



 **#ConsumerDay22**
#EESConsumers

Conclusions of the 23rd edition of **European Consumer Day 2022**

Empowering consumers for a more sustainable world

17 November 2022 | Brussels & online



European Economic
and Social Committee

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Main conclusions of European Consumer Day



European Consumer Day 2022

Empowering consumers for a more sustainable world

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- We need to **close the gap** between consumers' intentions to act sustainably and their actions. Europeans understand the seriousness of the environmental crisis and know they need to change their behaviour. The **biggest obstacle is price**; environmentally friendly products cost more.
- To help consumers save money – and reduce waste – manufacturers need to **make their products repairable**. Social initiatives such as mobile repair cafés promote sustainability, circularity, social inclusion and can help create secondary markets for spare parts.
- Consumers want to know **how long a product will last** but have **trouble finding such information**.
- Giving consumers **clear and accurate information** about products and the effect their purchasing decisions have on their carbon footprint can **empower them to make more sustainable choices** and contribute to the green transition.
- Consumers need to be given **the means to act for a more sustainable world**. The challenge needs to be attacked from many angles, including **robust legislation** and **space for voluntary engagement**.

Introduction

Dear participants,

The EESC has been organising its European Consumer Day since 1999. Traditionally, this annual event has taken place in March. Given that the European Commission, in cooperation with the rotating Presidency of the Council, is now also organising a Consumer Summit at that time of year, the EESC has decided to hold its European Consumer Day later in the year. This decision was based on a desire not to have two major events coming one after the other, as well as a wish to feed into the debate ahead of the Consumer Summit.

In order to keep up the momentum between the two events, the theme chosen for the European Consumer Day, namely “Empowering consumers for a more sustainable world” was chosen in such a way as to be consistent with the topics of the Consumer Summit scheduled for the first quarter of 2023.

The 2022 European Consumer Day was structured around inspiring stories, debates in several round tables, and an institutional response to set out the prospects for the coming year. The aim was to give civil society a voice, strengthen synergies between institutions, raise questions and move forward.



Last but not least, it has been decided to dedicate this edition of the European Consumer Day to the head of the secretariat of the section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), Luís Lobo, who passed away too early. Thank you Luís for all the work, time, energy and efforts you invested in the consumer protection policy. Thanks to your commitment, the European Consumer Day became one of the most popular EESC annual flagship events. As you would say: “Please, go on” and be reassured that the INT Section will do so.

**Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption
European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

Facts and figures



SPEAKERS

16 speakers, including:
1 State Secretary
1 European Commissioner
1 Member of the European Parliament
2 Directors



AUDIENCE

On site:
54 participants

On Interactio:
81 persons connected



LIVE STREAM

231 visits, 168 visitors, 1203 actions (pages consulted, downloads, diverse researches on the event's webpage).



TWITTER

36 tweets
68 retweets
177 likes



*Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia,
EESC member and moderator of the day*



Speakers of the morning sessions and EESC members



Participant in the meeting room



European Parliament and 3 others

Programme

Moderator of the day: Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia, EESC member

9.00 – 9.30 a.m. Welcome and coffee

9.30 – 10.10 a.m. Opening

- **Christa Schweng**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- **Didier Reynders**, European Commissioner for Justice
- **Biljana Borzan**, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur for the ongoing opinion on 'Empowering consumers for the green transition'
- **Jan Strakoš**, Director of Trade licensing and Consumer Legislation Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czech Republic

10.10 – 10.30 a.m. Key note speech

- **Philippe Moati**, Professor of economics at University Paris Cité, co-founder of l'ObSoCo (Society and Consumption Observatory)

Questions and answers

Round tables 1 and 2: Empowering the consumer

10.30 – 11.30 a.m. Round table 1

Tech for good

Rapporteur: **Christophe Lefèvre**, EESC member

- **Katarina Wangler Björk**, Applied Impact Partnership Manager, Doconomy, Sweden
- **Monique Goyens**, Director-General of BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation)

Debate with participants

11.30 – 12.30 a.m. Round table 2

The right to reparability

Rapporteur: **Dragica Martinović Džamonja**, EESC member

- **Simon Frémineur**, Project Manager Interreg Sharepair, Repair Together
- **Anthony Rosborough**, Researcher at the European University Institute, Florence

Debate with participants

Round tables 3 and 4: From consumer to *consum'actor*

2.30 – 3.30 p.m.

Round table 3

The functional economy

*Rapporteur: **Thierry Libaert**, EESC member*

- **Marc Diefenbach**, Co-founder of Rhinopaq, Germany
- **Coralie Muylaert**, ICHEC Research Fellow, Brussels Management School

Debate with participants

3.30 – 4.30 p.m.

Round table 4

Consumption and health

*Rapporteur: **Dragica Wauthier Robyns**, EESC member*

- **Guillaume Culot**, Project manager, Refresh Brussels
- **Francelyne Marano**, Professor Emeritus of cellular biology and toxicology, University Paris Cité

Debate with participants

4.30 – 4.50 p.m.

Summary of the round table discussions, given by the four rapporteurs

4.50 – 5.05 p.m.

Response from the institutions

- **Natasa Ristic Davidson**, State Secretary, Sweden
- **Nils Behrndt**, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), European Commission
- **Alain Coheur**, President of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, EESC

Speakers' contributions

OPENING

Christa Schweng, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Over the years, the EESC has established a very fruitful working relationship with the European Commission and the European Parliament on consumer issues.



The EESC's European Consumer Day enables active engagement with consumer representatives and policymakers. The 2022 event focused on empowering consumers for a more sustainable world. This is one of the key objectives of the Commission's New Consumer Agenda. The EESC supports the priorities of this agenda and welcomes the different initiatives to implement it at European and at Member State levels.

Our citizens, businesses and communities face pressing challenges. Climate change, raw material shortages and the emergence of new diseases

show that our path forward must be more sustainable for the planet – both in Europe and across the world.

We must work together at a pace that enables consumers and businesses to take ownership of the green transition: consumers need adequate information, such as a reparability index displayed on product labels. In addition, the right to repair should be promoted as an alternative to replacement. Another important aspect is the fight against the premature obsolescence of goods. Here, the EESC goes further than the Commission. It feels that it is not enough to inform the consumer that goods are not repairable and calls for the practice of intentionally making products that cannot be repaired to be banned.

We now face one of the biggest changes in our economies and societies. Let's join forces to make the green transition a success – for a greener and more sustainable economy and society. The conclusions of this day must feed into the debate on the road to the Consumer Summit which will take place next spring.

Last but not least, the EESC decided to dedicate this year's European Consumer Day to Luís Lobo, EESC Head of Unit, Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, who passed away recently, as a tribute to his great contribution to consumer policy over so many years.

Didier Reynders, European Commissioner for Justice

Empowering consumers for a more sustainable world: the EESC could not have chosen a better focus for its European Consumer Day.

Achieving the Green Deal objectives requires the contribution of every single European. More and more consumers are becoming aware that they can make a difference by adapting their consumption patterns.

It is crucial to know how products are made to ensure that they last longer and can be repaired, and consumers must be able to obtain reliable information about the products they buy.



Although consumers want to contribute to the green transition, there are obstacles along the way. This is why they must be empowered to act.

The least we can do is ensure that the information that consumers read about the sustainability of products is accurate. Greenwashing is one of the issues most often flagged up by European consumers. Greenwashing affects about 86% of consumers who believe they are buying green products. It undermines consumers' confidence and makes them suspicious about environmental claims. One of the solutions to this problem is responsible advertising. Environmental claims

must comply with EU legislation. It is therefore essential to have strong legislation to protect consumers against greenwashing and provide redress for people who fall prey to it.

Another piece of the puzzle is ensuring that consumers can reuse and repair the products they buy. A number of planned obsolescence practices should be banned, for instance those which entail shortening a product's lifespan for commercial purposes. The right to repair should be promoted rather than replacement.

The last piece of the puzzle is to ensure that there are green products available on the market. The ecodesign proposal would save European consumers EUR 120 billion in energy costs. The Commission recently proposed making sustainable products the norm in the European Union. In addition, thanks to the [Sustainable Consumption Pledge](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/consumers/consumer-protection-policy/sustainable-consumption-pledge_en)¹ introduced in 2021, companies can commit to reducing the footprint of their products.

Consumers need to be given the means to act for a more sustainable world. The challenge needs to be attacked from many angles, including robust legislation and space for voluntary engagement.

The Commission expects the ideas, experiences, proposals and new commitments which can be taken by various stakeholders to go further than current legislation and is preparing for future developments. It looks forward to the outcomes of the discussions taking place during this year's European Consumer Day.

Biljana Borzan, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur for the ongoing opinion on Empowering consumers for the green transition



Consumers are very interested in the environmental impacts of the products and services they buy. The great majority of consumers are ready to pay more for products that are more beneficial for the environment. However, a sustainable choice must not only be available to those who can afford to pay for such products; it should be available to everybody. Making the choice to buy a sustainable product must be easy to make and affordable.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/consumers/consumer-protection-policy/sustainable-consumption-pledge_en

The proposal on [Empowering consumers for the green transition](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/empowering-consumer-green-transition)² aims to provide consumers with an easy choice and to ban practices that mislead them and harm the environment. Producers have to take their share of responsibility in protecting the environment. An interesting point of the legislation is that it provides clarity for consumers who face a jungle of environmental claims. Every consumer should have clear and easily accessible information on the product they buy. For example, 86% of consumers would like to know how long the product they buy will last but have problems finding such information. Information on product lifespan should be accessible to consumers and displayed on the label. We should also protect consumers from premature obsolescence. In addition, we have to guarantee the right to repair. A lot of products break down due to design issues that could easily have been avoided. Consumers also want to know how easy it will be to get products repaired and this will create competition among producers to make more sustainable products. A culture of repair, reuse and recycling can also create more jobs.

Jan Strakoš, Director of Trade Licensing and Consumer Legislation Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czech Republic

The Czech government is fully aware of the negative impact of excessive consumption and waste on the environment.



Sustainability is a priority of the EU's internal and external core policies. Ensuring reparability of products requires a holistic approach: repair services should be accessible and affordable. We should ask ourselves whether the aim of legislators is to protect consumers from having to buy new products, or to motivate them to act more responsibly. We should first see whether the existing legislation is insufficient and only then look for a legal solution. New rules and regulations must not consider only the environment, at the expense of social and economic factors. Introducing new measures could make sustainable

products more expensive. This could lower living standards and result in less empathy for environmental problems. A balanced and evidence-based approach is needed, taking into account the consumer, trade, health and environmental impacts of each measure or decision.

2 <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/empowering-consumer-green-transition>

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Philippe Moati, Professor of Economics at University Paris Cité, co-founder of the Society and Consumption Observatory (ObSoCo)



Europeans have grasped the seriousness of the environmental crisis and the fact that it is linked to their consumption behaviour. However, people are reluctant to make sacrifices. For example, 69% of Europeans say they are willing to pay more for their energy to make the energy transition happen, but only 9% of them are willing to pay 10% more. This is a very low number.

This means that there is a “green gap” between our intentions and our actions, and one of the major obstacles to people acting more responsibly towards the environment is price. To encourage responsible consumption, people can be shown

that environmentally-friendly products are better for their health. This is one of the reasons why people buy organic products. Similarly, people buy second-hand goods because they are cheaper and better for the environment. In this way, individual and collective benefits can be combined.

A survey by ObSoCo found that people think the state bears the greatest responsibility for fighting climate change, followed by companies and, lastly, individuals. The state can use the carrot and stick approach in the form of bans, taxes and subsidies. We are already going down this path, but more can be done.

The paradox we face is that we live in a society of hyper consumption. Our economic model relies on companies getting consumers to make purchases continuously, and companies know which buttons to push to trigger our desire to buy. If we want to encourage more responsible consumption, telling people to consume less will not work.

A shift to a functional economy is one possible solution. This involves taking the focus from owning products, and moving it to creating useful effects for customers. Companies need to explore new ways of creating profit that are less goods-focused. But getting companies to change their business models is difficult, and this is where the state can intervene with the carrot and stick.

ROUND TABLES 1 AND 2: EMPOWERING THE CONSUMER

Round table 1

Tech for good

Rapporteur: **Christophe Lefèvre**, EESC member

Monique Goyens, Director-General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC)

Technology has brought enormous progress to society in the past and technological solutions are needed to decarbonise our economy. However, technological innovation, if funded with public money, needs to factor in individuals' perspectives to ensure that it contributes to the common good. We should avoid over-hyping technology as a solution when behavioural change can be just as effective and sometimes even faster. For instance, by eating less meat, each of us can reduce our carbon footprint quickly and effectively. This approach

should be preferred to the redesign of cattle feed, and would curtail methane production.



Technology also runs the risk of excluding those who are not digitally literate or who do not want to give up their privacy. It is crucial to provide solutions for these people so that they can still be part of society. Additionally, consumers need to be empowered to protect themselves from the various cyber risks. Currently, this is not the case.

Technology can also make people and markets more vulnerable as it results in an asymmetry between service providers and consumers. For instance, providers could decide what information

consumers see. Limited or filtered information would disrupt the foundation of the market economy and prevent consumers from making the most rational decisions for themselves. A consumer who lives in a “bubble” is the same as a person living in a “bubble”, which endangers democracy. For instance, filtered and targeted information could affect voting behaviour.

Finally, over-reliance on technology brings the risk of consumer frustration and dehumanisation. Chatbots are a good example of this. Instead, companies that invest in human interaction will be more sustainable in the long run, because consumers appreciate human interaction and feel that their concerns can be addressed more appropriately.

Katarina Wangler Björk, Applied Impact Partnership Manager, Doconomy, Sweden

[Doconomy](https://doconomy.com)³ is a Swedish start-up that democratises climate action. Their mobile application is able to show consumers how high the carbon footprint of their purchases is. It covers all electronic purchases. Creating transparency in this way can help close the gap between intentions and actions. Furthermore, companies need to be transparent to enable consumers to make decisions which are the least harmful to the environment.

3 <https://doconomy.com>



It should be as easy to understand climate change and carbon footprints as it is to understand weather reports. People should be able to follow climate and emission data daily. This goes beyond their own carbon footprint and covers companies, governments and even nations.

Currently, there is a huge lack of accountability regarding CO2 emissions. Knowledge about these emissions is limited and standards for calculating them are not consistent. By having uniform standards which are precise and comprehensible, financial transactions can be shifted towards more sustainable options.

While policy is important, consumers' lifestyles play a key role in achieving the goal of a world with zero CO2 emissions. Doconomy aims to address consumers' lifestyles and help them to make better decisions which not only benefit the environment, but also themselves. By doing so, consumers can become catalysts for the green transition.

[See presentation](#)⁴

Round table 2

The right to repair

*Rapporteur: **Dragica Martinović Džamonja**, EESC member*

Simon Frémineur, Project Manager Interreg Sharepair, Repair Together



The non-profit association [Repair Together](#)⁵ is a network of French-speaking repair cafés. They provide consumers with the option to repair their products, which decreases waste and prevents additional CO2 emissions. The association has four main objectives:

1. supporting the creation of new cafés;
2. looking after the existing network;
3. educating and training people;
4. campaigning against built-in obsolescence and supporting the right to repair.

Repair Together is part of the Right to Repair Europe coalition.

A repair café acts as a political, person-centric and volunteer-led initiative. They originated in the Netherlands and are usually organised once a month. Consumers can bring any objects, ranging from electronics and bicycles to clothing. Repair café volunteers fix them but also teach people how they can repair things

⁴ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/consumer_day_democratizing_climate_actionl.pdf

⁵ <https://repairtogether.be/en/>



make repair more accessible. This mobile repair café is a trailer that can be towed by a car, making it very flexible. Once it is set up and deployed, it provides several workspaces. Besides the repair function, the mobile repair café has a social function by bringing individuals together and creating a community of like-minded people.

Once Mr Frémineur's mobile café was ready, it toured the Belgian region of Wallonia in 2021. During this time, 54 repair sessions were conducted and nearly 300 objects repaired over a total of 150 hours. This avoided 1 tonne of waste and 7 tonnes of CO₂. Thus, the mobile repair café is proof that everyone can contribute to the reduction of waste. It also shows that people can easily switch to sustainable behaviour when they see the financial benefits.

[See presentation](#)⁶

Anthony Rosborough, Researcher at the European University Institute, Florence



The [Right to Repair](#)⁷ is a public interest movement that calls for consumers to have access to spare parts, tools and information to repair products and reduce their environmental impact. Launched in September 2019, it has expanded to 100 organisations in over 20 European countries. It helps to extend product lifespan, avoid waste and prevent built-in obsolescence, but also bolsters technological literacy and empowers users and remote communities. It encourages competition and the creation of a secondary market. By doing so, it facilitates innovation and increases consumer choice.

The EU has put forward a number of policy proposals enabling the right to repair. These policies have great potential to act as a model for worldwide repair-related policies. Despite these policy proposals, figures show that there is still much work to be done regarding reparability in Europe: 77% of EU consumers would rather

⁶ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/2-_simon-fremineur_repair-together.pdf

⁷ <https://repair.eu>

repair than buy a new item, but access to repair remains difficult. 79% of EU citizens think manufacturers should make it easier to repair digital devices or replace their parts. The average European produces 16 kg of e-waste each year, making it the highest in the world, while recycling rates vary significantly between Member States.

Some positive developments include the 2019 Ecodesign Directive. This requires manufacturers to provide parts, tools and information to professional repairers. However, one of its shortcomings is that it hinders access to repair for regular consumers and independent organisations. Thus, the directive needs to be updated to include all of these actors.

The recently adopted EU regulation aiming to standardise all USB charging points is a big step towards reducing e-waste but might also have some negative side effects. For instance, manufacturers could adopt wireless charging in their products more often, resulting in more e-waste since consumers need to purchase additional wireless charging ports. This example shows that policymakers and other stakeholders must consider all potential effects when writing legislation with the intention to reduce waste. Legislation should ensure that manufacturers follow the guidelines and prevent them from creating “alternative” solutions which do not solve the original issue.

Another resolution, namely the 2022/2015 RSP, shows that policymakers are aware of the topic and are pushing towards a stronger right to repair. Specifically, this resolution bolsters the role of independent repair organisations. While this is progress towards the right to repair, there is still a lot to be done. For instance, software updates need to be included in the repair process, as many products are de facto unusable when the latest software is not provided by the manufacturer. Other issues include legal obstacles such as intellectual property laws, trademarks and competition policy.

[See presentation](#)⁸

ROUND TABLES 3 AND 4: FROM CONSUMER TO CONSUM'ACTOR

Round table 3

The functional economy

Rapporteur: **Thierry Libaert**, EESC member

Marc Diefenbach, Co-founder of Rhinopaq, Germany



Rhinopaq⁹ was founded in July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the piles of cardboard boxes from online retailing. The idea was to make e-commerce more sustainable with the help of reusable and collapsible boxes. Figures show how serious a problem packaging is: every fourth tree cut down industrially is used for packaging and demand is rising, causing serious problems for the environment.

While there are reusable shipping solutions for larger goods, for instance containers or pallets, the amount of recyclable packaging for smaller

⁸ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/3_-_rosborough-right-to-repair.pdf

⁹ <https://www.rhinopaq.com>

goods remains very low. And even though reusable packaging contributes to less urban waste and to six of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, there is a lack of large-scale solutions in this sector.

Rhinopaq aims to address this issue by providing online shops with their reusable packages. They can be used when customers make online purchases and are asked if they want their goods to be delivered in reusable packaging. If so, it is up to the store whether they want to charge more for this. Once customers have received their goods, they fold the box and mail it back to Rhinopaq which sends it on to retailers.

The biggest cost factor in the process is shipping. To make reusable packaging more competitive and popular, sustainable packaging solutions could be subsidised by charging a fee for unsustainable options. Another issue facing the company is that they do not know where the boxes are sent. If they did, Rhinopaq could establish regional collection hubs and make the process more efficient.

While the idea of reusable packaging is interesting with large potential benefits, it only works if consumers can be convinced to use it and pay a potential premium. While in theory, consumers support sustainable solutions, in reality, they tend to choose the cheapest options, which are usually also the most unsustainable ones. To tackle this, sustainable solutions in general have to become cheaper while unsustainable solutions need to be more expensive and include external costs to the environment.

[See presentation](#)¹⁰

Coralie Muylaert, ICHEC Research Fellow, Brussels Management School



The functional economy is about selling a use and not a product. For instance, consumers can buy a mobility passport instead of a car. In this economy, it is in the interest of the company that owns the product to ensure that it has a longer lifespan, which should in turn reduce built-in obsolescence. The dematerialisation of the economy can then take place because fewer goods can meet the needs of all consumers. A company's success will then be measured based on the services it provides to their customers and the quality of those services. The number of products sold becomes irrelevant.

However, delivering a functional economy depends on whether consumers are able to change their behaviour. In order to successfully change consumers' minds, you have to know what they need and offer them solutions which are sustainable and comfortable at the same time. Only then can the gap between intentions and actions be narrowed down. According to several studies, consumers do have good intentions which benefit the environment. At the same time, many consumers believe that the consumption of goods equals happiness. In order to bring these contradicting views together, the functional economy and what it offers need to be presented as benefiting consumers. Highlighting its advantages, not just for the environment but also for consumers, will mean that consumers are more likely to change their minds and accept the functional economy as the new default.

10 https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/4_-_marc_diefenbach_-rhinopaq-eesc-public.pdf

There are already ways for consumers to act in a sustainable way. For instance, by buying products only when they are needed and only from stores with a proven track record of sustainable production processes.

Finally, socio-cultural factors play a big role in determining our behaviour. In today's materialised world, certain consumption patterns are used to display social status. Societal views need to shift so that sustainable consumption becomes admirable and popular. The "Good Food" or "Slow fashion" movements show that this shift can be achieved.

[See presentation](#)¹¹

Round table 4

Consumption and health

Rapporteur: **Wauthier Robyns**, EESC member

Guillaume Culot, Project manager, Refresh Brussels



[Refresh Brussels](#)¹² is a project that consists of a restaurant and 2200 m² rooftop garden in Ixelles, Brussels. It aims to be a model of urban agriculture. Its activities help integrate people into the labour market and provide training on the Farm to Fork Strategy. Their garden was created as part of the ERDF-funded [LagUM](#)¹³ project. One of the project partners is the Université Libre de Bruxelles, which is conducting research into urban gardening and its health benefits.

Furthermore, the garden is used to grow fruit, vegetables and other plants. As well as providing food, the garden acts as a laboratory to test the

economic viability of urban agro-ecology and its potential benefits for consumers. As a space where healthy food is grown and used locally, it contributes to raising awareness about urban agriculture. It is also used as an educational place, where teachers and students from local schools can learn, experiment and share.

On a scientific level, the garden is used to test methods that increase the nutritional content of the plants and to reduce the use of pest control. The latter can be achieved by growing hybrids which are more resistant and need fewer pesticides. By-products from local businesses are used as fertilisers, which in turn contributes to sustainability.

[See presentation](#)¹⁴

11 https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/5-_coralie_muyleart.pdf

12 <https://refreshbxl.com>

13 <https://refreshbxl.com/lagum>

14 https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/6_-_guillaume_culot_-_refresh_brussels_1.pdf

Francelyne Marano, Professor Emeritus of cellular biology and toxicology, Paris Cité University

Consumers need transparent information when choosing goods, especially household goods. Many products contain toxic ingredients and are only partly declared as such. This issue exists in many product categories, ranging from furniture to toys and decorative items.

There have been a variety of initiatives which tried to address this issue by providing consumers with the information they need. For instance, the “Scan4Chem” application, developed by the EU LIFE project “AskREACH”, provides information about substances of very high concern (SVHC) in consumer products. It



is being developed in 13 EU countries, including France. This initiative can increase transparency tremendously but also has its shortcomings, as it does not cover mixtures such as processed foods, inks, paints, cosmetics and hygiene products. Furthermore, the information the app provides is quite difficult for consumers to understand.

The Toxi-Score tries to fill the gap by providing information about products in an easy-to-understand way. It is based on the existing “NutriScore”, a 5-colour nutrition label. With this label, information can be accessed easily and without a mobile application. This helps consumers

to make informed choices when buying products which are potentially dangerous for them.

While the idea of a “Toxi-Score” sounds good, implementing a label like this requires a lot of research and expertise. This is why the French health and ecological transition ministry has asked the French Chemicals Agency to deploy the Toxi-Score and determine how it can be calculated for household products. By including experts at an early stage of the process, the authorities hope to implement the label as quickly as possible.

There is support for a Toxi-Score from the French League against Cancer which recommends extending it to all consumer products. This would be a milestone towards transparency in consumer goods and help consumers to make the right decision. Due to the complexity of the topic, involvement of various stakeholders, ranging from experts to consumers and EU legislators, is crucial.

[See presentation](#)¹⁵

15 https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/7_-_francelyne_marano_0.pdf

SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS BY THE FOUR RAPPORTEURS

Round table 1

Tech for good

Rapporteur: Christophe Lefèvre



New technologies need the appropriate frameworks to ensure that they contribute to the common good. Innovation is not always synonymous with progress. There are a number of risks linked to the use of technology, including dehumanisation through the use of chatbots, asymmetry between service providers and consumers, and exclusion of some groups in society.

Being aware of our purchases can help reduce the gap between our intentions and our actions. Information about climate change and transparency on individual CO2 emissions needs to be pushed forward and easily accessible, so everyone, including governments and countries, can make rational decisions to reduce their carbon footprint.

Round table 2

The right to repair

Rapporteur: Dragica Martinović Džamonja



Repair cafés are an easily accessible way for consumers to have goods repaired. They help reduce the negative impact of products on the environment, save consumers money and are an important social place where people can come together, support each other and learn to repair things themselves.

The Right to Repair is a public-interest movement that calls for greater access to the parts, tools and information needed to repair products. It originated in the US and has become a global movement with much action at EU level. Repair prolongs the lifespan of products, which in turns reduces their environmental impact and saves consumers money. However, for most people, access to repair remains difficult. Thus, it is important to not only provide consumers with an easily accessible repair option, but also to protect them against built-in obsolescence. This can be achieved by legislation that allows third parties to be included in the repair market.

Round table 3

The functional economy

Rapporteur: Thierry Libaert



Companies like Rhinopaq show that it is important to prioritise reuse of products in a circular economy. Legislation can help foster reusable packaging solutions and support innovative companies and start-ups like Rhinopaq. One approach to make these sustainable solutions more competitive and accessible would be to make unsustainable options more costly. This can be achieved by charging a fee for disposable packaging and supporting reusable packaging instead.

A functional economy can help support the use of sustainable products and contribute to a circular economy. The aim is to provide consumers with the most beneficial option which does not harm the environment. Public authorities can play an essential role in supporting the functional economy by promoting initiatives related to it and providing the necessary framework for it to function properly.

Round table 4

Consumption and health

Rapporteur: Wauthier Robyns



The Lagum urban agriculture site is an interactive research project. A dedicated team of volunteers grows vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs and sells them to local residents and restaurants. The project brings various local organisations together, including ULB and Brussels residents. Urban agriculture has many benefits, including the protection of biodiversity, education and promoting people's health. It is a project that can inspire people in other cities and help consumers become active participants in the shift towards a sustainable economy.

Ms Marano's presentation highlighted the lack of available information related to harmful substances in products. Where this information is available, it is often hard for consumers to understand. To address this issue, Ms Marano developed "Toxi-Score", a label based on the existing "Nutri-Score". This 5-colour coded label enables consumers to make rational decisions and choose the products which are the least harmful to them. There are calls to use such a scoring system not only for household cleaning products, but for all consumer goods. Due to the inherent complexity, cooperation with industry and experts is needed to ensure that consumers are provided with precise and easy-to-understand information about the health risks of everyday products.

RESPONSE FROM THE INSTITUTIONS

Natasa Ristic Davidson, State Secretary in the Swedish Ministry of Finance



New technologies need the appropriate frameworks to ensure that they contribute to the common good. Innovation is not always synonymous with progress. There are a number of risks linked to the use of technology, including dehumanisation through the use of chatbots, asymmetry between service providers and consumers, and exclusion of some groups in society.

Being aware of our purchases can help reduce the gap between our intentions and our actions. Information about climate change and transparency on individual CO2 emissions needs

to be pushed forward and easily accessible, so everyone, including governments and countries, can make rational decisions to reduce their carbon footprint.

Nils Behrndt, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), European Commission



Over the last couple of years, we have had to deal with the COVID-19 crisis and now we are faced with the war in Ukraine. Both crises have challenged the political, economic and societal situation. Consumers find themselves under financial pressure and this widens the gap between intentions and real behaviour when they go to the supermarket or buy online. Consumers are tempted to go back to cheaper products and neglect sustainability, but climate change and environmental challenges need to be addressed, even during crises like COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine.

In terms of the institutional response from the Commission, one big area of response is the legal proposals, because without clear and binding rules, it will not be possible to use the power of the internal market to contribute to a greener Europe. Many proposals have been addressed today: the ecodesign proposal and the proposal on empowering consumers for the green transition. Two proposals are in the pipeline: one on green claims and the other on the right to repair.

Another part of the response is our choice as consumers and this is where we have to contribute each and every day. That is very important, maybe even more important than the legislative response, and an area in which we want to engage with our partners. Repair cafés are an excellent idea and a culture of repair and the mindset that greener products are cool is needed. After the pandemic, it is very important to recreate a culture of repair. If people can accept that they will use a smartphone for three or four years rather than two, that will be a big step forward. Consumers need to overcome the intention/action gap discussed today.

The Commission looks forward to further engaging with the EESC on the role of consumers in the green transition.

Alain Coheur, President of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, EESC



Empowering consumers to act for a more sustainable economy includes solutions like technology, easy-to-understand product labels and information, access to repair services, and having the choice between repair or replacement. Sustainable consumption must be a priority: repairing should not cost more than replacing. The consumer is motivated to act in favour of more sustainability, but environmental and consumer interests still have to converge so that consumers choose the environmentally-friendly option.

Some companies are adopting the approach of product as a service, which represents a paradigm shift to sustainable consumption. A more sustainable world means humans take better care of their health and the environment. Companies need to make the shift to sustainability in tandem with consumers, and ending built-in obsolescence is one of the ways they can do so.

The outcomes of the day's discussions will contribute to the 2023 Consumer Summit. European Consumer Day will continue to provide consumers with a voice each year to shed light on current debates. Policies to meet new challenges must be shaped by consumer organisations, civil society, institutions and authorities working together.





European Economic and Social Committee

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