



# How to use the UN Guidelines

for Consumer Protection to raise awareness and  
campaign for stronger consumer protection

## The revision of UNGCP

---

The revision of the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection (referred to as the UN Guidelines) in 2015 was a significant achievement for the United Nations, national consumer protection agencies, Consumers International and its Members worldwide. The great effort made by all to secure the approval of the new Guidelines must now be channeled into improving the quality of consumer protection in countries around the world.

None of us can improve consumer protection by ourselves, we need the support of other civil society groups, businesses and government. This short briefing suggests some easy steps you can take to use the revised UN Guidelines to raise awareness amongst these groups and make them aware of the benefits that stronger consumer protection can have for the people they represent. For example:

**Informing governments** about the updated UN Guidelines and urge them to incorporate them into national legislation.

**Improving understanding amongst companies** about the importance of the updated UN Guidelines and how good consumer protection can benefit their business.

**Informing civil society groups** about the updated UN Guidelines and the relevance of consumer protection to supporting sustainable development including a fairer economy, health and safety.

### You can find more information about the UN Guidelines here

**We are all consumers. Everyday. Everywhere.** This short video gives a basic introduction to consumer protection and the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection for audiences that may not have thought about the issue.

**Consumer Protection: why it matters to you. A practical guide to the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection.** This 20 page booklet gives some basic background information about the UN Guidelines and what they contain. It is a good link between the introductory video and the UN Guidelines.

**The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection.** The UN Guidelines are available in a number of different languages from the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) website.

**The United Nations Manual on Consumer Protection.** This detailed manual on consumer protection has been updated to reflect the changes made in the revision of the UN Guidelines.

## The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection aim to:

- Help countries improve the protection of its citizens in their capacity as consumers, and to establish relevant public policies.
- Encourage those involved in the production and distribution of goods and services to consumers to adopt ethical standards of conduct and good business practices.
- Assist countries in curbing domestic and international trade practices that harm consumers.
- Foster international cooperation in the field of consumer protection.
- Encourage the establishment of market conditions that provide consumers with greater choice at lower prices.
- Promote sustainable consumption.

## What is new in the updated United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection?

New topics include:

**National consumer protection policies:** The update encourages the setting up of legal frameworks and actions to protect the rights of consumers, as well as dispute resolution.

**Dispute settlement:** The update encourages effective, fair and transparent mechanisms for addressing consumer complaints.

**E-commerce:** The update promotes the policy that transactions conducted online should be granted the same protection as those conducted offline.

**Financial services:** The update promotes the creation of oversight bodies, consumer protection regular, better education strategies and financial inclusion.

**Energy:** The update promotes universal access to improving the supply, distribution and quality of clean energy.

**Public utilities:** The update promotes the introduction or strengthening of national policies to improve standards and laws relating to the provision of public utilities, as well as the settlement of disputes between consumers and suppliers.

**Tourism:** The update promotes appropriate policies on the marketing and provision of goods and services relating to tourism and travel.

## Using the UN Guidelines to engage different groups in consumer protection

---

### Consumers and the media

When communicating with consumers it is important to give practical examples that highlight how implementing the revised UN Guidelines will benefit them in their everyday lives. For example, new guidance indicates that national governments should implement consumer protection policies for e-commerce that are transparent and effective which could help prevent some of the problems consumers have online.

Another example could be to use the new sections on financial consumer protection and good business practices to discuss these issues. Other sections of the Guidelines can be used to address specific consumer issues such as urging banks to respect principles of consumer protection in their contracts, providing accessible and accurate information and resolving disputes quickly and fairly.

#### Opportunities to highlight the UN Guidelines include:

- Public talks and presentations
- Interviews or articles on television or radio programmes
- Promoting the importance of the UN Guidelines through social networks

*The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP) act as an international reference point of the consumer movement.*

#### The UN Guidelines can be an important part of your media strategy, for example:

- Send a press release when a consumer right is undermined, citing the UN Guidelines.
- Disseminate Consumers International press releases related to the UN Guidelines.
- Create a database of media and journalists or media specialists that write about consumer protection and contact them to give them a briefing on the UN Guidelines.
- Keep journalists' contact information if they write stories related to these issues so you can contact them next there is a relevant issue.

## Civil society organizations

***Civil society groups working in social justice, poverty reduction, health, nutrition, community empowerment, environmental protection and other issues.***

Civil society groups may not be aware of the many ways in which consumer protection can support their own objectives. Implementing the UN Guidelines can help to support many different areas of sustainable development including access to basic services, rights for vulnerable or disadvantaged consumers, a fairer economy, health and safety, environmental and social goals. Consumer issues are also an important area in which communities can organize together.

When you are sending out information or a press release, holding an event or doing research, include other civil society groups who may be interested in the issue you are raising. Also ask these groups to include your organization when they are doing activities so that you can look out for common issues or ways you can work together either in a formal coalition or more informally.

### Government and state institutions

- Consumer protection agencies
- Legislature (for example assembly members or members of parliament)
- Judiciary (for example magistrates, judges, prosecutors)
- Regulators (for example utilities and public services)
- Specific commissions (for example consumer protection commission or energy commission)

The UN Guidelines state that it is the responsibility of governments to establish a framework to develop, implement and monitor consumer protection, being careful to ensure that the measures are applied for the benefit of all people, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

In order to further promote the implementation of the guidelines, consumer organisations can:

- Organise activities with Members of Congress, government ministries or departments, and judges whose work relates to the UN Guidelines. These meetings could also include representatives from the United Nations.
- Organise tripartite meetings between consumer associations, businesses and the government to advance joint actions based on guidelines.
- Encourage the government to adopt certain rules regarding the Guidelines. For example, recommendations made by the FAO, WHO, Codex Alimentarius, ISO, ITU or IEC.

### Businesses

- Chambers of commerce
- Business associations (e.g. banks, electronic commerce, tourism)
- Companies and trade unions

One of the main objectives of the UN Guidelines is to help countries combat business practices that cause consumer detriment at both the national and international level. In addition, all companies abide by the laws and regulations of countries in which they operate. They must also comply with the relevant international standards for consumer protection.

Consumer associations can work towards this goal by:

- Highlighting the good practices of companies when they act responsibly towards customers and in accordance with the Guidelines. This in turn encourages other companies to implement the Guidelines.
- Advising companies to answer questions on the application of the Guidelines.
- Establishing relationships with chambers of commerce and business associations.