

10 July 2025, 15:00 - 16:30 (CEST)**Geneva, Switzerland****Venue: Room XIX, E-Building, Palais des Nations**

Protecting and empowering consumers in the circular economy

The transition to a circular economy presents unique challenges and opportunities for consumer protection policies. The Sustainable Development Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production is significantly off track, with none of its 11 targets projected to be met by 2030. Simultaneously, consumer protection frameworks must evolve to address issues such as greenwashing, product safety, and privacy concerns associated with new circular business models. As central actors in the economy, consumers' choices and trust can catalyze circular practices, reduce environmental impacts, and create more equitable and sustainable markets. Balancing these dynamics is crucial to ensuring fair markets and empowering consumers to participate in a sustainable economic future actively.

Consumers face different obstacles that limit their ability to engage meaningfully in the circular economy. Greenwashing continues to undermine trust, with vague or misleading environmental claims obscuring the true impact of products. A lack of clear, standardized information about product durability, reparability, and environmental footprint makes informed decision-making difficult. Safety concerns around second-hand or refurbished goods and privacy risks in product-as-a-service models further complicate the landscape. Meanwhile, unclear ownership rights, inconsistent warranties, high upfront costs, and limited availability of sustainable products—particularly in disadvantaged communities—contribute to exclusion and harm. Consumer protection policies are essential for combating misleading environmental claims, often referred to as greenwashing, which undermine trust in sustainable markets.

Adopting circular economy practices is further hindered by low consumer awareness and resistance to shifting from traditional ownership models to shared or leased alternatives. Many consumers prioritize convenience over sustainability, reinforcing reliance on disposable products. Addressing these behavioral and structural challenges requires education, incentives, and standardized labelling to guide informed choices. Policymakers, businesses, and consumer associations must collaborate to establish transparent frameworks that promote accountability, ensure clear sustainability standards, and protect consumer rights.





Questions for discussion

- (i) What measures should be implemented to ensure consumers have access to reliable, standardized information about sustainable products and to combat greenwashing?
- (ii) How can governments, international organizations and businesses ensure that circular economy products and services are affordable and accessible to consumers across diverse economic and geographic contexts?
- (iii) What strategies can be employed to shift consumer behaviour from ownership-based consumption to sustainable models, such as sharing, leasing, or product-as-a-service?

Programme

15:00 - 15:05 **Presentation by the UNCTAD secretariat**

15:05 - 15:50 **Speakers**

- Mr. Andres Herrera, National Director, Consumers National Service, Chile
- Ms. Yvonne Stein, Deputy Director, Consumer Policy Division, Ministry of Finance, Sweden
- Ms. Jacqueline Alvarez, Chief, Chemicals and Health Branch, Industry and Economy Division, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- Mr. Pär Larshans, Co-Chair of International Chamber of Commerce's Working Group on Circular Economy, International Chamber of Commerce
- Mr. Pradeep Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International

15:50 - 16:30 **Interactive debate**

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