



Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy
5th Session, 5 - 6 July 2021, Geneva, Switzerland and online

Consumer Protection Needs of Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Consumers in Connection with Public Utilities

**Monday, 5 July 2021 (11:30 - 13:00 and 15:00 - 15:30)
Palais des Nations, Room XVIII (First Floor) and online (Interprefy)**

Access by consumers to essential goods and services, and the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers are two of the legitimate needs that the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection are intended to meet.¹ They are particularly relevant in connection with public utilities and against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis.

The note by the UNCTAD secretariat² provides a framework to better identify the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers. It summarizes the most salient aspects of consumer policies to attend their needs in the public utilities sector: access, special protection measures, information and education, and dispute resolution and redress. The note presents the principles for the provision of public utilities directed to the private sector: regularity, quality of service, affordability, and good business practices. It then reports on specific measures taken to protect vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers of public utilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by a brief conclusion and some policy recommendations.

To facilitate this interactive discussion, the secretariat raises the following questions:

- (a) What are the most pressing consumer protection needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers in connection with public utilities?
- (b) What are some of the policy-making tools and processes that could most effectively attend those needs, particularly in developing countries? Which evaluation criteria are suitable?
- (c) How can new technologies assist regulators to resolving the relevant issues regarding vulnerable consumer groups?
- (d) How might UNCTAD better contribute to support its membership, especially, developing countries and least developed countries, attending consumer protection needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers in connection with public utilities?

¹ [A/RES/70/186](#)

² [TD/B/C.I/CPLP/22](#)

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WORK PROGRAMME

11:30 - 11:40 **Presentation by UNCTAD secretariat**

11:40 - 12:40 **Speakers**

- Ms. Ana Catarina Fonseca, Director-General of the Consumer Directorate-General, Portugal
- Ms. Thezi Mabuza, Deputy Commissioner, National Consumer Commission, South Africa
- Ms. Shivani Sothirachagan, Researcher, Standards Malaysia
- Ms. Helena Leurent, Director General, Consumers International
- Mr. Mark Williams, Manager, Digital Development Practice, World Bank - technologies

12:40 - 13:00 **Interactive debate**

15:00 - 15:30 **Interactive debate (continued)**

Delegates wishing to speak during the session are invited to inform the UNCTAD secretariat accordingly by contacting Dr. Ying Yu (ying.yu@unctad.org) and Mr. Arnau Izaguerri (arnau.izaguerri@unctad.org).