

**9th United Nations Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection
Room XIX, Palais des Nations
Geneva
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Protecting and empowering consumers in the circular economy

Presentation

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Briefing Note for Speaking Engagements

Event

9th United Nations Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection

Panel: Roundtable on “Protecting and empowering consumers in the circular economy”

10 July 2025, 15:00 – 16:30 CEST, Geneva

Background Information

15:05 – 15:50 | Panel Interventions (Duration: 45 minutes)

Ms. Jacqueline Alvarez (UNEP) 6-7 minutes

Contextualizes the circular economy, greenwashing, and global consumer rights based on the work of UNEP.

Given UNEP’s role as the leading global authority on the environment, what approaches can be taken at the multilateral level to ensure that reliable product sustainability information is available across global value chains and that it translates into increased consumer rights as well as affordable and inclusive access to sustainable products and services?

1. Opening context (0.5 mins)

- UNEP has a unique mandate to guide the shift toward sustainable consumption and production globally through its One Planet Network – a global community of practitioners, policymakers and experts.
- We are at a tipping point: climate, biodiversity, and pollution crises are converging—and transforming value chains is central to addressing them.
- Access to reliable and transparent product sustainability information based on a life-cycle approach is critical for empowering consumers and accelerating this transformation.

2. The challenge (0.5 mins)

- Currently, product sustainability information is inconsistent, non-standardized, and unequally distributed across regions and sectors.
- This creates confusion, undermines trust, and limits consumer power to make informed, sustainable choices.

3. Multilateral approaches (2 mins)

- UNEP and UNCTAD have partnered on a joint initiative to align consumer protection and information policies with the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in climate, biodiversity and pollution. These include the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- MEAs and consumer protection frameworks share important touchpoints – especially in promoting sustainable consumption, improving access to reliable information, and shaping consumer behavior.
- As a key outcome of UNEP’s and UNCTAD’s joint initiative, a newly published report highlights actionable recommendations for consumer protection agencies and proposed next steps for MEA secretariats and international organizations.
- 2 key takeaways:
 - o Encourage collaboration between consumer protection agencies and MEA secretariats to

- strengthen public awareness and provide technical assistance to consumer protection stakeholders to support national implementation.
- Embed sustainability principles and the right to information into consumer protection policies and frameworks and align them with MEA implementation to promote informed choices, responsible business conduct, and more sustainable markets.

4. Digital tools (2 mins)

- To leap frog digitalization in the space of consumer information is a game changer. Digital Product information systems, such as Digital Product Passports (DPPs), hold significant potential for increase sustainability and driving the circular economy forward, as well as increasing transparency, traceability, innovation, efficiency, and sustainability. They have the potential to reduce costs, create new market opportunities (giving a second life to a product), and support new business models. They also empower decision-makers and help build trust in product information disclosures, encouraging sustainable consumption.
- To unlock the potential Digital Product Information Systems (DPIS), harmonization and interoperability is central. A wide variety of stakeholders must be engaged, ranging from different regions, countries, and sectors. UNEP, with strategic partners, is developing a Global Framework for DPIS, which is vital for addressing the challenges of fragmented approaches, ensuring interoperability, and that data is accessible, understandable, and usable for all stakeholders – companies, consumers, and regulators.
- By harmonizing efforts and ensuring the transparency of product sustainability data, we empower consumers with the information they need to make informed decisions.

5. Affordability (1 min)

- By harmonizing sustainability standards, cross-border trade in sustainable products is facilitated – making them more affordable in developing markets.
- UNEP is also supporting governments to enhance sustainable public procurement (SPP), integrate ecolabels criteria into SPP policies, and harmonize ecolabels criteria for strategic sectors, creating predictable demand and reducing costs through economic of scale. ([EcoAdvance project](#), [OPN Sustainable Public Procurement Programme](#))
- A major four-year [study](#) was recently conducted by France’s National Consumer Institute (INC) and UFC Que Choisir, analyzing 413 products across 28 comparative tests covering detergents, hygiene products, cosmetics, and paints (2020–2024).
- It concluded that products carrying the EU Ecolabel are, in 82% of the test cases, as affordable—or even cheaper—than conventional alternatives.
- For governments, institutions, and consumers in the EU striving for sustainability without compromising affordability, these findings provide data-backed justification for prioritizing EU Ecolabel-certified products.
- They offer a more environmentally and health-friendly alternative while remaining financially accessible to consumers.

6. Final message (0.5 mins)

- International Organizations such as UNEP and UNCTAD must act as convenors to guide the harmonized and joint transition towards sustainable consumption and production.
- By embedding sustainability information into the DNA of the global economy and ensuring sustainable products are affordable, we empower consumers, protect the environment, and ensure that no one is left behind.

15:50 – 16:25 | Interactive Debate + Q&A (Duration: 40 minutes)

If no questions from the floor: moderator poses 2–3 follow up questions

“How do we balance regulation and innovation when combating greenwashing?”

- Not applicable to UNEP.

“Can you give an example of a successful behaviour shift initiative in your country?”

- Not applicable to UNEP.

“What partnerships have proven most effective in making circular products affordable?”

- Refer to “Affordability” above.

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