Public Report

New Horizons for Product Safety

Close international cooperation is needed to ensure that products are safe for consumers – no matter where they are manufactured, and whether they are sold online or through traditional channels. That is why every two years since 2006 the European Commission's Directorate General for Justice and Consumers brings safety experts from all around the world for the International Product Safety Week in Brussels.

The 2022 edition – organised under the theme "New horizons for product safety" – was the most popular event to date. Over 640 participants from 73 countries gathered either in person in Brussels or online. They represented a wide range of stakeholders: national authorities, international regulators, consumer organisations, industry, standard-makers, test laboratories, academics, lawyers and other product safety experts.

Participants enjoyed inspiring and interactive plenary sessions, various side activities and many opportunities for networking.

MONDAY 14 NOVEMBER

The first day and a half hosted the International Symposium organised by the [**International Product Health and Safety Organisation (ICPHSO)**](#) – a global (NGO) non-profit membership organisation, bringing together regulators, industry, consumer organisations and other stakeholders.

In a keynote address, opening the ICPHSO International Symposium, Ana Gallego Torres – **European Commission's Director-General for Justice and Consumers** – outlined recent initiatives by the European Commission to empower consumers for the green and digital transitions. "Sustainability and safety go hand-in-hand," emphasised Ms. Gallego Torres.

TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER

Opening by Commissioner Reynders

The open part of the conference – in the afternoon of 15 November – started with a keynote speech by **Didier Reynders, EU Commissioner for Justice, European Commission**.

Much has changed since the EU's current product safety rules came into force in 2001, from the growth of online shopping to the vast new market of connected products. The current costs associated with product-related accidents are estimated at €11.5 billion per year for EU consumers and society at large. This evolution calls for a new approach to product safety, which is why the 2022 International Product Safety Week is focusing on "New horizons for product safety".

"We want to make sure that all of the risks consumer products pose are duly considered before they can freely circulate in our Single Market," the Commissioner said. "Our proposal for a new EU Regulation on general product safety aims to ensure that consumers are fully protected regardless of what, how and from whom they buy."

The Commissioner was also pleased to see new topics on the agenda. These included a discussion on the impact of gender on product safety, and looking at the new product safety challenges through the perspective of young product safety ambassadors.

He highlighted some of the areas where the European Commission has had a noticeable impact on improving consumer product safety. These include a voluntary Product Safety Pledge which has been signed by 11 major online marketplaces; a Product Safety Award to showcase the best practices of businesses; an EU-wide project to coordinate product testing by national authorities; and a new tool to support them in detecting online offers of dangerous products, which have been reported in the EU Safety Gate rapid alert system. He said Safety Gate remains a flagship of EU actions to stop dangerous products from being sold. He announced that alerts on dangerous products published on the Safety Gate are now available in the Ukrainian language.

He concluded that "this is a very exciting time for product safety policy. We face many new challenges, but there are many new opportunities to address them." He said that everyone shares the same desire to keep consumers safe. And he remarked that in today's global economy, where consumers are buying products from all over the world, "the very best we can do is work together to protect them."

High-level session on EU-U.S. product safety cooperation

Commissioner Reynders and **Alexander Hoehn-Saric, Chair of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)**, provided a first public debrief on the recently launched EU-U.S. informal dialogue on consumer product safety. In an interesting discussion, they outlined the priority topics of the EU-U.S. cooperation; the main challenges that both jurisdictions are facing; and how in practice such dialogue can bring benefits to both jurisdictions.

Mr Hoehn-Saric pointed to the fruitful exchanges between the EU and CPSC experts on online market surveillance and new technologies. "We gain much information about what is going on in the EU and what the European Commission is doing." On their side, the CPSC were happy to share about the work they are doing, for instance to use machine-learning technologies to enhance the identification of product safety issues and emerging trends.

As regards the globalisation of supply chains, **Mr Reynders** agreed that this is a challenge, as in the European Union's single market, 70% of the dangerous products are coming from outside the EU; a large proportion of that from China. He said that trilateral product safety discussions are being held with Chinese colleagues. In addition, the European Commission and the CPSC are organising successful joint training sessions for Chinese economic operators in the context of the EU awareness raising SPEAC project.

Both agreed that more attention and action needs to be given to protect vulnerable consumers such as children. And both see the EU-U.S. dialogue as part of a larger international effort, such as working with UNCTAD and the OECD.

The side events of the first day included a brainstorming in small groups on profiling the consumer of 2050 and a session on mindfulness and why it matters for product safety by **Anna Jassem**, International Projects Coordinator at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit.

The day ended with a Gala Dinner at the Maison de la Poste, a converted building that served as an administrative centre for telephone and telegraph services in the early 20th century and later as a post office.

WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER

Session 1. Quo vadis e-commerce: What's next for product safety?

This session looked at the latest developments in e-commerce and the challenges they create for product safety. The panel analysed the developments in the business models of e-commerce, such as sales via online marketplaces, direct imports, drop-shipping and e-commerce in social media. It also looked at how businesses active in e-commerce can improve the safety of products.

Els Bruggeman – Head of Policy and Enforcement at Euroconsumers – pointed out that "there are too many unsafe products on online marketplaces." Euroconsumers recently ran safety tests on 250 products, and two out of three turned out to be unsafe.

Kristi Talving – Director General at Estonia's Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority – identified key trends in her country such as the continuing fast growth of e-commerce (by around 50% in each of the past two years); the increase of online purchases from outside the EU; and the importance of sustainability, which means "not just sustainable products, but sustainable delivery methods too."

According to **Christoph Busch**, PhD – Professor of Law, European Legal Studies Institute, University of Osnabrück – one of the defining trends in e-commerce is the convergence of social media and online marketplaces, YouTube and TikTok being key examples. This more complex online retail landscape is a challenge for regulators, and will mean that rules have to be designed in an all-encompassing way to fit these very diverse business models.

Stefan Naumann – Director, Legal Business Partner Team at Zalando – said that these new actors have to live up to their new role and realise that they are not just advertising or media platforms but are now directly involved in the product safety chain. He also explained how Zalando ensures the safety of products offered for sale on its platform.

Another trend highlighted by **Els Bruggeman** is that social media influencers are having an ever-greater influence on the e-commerce economy. This brings with it many legal uncertainties and enforcement challenges. "What if a product being promoted by an influencer turns out to be an unsafe one? Who takes the responsibility for that?" A further trend is the online sale of IoT connected devices. Euroconsumers conducted tests in such products and found a whole range of security flaws.

All panellists highlighted that e-commerce is a well-established feature of the market with new trends such as cross-border shopping, shopping via social media and influencer economy. E-shopping is a new habit and consumers expect that products are safe everywhere, online and offline, and therefore expectations on e-shops and online marketplaces are high. All panellists agreed that while it's important to have the right regulations and legislation, ultimately it all boils down to effective enforcement. This will require significant investments at national, European and international level. Panellists also emphasised the importance of consumers' and stakeholders' awareness about product safety.

International Product Safety Week / 14-17 nov. 2022 — cartoonbase.com

Session 2. Online market surveillance: challenges and opportunities

This panel took stock of the latest developments and challenges in the market surveillance of products sold online. How well are authorities equipped to address these recent challenges? How can other players contribute, beyond their legal requirements, to ensure that products offered for sale via online channels are safe for consumers?

Thomas Berbach – Legal Officer at France's General Directorate for Competition Policy, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control – highlighted four main challenges to online market surveillance: the growing share of buying via online marketplaces and the large number of dangerous products offered for sale; the issue of jurisdiction regarding traders based outside the EU; insufficient cooperation from marketplaces in case of product recalls; and often poor product information on marketplaces.

Thyme Burdon – Policy Analyst in Consumer Policy Unit at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – agreed that the rapid global growth of e-commerce is leading to new consumer product safety risks, which in turn are making online market surveillance much more important. She shared some preliminary findings from a recent OECD online product safety sweep conducted in a number of countries in 2021. Of 4300 products surveyed, almost 80% were found to be non-compliant to the relevant safety laws and standards.

Setting the scene regarding the relevant European legislation, **András Zsigmond** – Legal and Policy Officer at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit – said that the recently adopted Digital Services Act addresses all types of illegal content, including unsafe products. Another important piece of legislation is the Market Surveillance Regulation from 2019, and of course of great relevance is the upcoming General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR). "This will act as a safety net and will complete the picture of the European product safety landscape, especially for products where we don't have harmonised safety requirements or when the risks are not fully covered in the harmonised legislation."

The GPSR will also introduce new obligations for online marketplaces and for distance sales. Mr. Zsigmond highlighted that beyond legislative requirements, it is also important to encourage businesses to go further, for example by voluntary commitments.

Delphine Dauba-Pantanacce – Director, Legal Counsel and Global Regulatory at eBay – provided examples of how online marketplaces can contribute to and cooperate with enforcement work. eBay's product safety strategy is based on the three pillars of education, enforcement and cooperation. Once an authority reports an unsafe product to eBay, they rapidly remove the listings, not only in the country where the product has been reported, but worldwide.

As a main takeaway, panellists agreed that cooperation and trust are key for enhancing the effectiveness of the surveillance of products sold online and that, beside horizontal legal requirements, voluntary cooperation can have a significant impact in this regard.

Session 3. New technology products: risks 3.0

In recent years, more and more connected and other new technology products have become part of consumers' households and lives. While these innovative products offer many opportunities to consumers, they can also pose serious risks to their physical and mental health and safety. Are consumers sufficiently protected against these new risks? Does the industry adequately identify and mitigate these risks before releasing products on the market? How can regulators build and deepen capacities to tackle these new challenges?

Birgitta Dresp-Langley, PhD – Research Director at French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) – described some of the new mental health issues arising as a consequence of the new connected and digital world we live in. Digital addiction can cause insomnia, anxiety and depression, which can even lead to suicide. Children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable. She mentioned virtual reality devices as an example of products whose prolonged use can lead to cyber-sickness, a sense of de-personalisation, and anxiety.

Leanda Barrington-Leach – Head of EU Affairs at 5Rights – echoed these concerns, focussing on children's rights in this digital world. "The way that very popular digital products and services are designed pushes the risks far beyond the reasonable. It gives a platform to the worst of human nature and exploits our vulnerabilities; those who suffer the most are children." She said that solutions must be delivered upstream by integrating children's rights by design and default into a product safety framework. "We should not ask children or parents to bear responsibility for badly designed systems."

As to whether the current legal frameworks are adequate to contain these new risks, **Rod Freeman** – Legal Expert, Cooley LLP – argued that Europe has had a long-established and robust regime for product safety for many decades and does not need fundamental reform but tweaking to take into account the question of scale; the changing nature of the product lifecycle; the issue of new markets; and the fact that "product safety is now part of a much more complex matrix of community expectations."

Following up on whether the authorities today are ready to tackle these new challenges**, Treye Thomas**, PhD – Program Manager, Chemicals Nanotechnology and Emerging Materials, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) – said that more research and cooperation is needed between regulators, academics and manufacturers. "We are dealing with risks that didn't exist." He also mentioned several recent CPSC staff reports on the potential hazards associated with emerging technologies.

Raphaël de Cormis – Vice-President, Thales Digital Factory – believes that two elements are necessary when building connected devices:

- To ensure safety while the product is evolving.
- To ensure the safety of the users beyond physical aspects, which means ensuring their mental health and well-being.

He gave some principles from a digital ethical charter.

Session 4. New technologies as allies for product safety

New technologies can be a great ally for consumer product safety. This panel presented a range of cutting-edge tools designed to enhance consumer product safety, e.g. by detecting dangerous products online, identifying emerging product safety issues and improving product traceability.

"Historically, smartphones have provided insight into consumer safety concerns," said **Alan S. Abrahams** – Associate Professor and Associate Director of Executive PhD in Business at Virginia Tech. In the future, "these technologies could give consumers the power to monitor their own safety." Mr Abrahams mentioned that smartphones could for instance be used to analyse the chemical composition of a product. He also presented his university work on big data analytics and how the use of software incorporating Artificial Intelligence can help detect unsafe products by analysing consumer reviews and other data available online. Among the challenges they faced when scraping data, he mentioned 'sanitising' behaviour by online marketplaces, i.e. eradicating reported safety concerns.

Petar Parushev – Policy Officer at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit – explained that under the General Product Safety Regulation, currently discussed at the EU level, online marketplaces will have to provide access to their interfaces for the online tools operated by market surveillance authorities and remove technical obstacles to data scraping for product safety purposes. A recommendation along the same lines is included in the OECD policy guidance on consumer product safety pledges, released in July this year, pointed out **Neville Matthew** – General Manager at Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and Chair of the OECD Working Party on Consumer Product Safety.

Olivier Andrault – Policy Officer on Food, Chemicals and Cosmetics, UFC-Que Choisir – introduced the QuelProduit application. It's a free and collaborative mobile app that allows consumers to check the safety and composition of the products they buy, such as food, household and cosmetic items. However, he recognises that such a "new technology patch" does not solve the root problems with product safety information, that must be solved with better regulation. "We want the precautionary principle to be applied, so that suspected components are not allowed. We want faster implementation of scientific advice. Labelling has to be simpler, more easily understandable, and clearly legible."

A new e-surveillance tool developed by the European Commission helps national market surveillance authorities scan the Internet for dangerous product listings. Mr **Parushev** invited the audience to take part in an internet surveillance game and search for remaining online offers of a dangerous product recently reported in the EU Safety Gate. The winner managed to identify two product listings during three minutes, compared to 30 detected by the application. "It may not be within the capabilities of a human to monitor the huge amount of information on the Internet. We therefore need to harness the potential of new technologies to maximise our capacity," said Mr Parushev.

Mr **Matthew** explained how the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission utilises new technologies to integrate and analyse the various sources of product safety data, and how this can help identify emerging issues. "Technology is going to continue to evolve and get more powerful. The policy challenge is to minimise the risks and maximise the benefits."

Hugo Weber – Public Affairs Director, Mirakl – introduced the Mirakl Marketplace Platform, which allows users to manage a network of third-party sellers whose products or services are featured on their online marketplace. "Right from the beginning of Mirakl we were aware that one of the most important features of an e-commerce website is the product information provided to consumers. We actually use the product information as a tool for product safety."

The Sustainable Product Regulation proposal adopted earlier this year includes the EU digital product passport. **Francesca Poggiali** – Chief Public Policy Officer, GS1 – explained that such a passport will enable consumers, marketplaces and authorities to easily access relevant product information in an electronic format. This in turn will facilitate the verification of product compliance and enable the tracking of all substances of concern throughout the lifecycle of every product covered by the passport, which can be very relevant for product safety aspects as well.

The side events of the second day included a session on "Why compassion matters in the product safety field" by **Pinuccia Contino –** Head of the European Commission's Product Safety Unit.

THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER

Session 1. We are the champions: Celebrating product safety advances

Protecting consumers from dangerous products requires a collective effort from all the stakeholders: regulators at national, regional and global level, businesses and consumers alike. This session showcased examples of recent product safety advances and the heroes behind them.

The session opened with **Trista Hamsmith** – Founder of Reese's Purpose – telling the tragic story of her daughter Reese, who when only 18 months old died after swallowing a button battery in October 2020. "Following this tragedy, I founded Reese's Purpose, a non-profit organisation to identify, advocate and correct safety issues impacting children and their families." On August 16, 2022, Reese's Law (Public Law 117-171) was passed in the U.S. to protect children and other consumers against the dangers associated with the accidental ingestion of button cell or coin batteries.

Another initiative to help protect vulnerable children is La Maison des Géants (The Giant's House), organised by Ligue des Familles and its Flemish counterpart Gezinsbond. "The aim is for adults to step into the shoes of a child and explore a dwelling from the perspective of someone much smaller," said **Vinciane Baudoin** – Project Manager at Ligue des Familles**.** The house is constructed three times its normal size, and thus helps adults discover tips for limiting the risk of domestic accidents. It is travelling to 11 Belgian cities between 2021 and 2023.

Yet another example is the EU Product Safety Award, which was introduced by **Susana Pratt** – Policy Senior Assistant at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit. This initiative started in 2019 and aims to reward businesses that are product safety champions. The second edition in 2021 gave awards to projects that used new technologies to improve product safety, and projects that improve the safety of vulnerable consumers. **Bogomil Nikolov** – Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, Director of the Bulgarian Active Consumers Association and Jury member for the first Award edition – was especially impressed by the children's products category. One of these was a pioneering car baby alert that can save lives by alerting a driver if a child is left behind in a car or if the child's seat belt becomes unlocked while driving.

Another winner of the EU Product Safety Award was TerrainQ Solutions for improving the safety of products on online marketplaces. "The software we developed checks the declarations of conformity and the technical files of CE-marked products," explained **Luca Vahrenwald**, the company's CEO. "If an online retailer is interested in sourcing a new product, they can use Ce-rt Proof as a pre-shipment inspection. It's also very interesting for online marketplaces if they want to create a safer shopping place for the consumer."

The fourth example shown was CASP (Coordinated Activities on the Safety of Products). This is a European Commission project to enable all market surveillance authorities of European Economic Area countries to cooperate in reinforcing the safety of products placed on the EU single market. Its three pillars are the funding of product testing; the exchange of ideas and best practices; and awareness raising. **Bori Szij** – CASP coordinator at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit – mentioned the testing of hand sanitisers, protective gloves and protective face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of truly pan-European cooperation on an urgent product safety priority.

One organisation that took part in "CASP Corona" testing activity was the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA), who sent in a number of face masks and hand sanitisers for testing. "CASP helped us to identify unsafe products which we then rapidly removed from the market, recalled **Rudie Vella –** MCCAA Director.

A truly global tool was showcased by **Brigitte Acoca** – Head of Consumer Policy Unit at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD Global Recalls Portal was created in 2012 to serve as a single window for sharing information about product recalls worldwide. The database contains more than 35,000 product recall notices from 48 jurisdictions, and integrates data from the EU's rapid alert system for dangerous non-food products (Safety Gate) and the ASEAN regional recalls portal. Ms. Acoca also outlined the newly-launched OECD global campaign on product safety online addressed to both consumers and businesses. Rounding off the session, **Nils Behrndt** – European Commission's Deputy Director General for Justice and Consumers – congratulated all the product safety champions who shared their stories, as well as many others in the audience. "I truly hope that your dedication, ingenuity and vision will inspire others to put consumers' safety at the very heart of what to do." He also pointed out that the Commission's efforts go beyond the borders of the EU. "With the growth of e-commerce and the globalisation of production and supply chains, challenges to product safety require global solutions, such as the OECD Global Recalls Portal."

Session 2. Safe for all? Gender and product safety

The panel discussed whether gender and sex differences affect product safety. Are mainstream consumer products equally safe for men and women? Are there specific risks linked to differences in consumption patterns? Should gender aspects be taken into account in policy-making, product design and education campaigns?

Rebekka Endler – journalist and author of the book "The Patriarchy of Things" – kicked off the session by giving some examples of products being designed, tested or manufactured with a cis-male in mind. These range from "mild annoyances" such as ironing

stations and electric bikes, to potentially life-threatening situations. For example, four out of five crash tests that are required by the EU for a new car launch are tested with a cis-male crash test dummy. "The safety of women drivers and passengers is therefore not being fully taken into account."

Dr. Stefanie Glathe, PhD – Senior Manager, Scientific & Safety Communications Europe at Procter & Gamble – added that the same gender bias often applies to the design and testing of personal care and cosmetic products. However, she said that within Procter & Gamble great attention is paid to this topic. "Objective safety does not know gender. If the user of a product is female or a child or another vulnerable person, this is taken into account in our product safety assessments."

A problem identified by **Kim van Sparrentak**, Member of the European Parliament, is the data gap. This exists because when it comes to products' impact on health and safety, data sets are most often based on white cis-men, and don't properly reflect the impact on women, let alone women of colour. This results in a bias in the conclusions extrapolated from existing datasets. "We have to pull product safety into the 21st century."

One organisation already doing this is CEN-CENELEC, according to **Deborah Wautier,** its Project Manager in charge of Stakeholders Engagement and Diversity & Inclusiveness. She reported that back in 2018 CEN-CENELEC developed a Design for All approach. It encompasses a procedure and a set of methodologies that identify aspects to be addressed when designing and revising standardisation deliverables, to make sure that they are fit for all and benefit everyone. "The gender lens should be put on as a default when designing or revising a standard. You might not see at first how sex or gender may have an impact on the use of a product, but it most likely does."

Amarachi Okpala-Onwuamaegbu – Founder of House of Maramuna – made an impassioned plea for companies to take gender into account. Examples include researching how chemicals in cosmetics and foods react differently to different genders; designing household appliances that are easier for women to use; and writing operating and safety instructions that are easier to understand, especially for women in rural areas.

Moreover, **Chantal Van den Bossche** – Communication Specialist on Energy, Climate, Chemicals & Gender at Women Engage for a Common Future – said it's been proved that women react differently towards certain chemicals, which consequently can have a different effect on their health. She particularly would like to see more research being done on sanitary products, especially in the light of a recent study by the Free University in Brussels into the effects of fragrances in sanitary pads.

From the legislative point of view, **Kim van Sparrentak** said that "it's our duty as legislator to ensure that we have safe products for everyone and take gender into account in the design phase of products, and in all testing procedures." Amendments to the currently negotiated General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR) proposal include the impacts of gender differences on health and safety in the assessment of products. She hopes they will be added to the GPSR "because it will set a standard for other future regulations to ensure that gender safety is a core element of them."

As for the standards development process, **Deborah Wautier** pointed out that CEN-CENELEC has developed a Gender Action Plan focused on raising awareness and training European standard makers towards making sure that gender considerations are systematically taken into account.

International Product Safety Week / 14-17 nov. 2022 — cartoonbase.com

Sessions 3 and 4. EC-UNCTAD workshop

The session opened with some background on the cooperation between the European Commission and UNCTAD. **Teresa Moreira** – Head of UNCTAD Competition and Consumer Policies Branch – said that UNCTAD is the focal point within the United Nations family on trade and development and related issues, including consumer protection and consumer product safety. As the European Union is the leading regional organisation on product safety, the synergies between the two are significant and two successful joint workshops on best practices in product safety were already organised in 2020 and 2021. Explaining the topics of this year's workshop, **Pinuccia Contino** – Head of European Commission's Product Safety Unit – remarked that civil society is a key enabler and a key representative of what consumers experience and encounter every day. "It is therefore just as essential in this conversation as authorities and businesses."

As to how UNCTAD fits their work on Consumer Product Safety into their broader activities, **Arnau Izaguerri Vila** – Economic Affairs Officer at UNCTAD Competition and Consumer Policies Branch – said that their work involves three pillars: consensus building among their 195 member states; research and analysis on emerging issues of interest; and technical cooperation with developing countries and countries with economies in transition. **Eva Sinkovic** – Deputy Head of the European Commission's Product Safety Unit, European Commission – emphasised that international cooperation on consumer product safety features prominently in the Commission's New Consumer Agenda. "Value chains are becoming more and more global, so it is vital that consumers are protected everywhere, especially as they have access to products from virtually anywhere in the world."

Panel 1: Consumer organisations on the product safety's frontline

Consumer organisations have a great multiplier effect when it comes to product safety. They are a bridge between authorities and consumers. Which best practices can they share? What is their experience working with regulators? How does the panel see the new horizons of product safety?

The panellists – representing both consumer organisations and regulators – were asked to share some good practices of how their organisations worked together to get action.

Antonino Serra Cambaceres – Advocacy Manager at Consumers International (CI) – gave the example of the Consumers International Guidelines for Online Product Safety, developed by Consumers International and its member organisations. These set out recommended actions for governments, marketplaces and sellers to take into account when developing policies and regulations on the safety of products sold online. He also mentioned the importance for Consumers International of bringing consumer perspectives into international discussions. This was for example the case during the work on the 2021 UNCTAD Recommendation on preventing cross-border distribution of known unsafe consumer products.

Shirish Deshpande – Chairman of Mumbai Grahak Panchayat – explained that this consumer organisation recently brought to the attention of Indian regulators the disturbing fact that many pressure cookers being sold on e-commerce platforms did not meet the relevant standard as required by law, and were unsafe. "The regulator investigated our claims, recalled the products, and imposed a significant penalty on each of the e-commerce platforms." He also mentioned the importance of product liability rules as a complement and a means to enforce product safety provisions.

Sylvia Maurer – Director for Sustainability and Safety at the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) – explained that BEUC focuses on legislation and consumer rights and participates in European Commission's expert groups such as the Consumer Safety Network, and also in many sector-specific working groups (e.g. on toys, cosmetics and food-contact materials). She also stressed the importance of BEUC member organisations testing results to alert regulators. In addition, she mentioned the important role of other actors, such as ANEC, which represents the consumer voice in the standardisation process.

Alma Laurence Contreras Garibay – Deputy Legal Attorney at Mexican Federal Consumer Protection Agency (Profeco) – stressed the importance of cooperating, from the point of view of an authority, with consumer organisations, in particular to publicise the information about recalls and class actions. She described a class action brought against 23 so-called miracle products, such as multivitamins, anti-wrinkle creams, weight reduction treatments, sexual potency aids and COVID-19 treatments. None of these products had been approved by the Mexican regulator as there was no evidence that they worked. Profeco worked closely with consumer organisations on these cases. Profeco also shares communication material with consumer organisations to maximise outreach.

Willard Mwemba – Director and Chief Executive Officer, COMESA Competition Commission – mentioned the creation of the COMESA Consumer Protection Committee, whose members are regulators from the COMESA Member States but also consumer organisations from these countries. Under this Committee, a regional early warning system to detect unsafe products has been set up, as well as a committee responsible for designing regional curricula for consumers to become more aware about product safety issues. He stressed the need for more awareness-raising towards consumers on

product safety issues, also with an enforcement purpose, as consumers who are aware of safety issues are more likely to report and bring issues to the authorities' attention.

A range of other examples were described by the panellists, each of them showing the benefits of close cooperation between consumer organisations, testing bodies, standards developers and regulators. This is to ensure that the web of protection is woven as tightly as possible so that no consumer falls through it anywhere in the world.

All participants stressed the importance for regulators and consumer organisations to collaborate closely. **Willard Mwemba** mentioned that relations between regulators and consumer organisations are symbiotic, as regulators have enforcement powers, which consumer organisations do not have, but the latter may have information useful for authorities and more outreach to consumers. This was echoed by **Antonino Serra Cambaceres** who pointed out that we are all consumers; even authorities and businesses are made of consumers. Even though common sense is something we all have, consumer organisations bring the expertise and the added value in representing the interests of consumers and creating capacity building.
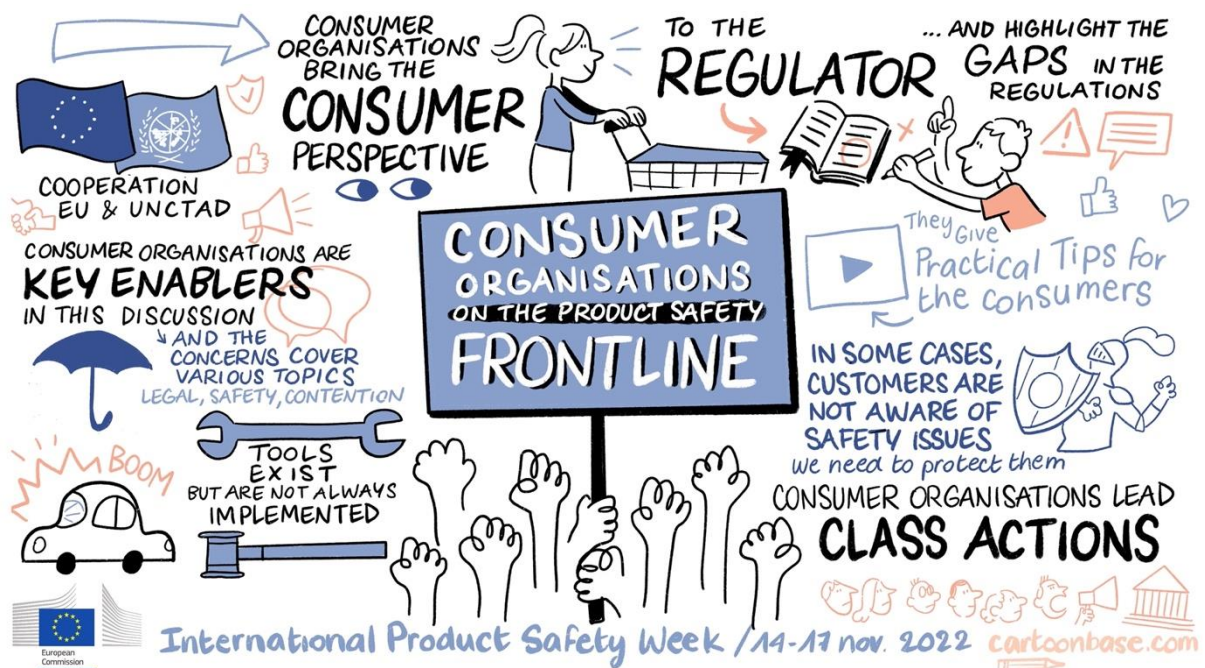
Session 4. EC-UNCTAD workshop – Panel 2: The next generation of product safety ambassadors

2022 being the European Year of Youth and to conclude the week on the new horizons of product safety, the final session shared the thoughts and experiences of the new generation of product safety ambassadors. What do they see as the most important product safety topics? What is their advice for effective communication towards the younger population on product safety issues? What do they think should be looked at in terms of new horizons?

Panellists were first asked to give examples of harmful products or practices that they had recently come across in the field of product safety. These included a toothpaste that was "recommended by dentists worldwide" and a sanitiser that would "leave your hands 99.9% germ-free", but both products lacked any evidence to support these claims. Also mentioned was a silicone baby teether in the shape of a mushroom, advertised as "helping the development of a baby's mouth structure". Unfortunately the mushroom head of the soother can flip around, creating a very tight suction which can block a child's nose and mouth, causing suffocation.

The next topic covered was the use of social media by regulators and companies to communicate about product safety. **Nina Križnik** from Zveza potrošnikov Slovenije (Slovene Consumer Association) said that regulators have until now mainly used conventional ways of communication and have only recently started using platforms like Facebook and Twitter. "But for the younger generation, TikTok and Instagram are far more popular, and are actually integral parts of everyday life for young people." She thinks that messages on product safety should be short, concise, and attention grabbing. This means converting traditional long-format articles into condensed content.

Ugochi Obidiegwu – Social Development Strategist and Founder of The Safety Chic (a child safety social enterprise) and UGIP Foundation (non-profit organization) – gave three priorities for social media messaging:

- It must educate: pick out simple sentences that summarise safety information.
- It must inspire: share new breakthroughs in product safety.
- It must entertain: bring a message in an attention-grabbing way. Use humour, images and videos where appropriate.

The third topic covered was the misuse of products being promoted on social media. **Mihaela-Magdalena Margel** – Web Communication Consultant at the European Commission's Product Safety Unit – gave the example of an art supplies manufacturer whose coloured crayons were incorrectly being used by children as a makeup tool. The company took a decisive action to communicate that this was wrong, while also grasping the new business opportunity and launching their own brand of makeup crayons for children.

The next set of discussions covered banned or dangerous products that are nevertheless being heavily promoted on social media. **Elizabeth Iberico Robles** – Head of department at ASPEC (social organisation promoting consumer rights in Peru) – gave an example from her country of a miracle pill that would help a person lose five kilos in a month with no lifestyle changes. She said that in this case Instagram was used to alert ASPEC and consumers in general about this product. "This shows that everyone has the potential to be an influencer."

Akshay Yadav – Teaching Associate at National Law School of India University – gave the example of e-cigarettes. Despite being totally banned in India, they are still offered for sale on many social media platforms, although more discretely than openly. Given the massive size of social media platforms and the overwhelming amount of data on them, he thinks this is where AI technologies can help, by identifying and red-flagging banned products, as well as spurious or counterfeit products.

Mihaela-Magdalena Margel pointed out that the Safety Gate receives daily alerts of dangerous skin lightening and teeth whitening products. Some contain mercury, which can damage the kidneys, brain and nervous system and may harm unborn children if used by a pregnant woman. She said it's vital that influencers are made aware of the Safety Gate database, and are encouraged to spread information about unsafe products on their channels.

Also covered was the role of consumer reviews and comments. It was agreed that AI could be useful here, to detect certain keywords indicating a potential product safety issue, so that an institution can know where to respond. At the same time, there is great value in ordinary people engaging and sharing the right information.

The panel rounded off with a discussion of the takeaways from the brainstorming on profiling the consumer of 2050 that happened in small groups earlier in the event and what they, as young ambassadors for product safety, see as priorities:

> 1. Set up a youth advisory board that will meet periodically to synthesise current insights on consumer protection;

> 2. Map out a product safety policy that will address the impact of e-commerce on general health and mental health for now and the future;

> 3. Institutionalise child safety education for children, parents and teachers so that it is carried out with stakeholders' engagement from top to bottom;

> 4. Develop a social media communication strategy to increase safety awareness of the public on product safety.
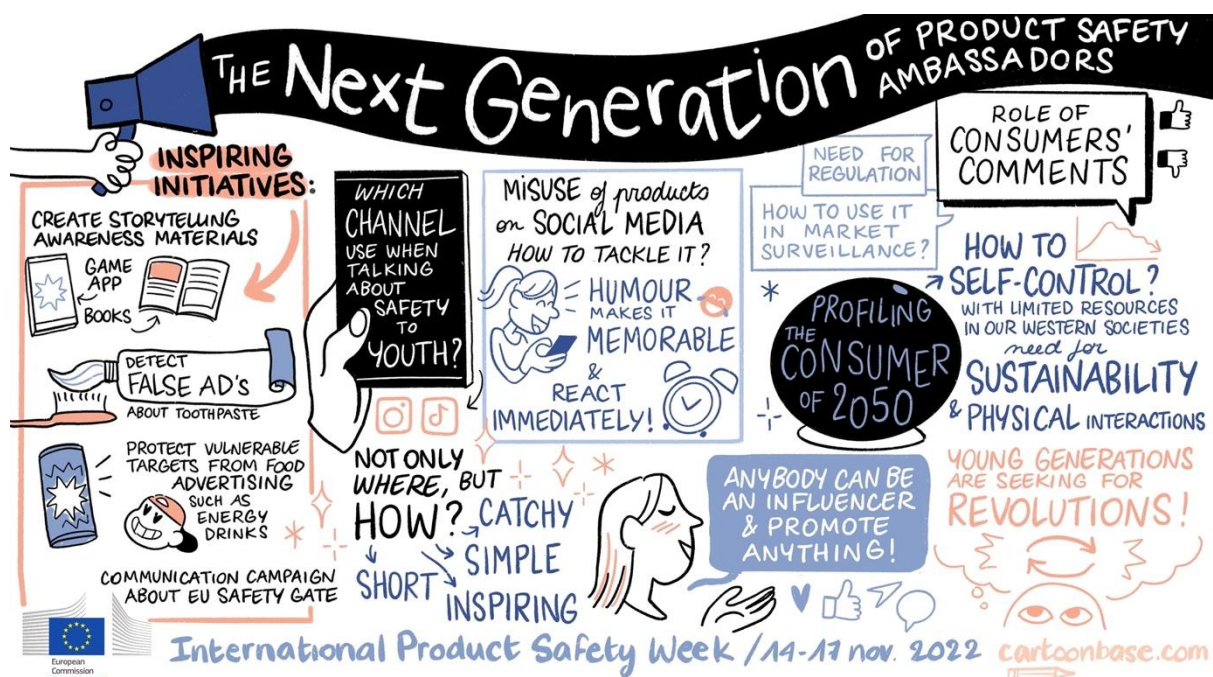
Closing the session, **Teresa Moreira,** remarked that "this final panel with the new generation of product safety ambassadors was an inspiration. I think all of us feel extremely touched by their input and suggestions. We have seen how social media and consumption habits are shifting the way consumers interact with businesses. Governments will therefore need to rekindle their education and

information campaigns for young consumers and incorporate their interests and needs in public policies."

In her wrap-up of the whole conference, **Pinuccia Contino** was impressed by how the panel discussions and networking opportunities expressed how much concern there is for the health and safety of consumers. "I was struck by the fact that all the challenges and advances we discussed come from an inclusive and human-centric approach." She was also in awe of the energy and collaboration that is being invested in innovative product safety projects, cooperation activities, and inclusive actions, not only in Europe, but everywhere in the world.

"Online sales have made our lives easier," she remarked, "but they have also brought many dangerous products into many more consumers' hands. No product, as innocent as it may look, is safe by nature. That's why we need to implement Safety by Design for All."

Ms Contino was also pleased that the event discussed how new technologies and sales channels are bringing new aspects into account surrounding mental health issues, diversity, and gender. "The overall picture of product safety gets more complex. This requires more and more collaboration among the different actors, jurisdictions and globally. I am glad to see that this event was the perfect catalyst for this kind of cooperation."