



Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy
7th Session, 3 – 4 July 2023, Geneva, Switzerland and online

Roundtable on:
Consumer protection and the transition to clean energy
Monday, 3 July 2023 (11:30 - 13:00)
Palais des Nations, Room XIX (Third Floor) and online

The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection¹ recognize the legitimate needs of consumers to access essential goods and services and to the promotion of sustainable consumption, among others. The guidelines also contain recommendations on areas of essential concern for the health and well-being of consumers, including energy.² This should be understood in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals which aim to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.³

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Fifteenth Session declaration, the Bridgetown Covenant (2021)⁴, identified three major global challenges – inequality and vulnerability; climate change and environmental degradation and the widening digital divide and the uneven speed of digital transformation (part II, paragraphs 22-37). Under the goal of “Transforming to a more sustainable and more resilient economy”, paragraph 71 states that “Transforming to a climate resilient and a more sustainable and more resilient economy requires decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions diversifying towards more sustainable energy. This will require capacity-building and investment to support developing countries in building enabling infrastructure, human capital skills and adopting environment-friendly technologies that enhance efficiency of current sources of energy and promote a sustainable energy transition, as well as the medium-term rationalization and phasing out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption, while providing targeted support for the poorest”.

¹ A/RES/70/186.

² Paragraph 76: “Member States should promote universal access to clean energy and formulate, maintain or strengthen national policies to improve the supply, distribution and quality of affordable energy to consumers according to their economic circumstances. Consideration should be given to the choice of appropriate levels of service, quality and technology, regulatory oversight, the need for awareness-raising programmes and the importance of community participation”.

³ Sustainable Development Goal 7: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7>.

⁴ https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/td541add2_en.pdf.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁵, signed in Paris in 2016, acknowledged that clean energy can reduce emissions and help achieve global climate goals.

The recent global cost-of-living crisis has seriously impacted energy access and caused rising energy prices, recommending that, amongst others, “Governments must identify and address bottlenecks in renewable energy supply to foster clean energy and economic growth and leverage opportunities for a just transition”⁶.

In this context, safeguarding countries’ commitments to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require significant efforts from all involved stakeholders. Therefore, it is necessary to promote public awareness and education to encourage greater participation in the global effort to transition to clean and sustainable energy sources. Empowering consumers with information on clean energy can enable them to make more sustainable decisions.

This round table will reflect on the challenges and possibilities to address consumers’ needs in the clean energy transition process.

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

- (a) What are consumers’ most pressing needs regarding the clean energy transition, and how can these be better measured and tracked?
- (b) How can policy and regulatory frameworks governing the energy system and its transition towards clean sources be better aligned with consumers’ legitimate needs?
- (c) How can UNCTAD support developing countries in addressing consumers’ needs in connection with the clean energy transition?

⁵ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

⁶ Global impact of war in Ukraine: Energy crisis (brief no.3), Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, August 2022 - <https://unctad.org/publication/global-impact-war-ukraine-energy-crisis>.

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WORK PROGRAMME

11:30 - 11:35

Opening Remarks

Ms. Teresa Moreira, Head, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch,
UNCTAD

11:35 - 12:20

Speakers

Panelists

- Ms. Ana Catarina Fonseca, Director-General, Consumer Directorate-General, Portugal
- Mr. Willard Mwemba, Director and Chief Executive, Competition Commission, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
- Ms. Helena Leurent, Director General, Consumers International
- Ms. Julie Hunter, COPOLCO advisory group, Committee on Consumer Policy, International Organization for Standardization

12:20 - 13:00

Interactive debate

Delegates wishing to speak during the session are invited to inform the UNCTAD secretariat accordingly, by contacting Ms. Ana Cipriano (ana.cipriano@un.org).