European Consumer Centres Network

ECC-Net in 2022

Free help in cross-border consumer issues

European Consumer Centres Network

ECC-Net

Co-funded by the European Union



Our mission

Our network of 29 European Consumer Centres (ECCs) empowers consumers to know their rights and take full advantage of the opportunities the Single Market offers.

Our success rate

Our legal experts on EU consumer right provided individual answers to

118 142 enquiries



Amount recovered (in Euro)

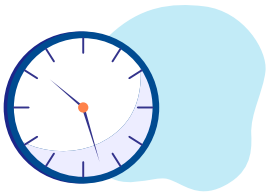
9 904 715 €



60%

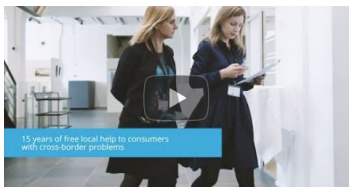
of cross-border consumer complaints could be resolved amicably directly by the centres.

In **88%** of all inqueries, consumers recieved a first comprehensive response within **14 working days.**

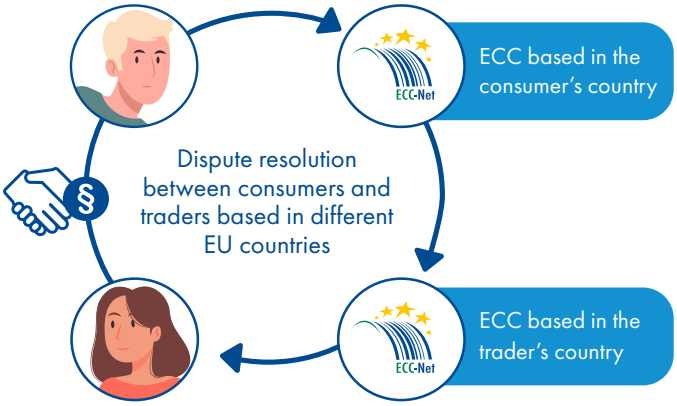


How we accomplish our mission

The ECC-Net's legal experts assist consumers to solve their cross-border problems free of charge by providing strong legal expertise. The network offers a unique overview and reliable information about consumer affairs in the Internal Market which can be used for policy making in collaboration with European and national stakeholders.
> Get to know us in this video.



Our help for consumers



Consumer testimonials

I am very grateful for the assistance I received from ECC Iceland. They were able to resolve my dispute fast and efficiently!

Linda María from Iceland



They made a huge effort to help me get my money back: the trader which didn't reply my complaint finally listened to the ECC.



Caterina from Italy

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You helped me out of a very awkward situation. It's good to know that if this ever happens to someone, I know who to turn to for help!

Janne from Estonia



Amazing! Well done and many thanks. Case closed in less than three weeks. I always got immediate replies, very helpful. Keep it up!



Anonymous consumer from Malta

Country of consumers

CONSUMER COUNTRY	Total
Austria	6404
Belgium	12653
Bulgaria	2306
Croatia	653
Cyprus	928
Czech Republic	2367
Denmark	2802
Estonia	1312
Finland	2942
France	13503
Germany	102187
Greece	1040
Hungary	2384
Iceland	248
Ireland	1665
Italy	9106
Latvia	1301
Lithuania	2798
Luxembourg	3277
Malta	655
Norway	1252
Poland	6613
Portugal	2238
Romania	5399
Slovakia	1080
Slovenia	1134
Spain	9061
Sweden	6842
The Netherlands	5991
TOTAL	118141

Country of traders

TRADER COUNTRY	Total
Austria	410
Belgium	436
Bulgaria	209
Croatia	82
Cyprus	776
Czech Republic	622
Denmark	154
Estonia	263
Finland	179
France	1380
Germany	3495
Greece	330
Hungary	558
Iceland	53
Ireland	1506
Italy	1026
Latvia	330
Lithuania	264
Luxembourg	791
Malta	142
Norway	118
Poland	621
Portugal	599
Romania	380
Slovakia	185
Slovenia	211
Spain	2332
Sweden	459
The Netherlands	2045
None	98197
TOTAL	118141

ECC-Net Expert Statements

ECC-Net collaborates with stakeholders such as EU institutions, Consumer Policy Network (CPN) members, Consumer Policy Advisory Group (CPAG), business and consumer organisations, MEPs and other stakeholders in the field of consumer protection.

Digital fairness

Chatbots -
In the context of the increasing use of automated interactions (chatbots), the European Consumer Centres Network stresses the importance and the continuing obligation for businesses to be contacted quickly and to communicate in a direct and effective way with consumers.

Automatic renewal of contracts -
Consumers are regularly trapped in subscriptions without information on the main features and without the possibility to cancel the contract. Further improvements are therefore needed in the areas of companies' information obligations, simplified cancellation procedures and further protection mechanisms for the payment of subscriptions.

Dark Patterns -
Dark patterns such as false urgency and scarcity or hidden costs and intransparency come into play when companies try to get consumers to give up as much data and money as possible. By influencing consumer behaviour online, merchants undermine consumer autonomy. The EU legislator's approaches to regulating dark patterns are still incomplete and do not reflect the rapidly evolving reality.

In-app purchases and lootboxes -
Things that players don't think about at first: pre-contractual information, right of withdrawal, automatic contract renewal, protection of minors and account blocking. This makes ECC-Net's call for clear legislation and consumer protection rules all the more important.

Influencers: obligations and responsibilities -
As an indispensable part of modern marketing, influencers praise and promote various products and services. For consumers, the fine line between personal opinion and commercial promotion is not easy to discern. Our main concerns are that influencers engage in poorly labelled advertising, exorbitant pricing and drop-shipping without sufficient transparency. They mainly target very young consumers who are not financially literate.

Know your customer (KYC) -
It is understandable that companies want to know their customers better. But beyond identity and credit checks, companies need to have good reasons for collecting data. In any case, consumers need to be fully informed in a clear and understandable way (short text, plain language) about the purpose of collecting ID and other personal data, how it will be used and how it will affect offers and customer relationships.
Online retailers should also be prohibited from sharing this information with third parties, except for legitimate reasons such as police or judicial proceedings. Consumers should never be led to believe that consent to data processing for all the purposes listed is compulsory in order to receive the item or service requested.

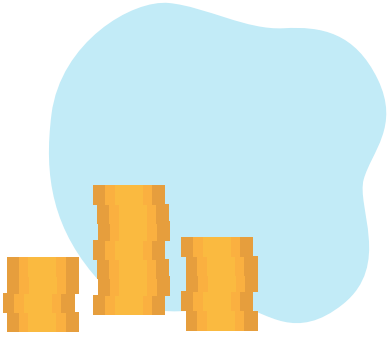


Digital fairness

Presentation of information to consumers when buying online -
The better informed consumers are about their rights, the more confident they will be in buying products online. The clearer the information provided upfront, the fewer misunderstandings and disputes there will be at a later stage. Although EU law covers the mandatory information that a trader must provide to a consumer in the case of an online contract, this legislation is not always respected by traders and is not sufficient in certain circumstances. Traders provide consumers with terms and conditions in complex and confusing language, with font sizes and colours that make it difficult to read, lacking basic information about the product and delivery, not to mention consumer rights. That is why we are calling for consumers to be able to see the most important information at a glance.

Vulnerable consumers -
In digital marketplaces, most, if not all, consumers are potentially vulnerable in certain situations. With the digitisation of consumer markets, these systems are largely data-driven and target consumers with digital marketing strategies, making everyone «digitally vulnerable». For this reason, the ECC-Net requests that all relevant information should be available in plain language prior to the conclusion of the contract, that the burden of proof should preferably lie with the trader, that terms and conditions should not exceed a certain length and that a contract should always be confirmed in writing.

Ticket scalping -
Unauthorised resale ticket websites offer consumers event tickets that have been acquired through dubious practices. In many cases, consumers are unaware that they have purchased at a premium price on a secondary market site after being directed there by the official ticket agent. Throughout the process, consumers encounter various problems such as non-delivery, wrong/invalid/duplicate tickets or cancelled events. Several countries have specific rules prohibiting or restricting the resale of tickets in one way or another, but there is still a lack of much-needed EU-wide harmonisation of the rules governing the resale of tickets. In particular, clear rules setting out the circumstances in which sales platforms are liable for providing misleading information or guarantees, incentivising illegal sales and allowing withdrawn tickets to reappear on their platform.





Digital Fairness Fitness Check -
Read ECC-Net's input on the digitalisation of consumer markets for the Consumer Policy Advisory Group (CPAG) Fitness Check of EU consumer law on digital fairness. The content of this publication is based on ECC-Net's experiences as a pan-European network that offers cross-border consumer advice and assistance.
Digital_fairness_fitness_check.pdf

Passenger Rights

Passenger rights -
Given that enquiries and complaints in the field of air passenger rights make up a large proportion of the cases handled by the ECC-Net, we have a good insight into the existing legal gaps in the field of air passenger rights. These include: the lack of specific provisions ensuring the reimbursement of passengers who have booked their ticket with a ticket vendor (e.g. travel agent, online booking platform) acting as an intermediary between the passenger and the airline, as well as rules governing this contractual relationship; no right to reimbursement of the ticket price if passengers decide to cancel the ticket themselves because of a major crisis at the place of departure or destination; there are currently no EU rules to protect passengers who make multimodal journeys and experience travel disruptions when switching between different modes of transport; enforcement of passenger rights varies widely across the EU and is not effective enough.



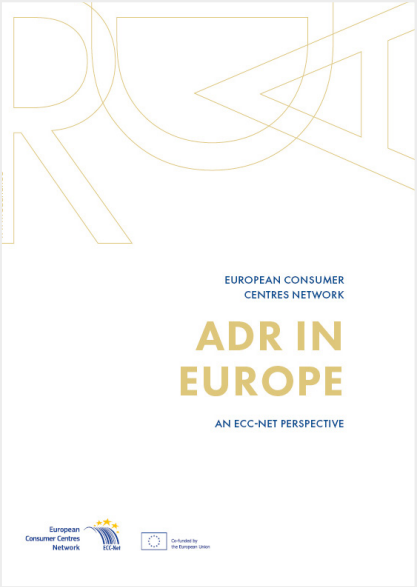
Airline insolvencies -
Against the backdrop of numerous airline insolvencies in recent years and the resulting financial damage to consumers (airline tickets that have become worthless, costs of purchasing new tickets, passengers left stranded abroad), the European Consumer Centres Network calls on the European lawmaker to introduce a mandatory insolvency protection scheme in the airline sector.

Package Travel Directive -
The forthcoming revision of the Package Travel Directive should be used to address some of the problems faced by our consumers, particularly as a result of developments in recent years: Ensuring a rapid refund to the consumer in the event of travel being cancelled by the organiser, clarifying the relationship between the retailer and the tour operator, regulating a cross-border pandemic situation, addressing the massive increase in internet bookings, improving protection against insolvency (particularly in relation to vouchers).

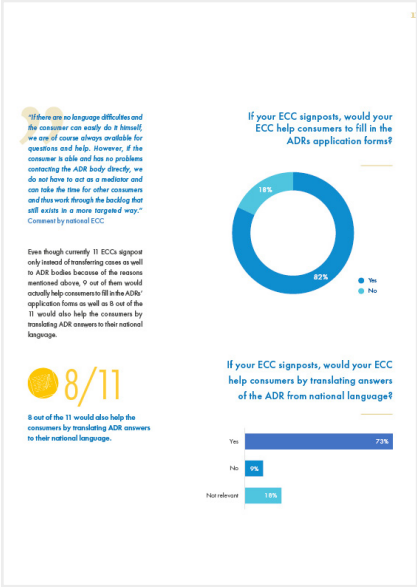
Further key concerns

ADR Report -
The paper makes recommendations for ensuring more trader participation in cross-border ADR and emphasises the necessity to work on full effective ADR coverage in the EU.

Click here for the full ADR report: [Publications | European Consumer Centers Network (eccnet.eu)]







Parcel delivery services by intermediaries -
While new players have entered the market alongside traditional parcel delivery companies, more and more consumers are looking for ways to ship returned goods or their personal belongings across Europe. This has led to the proliferation of intermediaries and price comparison websites. However, the same problems arise as in other sectors (e.g. tourism): Non-delivery or late delivery, contradiction between the terms and conditions of the intermediary and the carrier or even the law, sale of insurance without proper pre-contractual information, disputes over compensation in the event of damage, additional (customs) charges, no contact possibilities or a ping-pong game of responsibilities between the platforms and the carriers.

Right to repair -
In the context of the European Green Deal and the goal of the first climate neutral planet, the Network of European Consumer Centres also calls for concrete measures in the field of consumer law that will contribute to this. The right to repair can make a crucial contribution. When implemented across Europe, particular attention should be paid to: extended legal warranty periods based on the expected lifetime of a product; information on the repairability of goods and the availability of spare parts; the visibility of authorised repairers; the standardisation of spare parts; the introduction of durability and repair requirements; and a digital product passport that includes information on repairability.

Further key concerns

Proposal to repeal the ODR regulation -
The ECC-Net regrets that the ODR platform established under Regulation (EU) No 524/2013 has not reached its full potential with regard to the conduct of cross-border ADRs. However, this platform plays a central role in informing consumers about ADR procedures in Europe. Thanks to the information obligations imposed on traders, consumers across the EU were aware of the possibility to initiate ADR procedures and the contact points could help them to do so. Any new initiative should ensure that these benefits for consumers are maintained: help with the submission and documentation of the complaint; providing general information on consumer rights to the parties and to ADR bodies; facilitating communication between the parties and the competent ADR body; explaining to the parties the procedural rules applied by the ADR. bodies identified; informing the complaining party of other means of redress if a dispute cannot be resolved through the through the ODR platform.

Upholding consumer rights when shopping outside the EU -
The ECC-Net offices receive a considerable number of enquiries about traders located outside the network's service area. All we have been able to do for consumers has been to refer them to the relevant consumer organisations in the countries where the other parties are based, or to advise on other means of redress, such as chargeback, where appropriate. The Internal Market Programme 2021-2024 explicitly foresees the possibility of partnerships with bodies with similar activities in third countries to promote assistance to tourists travelling to and from those countries. We believe that it would be a good idea to use the existing consumer networks, such as the ECC-Net, which exist locally around the world, perhaps even at OECD level, or to sign specific MoUs with consumer organisations in third countries. The challenges we see are the following: language barriers, applicable legislation where local laws from third countries need to be applied, the need to develop a basic reference book for frontline advisers, as well as a substantial knowledge base type system. All this on the premise that there is sufficient funding for these additional tasks for the ECC-Net.

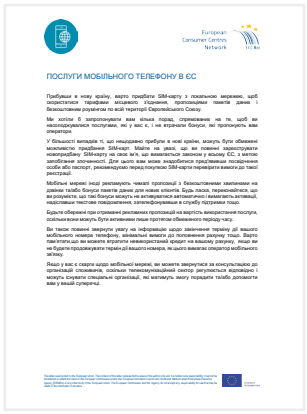
Counterfeit and piracy -
We welcome the European Commission's call for evidence in the context of the EU anti-counterfeiting toolbox and make the following recommendations: facilitate effective and efficient exchange of information (including personal data), in compliance with EU data protection and competition law, to prevent and detect counterfeiting activities; promote and improve information exchange tools; increased training for public authorities, in particular law enforcement and judicial authorities, intermediaries and right holders; improving cooperation between public authorities such as customs, police and market surveillance authorities, administrative bodies, judges and prosecutors, etc.
In addition, in the context of the Green Deal, information on the environmental and social impact of goods could be a tool to differentiate between genuine products, where companies invest in their sustainable business model, and counterfeiters, who most likely don't. Transparent information and sustainable labelling of products would be welcome for products entering the internal market. > See a video on YouTube

Geoblocking -
Since the entry into force of the Geoblocking Regulation in 2018, direct and indirect discrimination based on a consumer's nationality or place of residence when shopping online has been prohibited. Many ECCs have been designated as contact points for consumers under the Regulation. The ECCs also noted that although awareness has increased, the exact scope and coverage of the geo-blocking regulation is still unknown to consumers. There is also confusion about other legal instruments such as content portability, access to digital services such as apps, exclusive/selective distribution rules, protection of authors' or intellectual property rights, or even cross-border TV and radio broadcasting.
In addition, the ECCs call for: full enforcement of the SEPA Regulation and Article 5 of the Geo-blocking Regulation; Sweeps, joint actions and enforcement of the geo-blocking regulation, including on discrimination in passive distribution constellations; extension of the regulation to other services not covered by the current scope (e.g. copyright protected digital services, financial services, insurance, private health services not covered by other EU instruments, etc.).

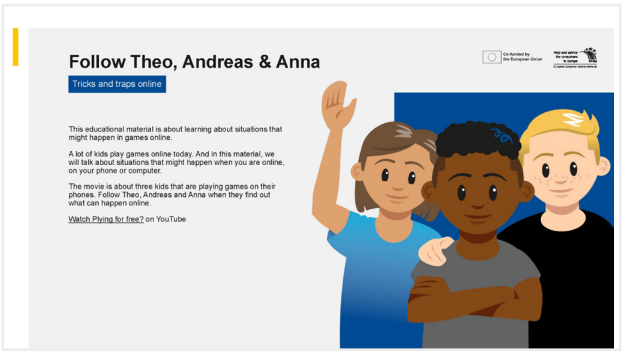
Further activities in 2022

8 Leaflets EU-Ukraine –
in English and Ukrainian language
Main legal consumer information that may be important to Ukrainian refugees arriving in the EU. The factsheets below summarise various consumer and travel rights issues for Ukrainian refugees and those who assist them.
The factsheets are available in English and in Ukrainian.

Consumer and Travel Rights Factsheets Available in Ukrainian | European Consumer Centers Network (eccnet.eu)


ПОСЛУГИ МОБІЛЬНОГО ТЕЛЕФОНУ В ЄС


ACCOMMODATION CONTRACTS IN THE EU



Educational Toolkit for Young Consumers
The Internet isn't all fun and games. Spending much of their time on social media and playing games, young consumers are likely to encounter some difficult online situations. Is it okay to buy in-game items with real money? How can you tell a fake webshop from a real one? As part of the European Year of Youth 2022, the European Consumer Centres Network has developed a toolkit of teaching materials to help discuss these topics in class or at home. The topic was the top download on the common website eccnet.eu.

Educational Toolkit for Young Consumers | European Consumer Centers Network (eccnet.eu)

Cooperation with 3rd Countries
The ECC-Net cooperates with the International Consumer Centre in the United Kingdom (ICC UK) and supports consumers in cross-border complaints. In 2022, the ECC-Net handled 1639 cases of European consumers with UK traders.



Conferences & Exchanges

ECC-Net participated in more than 40 conferences and exchanges in 2022. Among them:

European Consumer Summit (February 2022)
ECC-Net presented the issues identified by the network when it comes to cross-border ADR procedures under Workshop 1- Panel II "Digital tools supporting consumers to enforce their rights".

European Schoolnet / Better internet for kids online (September 2022)
ECC-Net explored together with the European Schoolnet future synergies to be developed between the 2 Networks.

APPLiA & ECC-Net (September 2022)
ECC-Net met APPLiA Europe, the association of home appliance producers and discussed on repairability, durability, legal guarantee.

Ecommerce Europe & ECC-Net (July 2022)
The network met with Business side and exchanged on issues identified in cross-border cases. Digital fairness was discussed together with platform liability and ADR procedures.

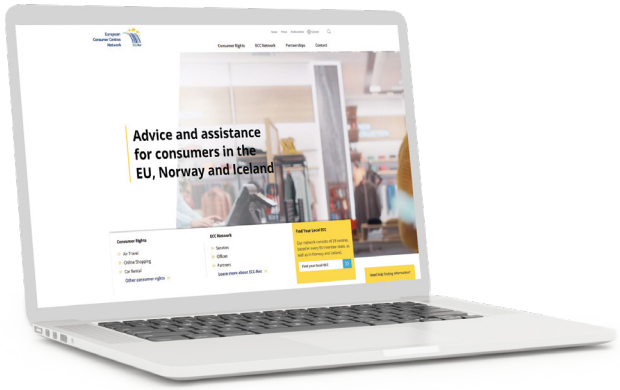
Cross-Border ADR roundtable (June 2022)
ECC-Net co-organised with DG JUST and Ecommerce Europe a cross-border ADR workshop in Brussels. A huge ranger of participants were present: academics, consumer organisations, ADR Bodies, business side.

ERFF & ECC-Net (June 2022)
A join meeting focusing on specific cross-border fraud issues was organized by ERFF & ECCs. Selected relevant EU associations including EBF + the European FinTech Association participated as well.

Visibility

ECC-Net website

- First year (launched in December 2021)
- 47,360 website visitors, 91% of whom were consumers
- 104,412 page views
- Top downloads: Youth Campaign
- Top news: Ecommerce and the Pandemic - 9 Trends and Learnings
- Top consumer rights pages: Air Passenger Rights
- Shared and cost-efficient Single Digital Gateway implementation
- Tools for real user feedback



ECC-Network - media action

- **Safer Internet Day:** social media action
- **Valentine´s Day:** opt for 100% guaranteed gifts - press releases & social media action
- **World Consumer Rights Day:** Best sustainable practices around Europe - press releases & social media action
- **Europe Day:** Video on consumer rights
- **World Tourism Day:** Beware of (hidden) additional holiday costs - pressreleases & social media action
- **Black Friday and Cyber Monday:** social media action
- **ECC-Net Social Media Christmas Calendar:** useful consumer tips shared by 20 ECCs in their channels during 1-24 December
- **ECC-Net Social Media Calender 2022**

Events & campaigns on national level

ECC FI
Online shopping themed Q&A live discussion before Black Friday on Jodel platform together with national Consumer Advisory Services – the discussion thread was opened by 5300 young consumers/ Jodel users.

ECC NL
National campaign on checking reviews before ordering from an online shop, together with Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets, Fraud Help Desk, Consumentenbond (national consumer organisation) and Landelijk Meldpunt Internetoplichting (Netherlands Police department for internet fraud).

ECC DE
A European consumer rights podcast in German language covering topics like phishing, online scams, dropshipping and many more. "Hilfe mein Toaster brennt!" (Help, my toaster is on fire!), so the podcast's name, explains legal issues in a simple and approachable way and is available on all known audio platforms such as Spotify. 18 episodes were published in 2022.

ECC LT
Event at the ECC-Net Almond park dedicated to commemorate International Consumer Rights Day together with representatives from ADR institutions and the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania.

ECC PL
«Consumers at the Border» event in the end of August together with ECC Germany to inform citizens and visitors of the Old Town Festival (Jakuby & Altstadtfest) about the help provided by the ECC-Net. ECC-Net information point was visited by 150 consumers.

ECC DK
Hosting the annual Danish ADR Conference with participants from Danish ADR entities, the ADR competent authority as well as other authorities and ministries and Danish consumer and business organisations to gain new insights and learn from each other.

ECC FR
Organising the ECC-Net Cooperationin in February 2022 to which more than 100 case handlers participated online and the live visit of the French Minister Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne and European Commissioner Didier Reynders to ECC's Kehl office.

ECC SK
Hosting a cooperation event with ADR bodies from Czech and Slovak republic to share information and picking up new strategies to tackle tricky situations.

ECC BG
Taking part to the worklife orientation initiative "Manager for a day" where young people and students can get early career guidance and train one day at a chosen workplace – from many applicants one was chosen to be the director of ECC Bulgaria for one day and receive orientation to the ECC-Net and to managing an ECC team form the actual director.

ECC SL
Annual networking meeting of Market inspectorate of the Republic of Sloveni where the ECC director gave a presentation of the ECC-Net and ECC Slovenia.

How we are funded



Member State



EU Commission



Our service is completely free of charge for consumers thanks to the co-funding of our partners.

European Consumer Centres Network

ECC-Net

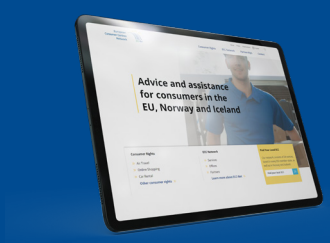
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www.eccnet.eu



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