their respective markets, of national competition authorities participating in the Competition and Consumer Protection Policies for Latin America (COMPAL) programme, highlighting the positive effects of UNCTAD regional technical cooperation on the COMPAL programme.⁷ The third phase of the COMPAL programme, funded by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland, was implemented in 2015–2018, with training, exchanges of best practices and policy tools provided, enabling beneficiary countries to adopt or modernize competition laws and to establish enforcement authorities. Since the end of the regional technical cooperation programme on competition and consumer protection of the COMPAL programme, new activities in Latin America have been self-funded by beneficiary countries. UNCTAD launched a project on competition compliance in Latin America, in cooperation with the School of Management and Law of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, which includes the funding of some activities. The final activity of the project, in 2021, will be the drafting of a guidance document for competition authorities wishing to establish a compliance programme as part of their competition policy.

2. National level

13. The fact that UNCTAD technical assistance on issues related to the pandemic is in high demand shows that there is a need among competition authorities in developing countries to learn from the experiences and initiatives of more developed authorities, to assess how they should respond to competition issues stemming from the pandemic.

14. UNCTAD has continued to provide assistance, since 2019, to Barbados in preparing its merger guidelines. UNCTAD undertook a review of the merger provisions of Barbados and supported the drafting of merger guidelines, followed by preparation of a report based on the review. A training workshop for officials from Barbados was held in September 2020 to validate and disseminate the report.

15. UNCTAD, with the competition authority of Belarus, launched the *UNCTAD Assessment of the Competition Law of Belarus*.

16. In response to specific requests, UNCTAD organized training activities for the competition authorities of Cambodia and Myanmar on State aid policy and action against cartels and abuse of a dominant position during the pandemic, in July and November 2020, respectively.

17. UNCTAD provided technical assistance to Thailand on a pandemic-related impact assessment and market study of online travel agencies in the national hospitality industry. The technical assistance project aims to review the status of the hospitality industry in Thailand prior to and in the aftermath of the pandemic, in particular the online travel agency market, assessing the economic impact of the pandemic on the industry, including online travel agencies, as well as impacts on competition conditions during and following the pandemic, identifying competition concerns and developing guidelines for competition law in Thailand to regulate anti-competitive practices in the online travel agency market.

⁶ See <https://asean-competition.org/read-publication-asean-competition-law-and-policy-peer-review-guidance-document>.

⁷ UNCTAD, 2020, *Evaluation of the Impact of the Performance of the National Competition Authorities Participating in the COMPAL Programme Within Their Respective Markets* (United Nations publication, Geneva).

B. Activities in the field of consumer protection

1. Regional and international levels

18. UNCTAD is implementing a United Nations Development Account project on strengthening social protection for pandemic responses in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, with contributions related to consumer protection policy in the provision of health services, including electronic health.

19. Restrictions on travel due to the pandemic led to the increased hosting of meetings and events online with governmental bodies and representatives from authorities, relevant stakeholders, academia, civil society organizations and the private sector. As detailed in this chapter, in 2020, UNCTAD organized or co-organized several workshops and webinars on consumer protection to serve the requests and needs of member States, including a webinar titled “Using standards as a tool for consumer protection”, jointly organized with the Committee on Consumer Policy of the International Organization for Standardization and Consumers International (April); and others detailed below.

20. A technical cooperation project on delivering blockchain-based online dispute resolution for consumers, funded by the China Silk Road Group, aims to help improve international trade and consumer trust in electronic commerce in two pilot member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations before it is expanded to other States in the region. The objective is to identify best practices and policy options for promoting online dispute resolution for consumers; to define the legal, technical and infrastructure requirements for the development of online dispute resolution systems, including through the use of blockchain technology; and to build the capacities of governmental consumer protection agencies, consumer groups and business associations in online dispute resolution. The project has been presented to potential beneficiaries in South-East Asia. In addition in 2020, in response to a request from the Government of the Philippines representing the Committee on Consumer Protection of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the secretariat of the Association, UNCTAD joined a regional technical project, under a Japan–Association project on the promotion of sustainable consumption, supported by the Government of Japan through the Japan–Association of Southeast Asian Nations Integration Fund. The objective of the project is to promote sustainable consumption in member States of the Association. Funding was allocated to consultancies, to organize an event for member States of the Association to discuss the modules of a toolkit on sustainable consumption, as agreed between the parties involved, and to develop the toolkit, which aims to help enhance the capacity of consumer protection authorities in member States of the Association in promoting sustainable consumption to relevant stakeholders. The four modules of the toolkit cover concepts and principles of sustainable consumption; best practices and approaches to policies that promote sustainable consumption; tools and instruments influencing consumer behaviour; and the use of appropriate instruments and tools in the food, energy, consumer electronics and plastics sectors. A workshop titled “Consumer protection in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: Focus on digitalization for the Arab region”, jointly organized by UNCTAD and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, was held in August 2020 and addressed the increasing reliance by consumers on online mechanisms and the challenges faced by consumers and consumer protection agencies during the pandemic and in its aftermath. UNCTAD shared consumer protection responses to the pandemic worldwide and the UNCTAD recommendations for action in this regard. UNCTAD also provided national authorities in Arab States with recommendations from both regional and international perspectives with regard to the pandemic at the workshop, which included officials from consumer protection agencies from the Middle East and North Africa and representatives from other Governments, international organizations and academia.

21. In November 2020, during International Product Safety Week 2020, UNCTAD held a three-day workshop titled “Kick-starting consumer product safety: A worthwhile endeavour”, jointly organized with the European Commission. The workshop identified the needs of the least developed countries and discussed the fundamental building blocks required to boost consumer product safety and support policy reform and international cooperation in the field of consumer product safety. More than 500 participants attended

the workshop from national authorities, international regulators, consumer organizations, the industry, test laboratories and academia, as well as standard-setters, lawyers and product safety experts. In particular, speakers from developing and developed countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zambia and member States of the European Union shared experiences in policymaking and institutional design, legal revision, awareness-raising, consumer education and stakeholder participation in the field of consumer product safety.

22. The Iberoamerican Forum of Governmental Consumer Protection Agencies held five dialogues focusing on pandemic-related issues, in particular hoarding and price gouging; refunds; consumer bankruptcy; unfair commercial practices; and international and cross-border cooperation. In October 2020, the Forum held its first digital conference on consumer protection and international cooperation. The Forum hosts three working groups on the implementation of the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection; protection of vulnerable consumers, with results transmitted to UNCTAD; and pending integration into the secretariat of the Forum. UNCTAD participated in two Forum dialogues, on hoarding and on international cooperation, as well as the digital conference. UNCTAD delivered two master classes, on international consumer protection and on dispute resolution and redress, at a course titled “International programme for improving the management of government agencies in consumer protection”, organized by the Centre for Studies in Consumer Law of the National University of the South, Argentina. The lectures were attended by consumer protection officials of countries in the region, such as Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, to help build their capacities, taking into account legal, administrative and technological perspectives.

2. National level

23. In 2020, several developing countries requested support from UNCTAD involving advisory services on pandemic-related unfair commercial practices taking place in their markets, including on the following topics: consumer protection legislation and decisions on hoarding and price gouging, National Institute for the Defence of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property, the consumer protection agency of Peru (April); unsafe trade products related to the pandemic, Pro Consumidor, the consumer protection agency of the Dominican Republic (May); the definition of “consumer” in other jurisdictions, National Consumer Secretariat of Brazil (July); contract cooling-off periods in consumer protection legislation, the consumer protection agency of Chile (July); and price regulation and the practice of excessive pricing, Antimonopoly Committee of Uzbekistan (December). Others requested specific training activities, including for Arab States under the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

III. Voluntary peer review exercises in 2020–2021

A. Review of the competition law and policy of the West African Economic and Monetary Union

24. The second voluntary peer review of the competition law and policy of the West African Economic and Monetary Union was held during the Eighth Review Conference. The Union is the only regional organization to request such a peer review to date. The first voluntary peer review of the competition law and policy of the Union was conducted in 2007 and the second review was of the results obtained over the 12-year period since the first review.

25. The Chair of the Competition Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Professor of the ESSEC Business School (Paris) and the former Director of Competition at the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union presented the report on the voluntary peer review. In the report, the efforts of the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union to improve the enforcement of competition law were highlighted. Further work was needed, however, to enhance the effectiveness of the Union’s competition regime, as centralization of

enforcement at the regional level had undermined national competition authorities. Recommendations for institutional and legal reform were also provided in the report to improve the competition regime of the Union and strengthen collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States, considering that the eight member States of the Union were also member States of the Community. A Commissioner of the West African Economic and Monetary Union outlined UNCTAD technical assistance work, underscored cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States and noted implementation of the recommendations in collaboration with UNCTAD.⁸

26. The Chair of the Competition Council of Tunisia, the Director of Competition of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and a former Deputy Director of the Swiss Competition Commission/Professor of the School of Management and Law of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences acted as peer reviewers. The peer reviewers asked questions concerning the timetable for decisions by the Commission; the relationship between the Commission and national competition authorities; the experience of the West African Economic and Monetary Union in merger control; advocacy initiatives; and collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States. In response, the Commissioner of the West African Economic and Monetary Union stated that, since 2007, initiatives had been undertaken by the regional authority to cooperate with national competition authorities. In addition, strong cooperation between the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Economic Community of West African States was needed to clarify the competencies of each body. UNCTAD presented a technical assistance project to consolidate the institutional and regulatory frameworks in the member States of the Union and to facilitate collaboration with the Community.⁹

B. Review of the consumer protection law and policy of Peru

27. The voluntary peer review of the consumer protection law and policy of Peru was held during the Eighth Review Conference. It was the third such review in this field facilitated by UNCTAD, which is the only international organization conducting voluntary peer reviews in this area.

28. The voluntary peer review opened with a statement by the President of the National Institute for the Defence of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property. UNCTAD then presented the main findings and recommendations of the report on the legal, policy and institutional frameworks for consumer protection.¹⁰

29. The report stated that Peru had a strong consumer protection system that had achieved many nationally and internationally recognized successes. The legislative and public policy framework was extensive and balanced and integrated various international best practices and almost all of those in the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection. The institutional framework for consumer protection was satisfactory and the main consumer protection agency fulfilled its role as leader of the inter-institutional coordination system, with effective enforcement of legislation. The report identified some areas in which improvements could be made to strengthen consumer protection and related recommendations were aimed at improving aspects such as orienting the main consumer policy instruments towards vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers, developing a plan of action that addressed specific aspects of the digital economy, facilitating consumer redress and strengthening consumer product safety networks and international and cross-border enforcement cooperation.

30. Representatives of the Governments of Australia, Italy and the United States of America acted as peer reviewers. The peer reviewers asked the delegation of Peru about the protection of the country's vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers, funding of consumer associations, interaction between government institutions with responsibilities in consumer protection, enforcement powers in digital markets, international cooperation and collective redress. In turn, a representative of the consumer protection agency of Peru asked peer

⁸ TD/RBP/CONF.9/9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ TD/RBP/CONF.9/7.

reviewers about the use of behavioural insights in consumer product safety, regional networks for cross-border enforcement cooperation and policymaking in the digital economy. She also asked questions of other delegates participating in the session, to benefit from their experiences, on measures taken to address consumer overindebtedness and avenues for public funding of consumer associations. UNCTAD presented a proposal for technical assistance projects to implement the peer review recommendations, with the overall goal of improving the legislative and institutional frameworks for consumer protection in Peru. The representative of Peru expressed agreement with the recommendations and appreciation for the guidance from UNCTAD.¹¹

C. Working group on modalities of voluntary peer review exercises

31. The Eighth Review Conference, in its resolution A, decided that UNCTAD should “establish a working group on modalities of UNCTAD voluntary peer review exercises, open to Member States on a voluntary basis, without any financial implications for the regular budget of the United Nations, to discuss and improve existing procedures and methodology, to report respectively to the nineteenth and fifth sessions of the Intergovernmental Groups of Experts on Competition Law and Policy and on Consumer Protection Law and Policy”.¹²

32. This proposal comes at a time of changes in markets as a result of the pandemic and its impacts on competition and consumption, as well as the development of and increase in digitalization. More than five years have passed since the first evaluation of the voluntary peer reviews of competition law and policy.¹³ In the field of consumer protection, only three such peer reviews have been conducted to date. The working group will therefore serve as a forum for reflection on both the content and objectives of this valuable UNCTAD instrument.

IV. Future activities

33. Despite pandemic-related restrictions, UNCTAD actively provided a wide range of technical assistance activities in 2020–2021, adjusting formats as necessary to enable remote participation, including at the Eighth Review Conference, which was held with both physical and remote participation. Importantly, UNCTAD was able to maintain the same level of quality in its technical assistance activities as before the crisis in terms of content and respond to the substantial increase in requests from competition and consumer protection authorities in developing countries facing challenges related to the pandemic. There are some advantages to the provision of technical assistance activities through remote participation, including the fact that it expands the reach of UNCTAD and the size of target audiences, allowing for events to be attended by high-level participants worldwide. Meetings with physical participation allow for interaction, personal contact and informal discussion, yet the organization of events with remote participation is less costly and less cumbersome. However, good quality access through existing information and communications technology infrastructure is an important condition for events to take place online. At the same time, differences in time zones among organizers and participants can interfere with the organization of international online events. In the near future, restrictions on travel are expected to continue to be enforced and it will remain difficult to conduct field missions or hold events with physical participation. Therefore, UNCTAD will continue to explore the organization of events and activities through digital means, including pursuing technical assistance activities with remote participation, taking into consideration both the advantages and disadvantages.

34. For the next five years, UNCTAD technical assistance in the area of competition and consumer protection will focus on the following areas, as proposed during the Eighth Review Conference: interface of competition, consumer protection and data protection

¹¹ TD/RBP/CONF.9/9.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNCTAD, 2015, *External Evaluation of UNCTAD Peer Reviews on Competition Policy* (United Nations publication, New York and Geneva)

policies in the digital economy; stronger focus on advocacy: how authorities can approach different stakeholders; priority setting: how young authorities with limited resources should prioritize their work strategies, depending on the level of development; and international cooperation, especially bearing in mind the role of UNCTAD in the guiding policies and procedures in implementing international measures under section F of the United Nations Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices.¹⁴

35. In 2020, digitalization-related issues were discussed at a variety of different conferences, such as the Istanbul Competition Forum and that of the Iberoamerican Forum of Governmental Consumer Protection Agencies, and the importance of international cooperation in both the competition and consumer protection areas was emphasized in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area and with regard to the pandemic.¹⁵ UNCTAD is ready to provide technical assistance to competition and consumer protection authorities in member States on other areas of interest in response to requests and needs. In the near future, the impacts of the pandemic will continue to be felt and, in particular, Governments worldwide will need to move on to economic recovery following the pandemic, taking into account competition and consumer protection viewpoints. UNCTAD will continue to provide technical assistance continuously and comprehensively, in formats adjusted to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, given the focus areas noted above, and ensuring monitoring and the conduct of impact assessments of implemented projects.

¹⁴ TD/RBP/CONF.9/6.

¹⁵ For more information, see ACM Cipriano and AI Vila, 2020, International cooperation in consumer protection, Research Paper No. 54, UNCTAD.