

Report from the webinar on product safety and sustainability

PRESENTATIONS:

The informal working group on consumer product safety hosted a webinar on product safety and sustainability on 7 May 2025. This webinar was open to governments, international organizations, non-profits, businesses, academics, and other relevant stakeholders. In total, 345 people were registered. The webinar discussed the intersection of product safety and sustainability through two presentations followed by a question and answers segment.

The webinar began with an introduction from Mr. Arnau Izaguerri Vila, Legal Officer, at UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Mr. Izaguerri highlighted the importance of ensuring consumer product safety by noting that unsafe products connect to human and environmental health. Jisook Yang, International Specialist at the Korea Consumer Agency (KCA), presented the Korean Experience with Second-hand online marketplaces (OMPs) and Product Safety Pledges. Ms. Yang explained that the Korean consumers are increasingly interested in sustainable products, with the value of the online secondhand OMPs having grown from approximately \$3 million in 2008 to an estimated \$17 million in 2021. This value is expected to rise to \$30 million in 2025. Ms. Yang also highlighted that in 2022, the KCA found that 5,434 unsafe products were sold in secondhand OMPs.

In response, the KCA created the “Second-hand OMPs Product Safety Pledge.” This pledge committed to ensure product safety in line with sustainable consumption trends. The four key pillars of the pledge are: cooperation among OMPs and regulators to protect users from unsafe products, ensuring the safety of secondhand goods and consumers, for OMPs to inform users about unsafe products and safety regulations, and for OMPs to monitor product sales posts for safety, while also providing regulator contact points. Critically, Ms. Yang highlighted that the four largest secondhand OMPs in Korea joined this pledge.

In response to this pledge, the signatories removed 1,766 product listings from their platforms in 2023 and 9,286 unsafe products in 2024. Ms. Yang noted that most of the removed unsafe products were dietary supplements and weight loss medications. Ms. Yang highlighted that the KCA also developed “Guidelines for Product Restrictions on Online Sales” to clarify the interpretation and implementation of the pledge. She also explained that the KCA and the pledge signatories maintain continuous communication to discuss better ways to protect consumers from unsafe products in secondhand OMPs.

Ms. Yang concluded her presentation by discussing challenges and improvements that can be made in advancing product safety in secondhand OMPs. Some challenges she noted include a limited number of monitoring personnel and missing product information in sales posts. To combat these challenges, Ms. Yang emphasized that a system should be built using technologies like artificial intelligence to monitor sales posts for unsafe products. Similarly, Ms. Yang noted that missing product information could be remedied by requiring sellers to enter this information when listing products on secondhand OMPs. Lastly, Ms. Yang highlighted that the KCA's development of a self-regulation system portal for businesses is a recent improvement, because it provides information about unsafe products and regulations which allows businesses to take proactive measures for consumer protection.

The second presentation was made by Marie Gérardy, Legal and Policy Officer in the Directorate-General (DG) for Justice and Consumers in the European Commission, on product safety in the circular economy. Her presentation presented preliminary results from a DG study supporting the implementation of the European Union (EU) General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR). Ms. Gérardy noted that this study considered six types of products, specifically: sports equipment, vehicles, toys and games, clothing/textiles, childcare equipment, and electronics/home appliances. Notably, she emphasized that products must be safe throughout their lifespan and that circular models increase that lifespan.

Ms. Gérardy explained that the most recurring safety issues found in this study were general stress factors, circularity related issues, and consumer perception. General stress factors include: wear and tear, unverifiable product history, fading labels and missing safety information, and consumers not following safety instructions during first use. Circularity related issues involved missing product history, missing parts or hidden defects and consumer perception problems concerned safety issues that vary depending on the circular business model that is being used and potentially outdated safety requirements. Ms. Gérardy further noted that secondhand products have the highest risks of being unsafe in circular business models, due to the lack of monitoring on reused goods. Similarly, she noted that remanufactured goods are at the lowest risk of being unsafe.

Ms. Gérardy also highlighted several behavioral findings from the study. Some key conclusions are: that consumers are concerned about product safety and that this impacts their willingness to purchase circular goods; products which are refurbished or repaired by the original manufacturer are more trusted by consumers; consumers tend to trust business to consumer interactions more than consumer to consumer interactions; consumers trust circular goods that are bought in a physical store more than circular goods that are bought in an online store; and that more safety information

listed for a circular product tends to increase consumer trust in that product. This study also found that there are critical information gaps concerning missing product history, limited original equipment manufacturer information, and in safety incident reporting.

Additionally, Ms. Gérardy noted that manufacturers have the primary responsibility to ensure that their products are safe. Ms. Gérardy also highlighted that standardization is a challenge for circular product safety because most technical standards are designed for new products and therefore do not address circular products.

In her conclusion, Ms. Gérardy offered recommendations on how to enhance product safety in the circular economy. She emphasized that education for consumers, businesses, and authorities on circular product safety is vital. Additionally, she reflected that providing legal clarity, improved standardization, and investments in continuous monitoring, must be advanced.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SEGMENT:

Mr. François Belin from the label LONGTIME started the question and answer segment, by highlighting the need for specific regulations in this sector, while also considering 3D printing parts.

Next, Mr. Amin Akbar from the Competition Commission of Pakistan asked Ms. Yang how does Korea ensure product safety and sustainability in an environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework. Ms. Yang explained that the government ministries work closely together, thus KCA's collaboration with other ministries helps embed ESG in their work.

Additionally, Mr. Akbar asked Ms. Gérardy how the EU ensures product safety and sustainability for products which are not categorized as circular products. Ms. Gérardy explained that under the GPSR, the EU does not distinguish between circular and non-circular products and requires that all products are safe.

Mr. Izaguerri then asked Ms. Gérardy about the EU selection criteria for the six products used in the study. Ms. Gérardy explained that they looked at statistics on consumer product usage and at cases listed on the EU Safety Gate. Ms. Gérardy also noted that the study found that consumers perceived certain goods as more dangerous when they are circular goods. She highlighted that secondhand cars and secondhand childcare equipment were identified by consumers as being more dangerous as circular goods.

Next, Ms. Mehmoona Allauddin from the Competition Commission of Pakistan asked if there any significant legal gaps in international regulations to ensure product safety

when there is cross-border movement of used or refurbished goods. Mr. Izaguerri noted that there are a lot of gaps in the cross-border distribution of products that are known to be unsafe and highlighted a 2020 UNCTAD recommendation on this subject. Additionally, Ms. Yang noted that Korean authorities created product safety pledges with Temu and AliExpress because of the large number of cross-border product transactions from China to Korea.

Mr. Darcy Altavilla from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) then asked Ms. Gérardy if she could clarify the definition of the term ‘remanufactured.’ Ms. Gérardy noted that this term, as defined in the EU Ecodesign of Sustainable Products Regulation, involves disassembling a product as well as replacing or restoring components, while also testing individual parts and the entire product to ensure it meets safety requirements. Mr. Altavilla noted that the ACCC uses the word ‘remade’ to refer to the same concept. Mr. Altavilla also asked when the report Ms. Gérardy presented will be available. Ms. Gérardy responded that it will likely be available in June 2025.

Additionally, Mr. Raymond Johnson from The E-Institute of International Trade asked about the methodology for certifying product safety in cross-border trade. Ms. Gérardy responded that it depends on the product category as well as the governing regulations.

Mr. Tolga Erkin from the OSTIM Technical University asked for an assessment of the proposed solutions to address threats to safety and sustainability in Mediterranean countries during the peak tourism season. Mr. Izaguerri Vila responded by noting that the product safety regulations are focused specifically on a consumption relationship and a product that is placed in the market.

Lastly, Mr. Izaguerri asked Ms. Yang and Ms. Gérardy what participants should take away from this webinar. Ms. Yang responded that businesses and consumers can only make environmentally friendly choices through guaranteed product safety. She also noted authorities are responsible for supporting businesses and consumers to make greener choices. Ms. Gérardy emphasized that product safety and sustainability strengthen each other, that products must be safe for their entire lifespan, and that fostering product safety will enhance consumer trust in the circular economy.

In conclusion, Mr. Izaguerri invited the participants to attend the Ninth United Nations Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection, which will be held in Geneva from 7- 11 July 2025.