

Press Release

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Consumer Organisations Worldwide Call on G20 to tackle Digital Rights

Consumers International and vzbv hand over Ten Recommendations to the G20 to protect Consumers in the Digital World

Consumer organisations worldwide have issued a call to the G20 to address the issue of digital consumer rights. They ask the G20 to develop legislation, incentives and guidelines to ensure all people can benefit from the digital economy. This should include ensuring the highest standards of online security and data protection.

As the world becomes increasingly digitised, too many consumers are concerned that their rights online are being left behind. Consumers International (CI), the international federation of consumer organisations and the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv), have developed ten recommendations to address this issue.

The recommendations for how to protect consumers in the digital world were handed over to Gerd Billen, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV), at a G20 Consumer Summit in Berlin today, on World Consumer Rights Day.

“Digital products and services do not stop at borders. For example, worldwide businesses collect data regardless of where consumers live. Therefore we need a reliable national and international regulatory framework to protect consumers in the digital world. To measure the progress of consumer protection in the digital world, vzbv recommends to the G20 an annual investigation based on meaningful indicators for consumer protection and trust”, says Klaus Müller, Executive Director, vzbv.

Amanda Long, CI, Director General, says: "It's consumers who drive growth in the digital economy and that growth could easily stall if they don't trust the products and services they are being offered. Both governments and businesses have a crucial role in ensuring this doesn't happen and that consumers everywhere can trust the digital world around them."

The historic G20 Consumer Summit is the first G20 event that focuses entirely on issues that affect consumers. Entitled 'Building a Digital World Consumers can Trust', the Summit is co-hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV), CI and vzbv.

The Summit brings together G20 secretaries of state, business leaders and senior leaders from consumer organisations to tackle the issue of consumer rights online and to discuss how to build a digital world consumers can trust.

The Ten Recommendations to the G20:

1. Equal rights offline and online

Regulatory frameworks should be created in all G20 countries to protect consumers' rights equally offline and online and address new challenges arising from consumer use of digital technology.

2. Digital providers held to account

Digital providers should be held responsible for upholding digital consumer protection and countries should have independent oversight bodies.

3. Everyone has access to affordable and good quality internet

A concerted, co-ordinated effort by governments, regulators and business must be made to ensure all consumers have access to an open, affordable and good quality internet connection. Access services should respect the principle of net neutrality.

4. Key information about products and services

Information about digital products and providers should enable consumers to quickly acknowledge critical information, with anything that would be beyond consumers' reasonable expectations highlighted.

5. Clear and fair terms of use

New developments must respect consumers' rights and the principle of fair use, and be clearly communicated to consumers so that they can make informed decisions regarding the purchase and use of connected products. It should be clear which entity is responsible for performance and security at each point of product delivery and during the full lifespan of the product.

6. Digital education and awareness

Digital education and awareness should support consumers to be able to make informed choices and manage risks and opportunities. Companies should develop systems to make it easier for consumers to understand risks and opportunities about their products and services online.

7. Protection against fraud and abuse

International standards should be developed to ensure companies provide essential security updates for all digital products for a specified and reasonable period after sale. Governments should regulate to ensure that financial data, personal data and any personally identifiable information be stored and transmitted to the highest reasonable standards of security based on the risk to consumers. There should be clear rules of liability, and companies should be incentivised to adopt best practice standards such as privacy and security by design.

8. Control over personal data and privacy

Consumers should be able to exert control over their personal data and privacy preferences and it should be clear how algorithms that affect the quality, price or allow access to a service make decisions about them. Consumers should have the ability to challenge automated decisions.

9. Effective redress

Effective redress in the online world should not be less than those available for other forms of commerce. Aggregate information with respect to complaints and their resolutions should be made public and appropriate mechanisms to solve mass claims situations should exist.

10. Competitive markets and meaningful choices

Competitive markets should be promoted to give consumers a meaningful choice of digital providers and the ability to easily switch should be enhanced.

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Notes for Editors:

- World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) is celebrated annually on 15th of March. It marks the anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's address to the US congress on 15th of March 1962, in which he formally addressed the issue of consumer rights. He was the first world leader to do so.
- Consumers International brings together over 200 member organisations in more than 100 countries to empower and champion the rights of consumers everywhere. It is their voice in international policy-making forums and the global marketplace to ensure they are treated safely, fairly and honestly.
- The Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) represents the interests of more than 80 million consumers in Germany. The vzbv acts as the umbrella organisation for 40 German consumer associations: the consumer centres of each of Germany's 16 federal states and 24 consumer policy organisations. The vzbv fights for fair markets, safe products and clear information.