

First Arab Consumer Protection Forum Manama, 20–21 February 2024

1. Background

Recently, noticeable progress has been witnessed in the consumer protection framework within the Arab region, marked by legislative and legal adjustments aimed at addressing gaps or deficiencies in certain aspects of the frameworks and laws associated with consumer protection. The awareness and educational aspect in the field of consumer protection has also had a share in this development, as work is being done to spread consumer awareness for both consumers and the commercial sector alike and to introduce the rights and obligations of both parties. However, the consumer protection system in the Arab region may encounter various challenges in the process of advancement and enhancement in the realm of consumer protection, encompassing legislative and legal aspects, awareness, and education initiatives, as well as the mechanisms for settling and resolving complaints. Despite these challenges, there is a need to thoroughly investigate them and identify the most efficient and effective approaches to address them. This is essential to cultivate a robust consumer environment and ensure enhanced protection for consumers, promoting the establishment of markets characterized by a high degree of justice and transparency.

In this context, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Consumer Protection Directorate under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of the Kingdom of Bahrain, is launching the first Arab Consumer Protection Forum to serve as a platform for continual knowledge-sharing on consumer protection policy and enforcement among Arab stakeholders. It will provide an annual opportunity to advance knowledge, exchange best practices, and facilitate coordination and collaboration at the national, regional and international levels.

The first Arab Consumer Protection Forum will bring together representatives of consumer protection authorities from ESCWA member States. Over the course of two days, participants will engage in peer learning, and examine regional and international experiences and successful practices implemented by their counterparts in different countries. This knowledge-sharing event aims to enhance the understanding and expertise of consumer protection authorities, thus driving the development of more effective consumer protection frameworks in the Arab region.

2. Objectives

Objectives of the first Arab Consumer Protection Forum include the following:

- ➔ **Enhancing economic growth and governance in the Arab region, in line with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** The Forum aims to contribute substantively towards achieving sustainable economic development by protecting consumer rights and promoting responsible business and consumer practices.

- ➔ **Promoting collaboration and coordination among consumer protection authorities in ESCWA member states.** By facilitating knowledge sharing, exchanging experiences, and promoting best practices, the Forum aims to strengthen the collective efforts of Arab countries in ensuring effective consumer protection measures.
- ➔ **Informing consumer protection policymaking and enforcement in the Arab region, guided by international best practices.** The Forum seeks to provide a platform for dialogue, research and knowledge dissemination, enabling policymakers and enforcement agencies to make informed decisions and enhance their consumer protection frameworks.
- ➔ **Generating concrete recommendations for future activities aimed at advancing consumer protection policy and enforcement in the Arab region.** Through discussions and interactive sessions, the Forum aims to identify emerging challenges, gaps and opportunities in consumer protection, and formulate actionable recommendations for future initiatives and collaborations.

3. Participants

The Forum will foster dialogue among representatives of consumer protection authorities in the Arab region, academia, United Nations and international organizations, regional organizations, and international experts engaged in consumer protection policy and enforcement.

4. Language

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic and English. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided between Arabic and English for onsite and online participants.

5. Agenda

Day 1. Tuesday, 20 February 2024	
9–9.30 a.m.	Registration
9.30–9.45 a.m. <i>Format: Open session/Broadcasted live</i>	Opening remarks and introductory comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abdulla Bin Adel Fakhroo, Minister of Industry & Commerce, Kingdom of Bahrain • Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA • Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary General, UNCTAD
9.45–10.00 a.m. <i>Format: Open session /Broadcasted live</i>	Appreciation ceremony During this ceremony, a distinguished group of individuals and organizations who are actively promoting and advocating consumer protection values will be recognized and honoured.
10.00–11 a.m.	Coffee break and group photo

11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.

Format: Open session/hybrid

Session I. Consumer protection policies for sustainability/achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Consumers must be empowered to play their transformative role in markets. Responsible purchasing decisions that consider the environmental and social impacts of products lead to sustainable consumption and development. By encouraging practices like recycling and waste reduction, supporting ethical and eco-friendly products, and fighting misleading practices such as greenwashing, consumer protection efforts can play a significant role in advancing broader sustainability goals.

This session focuses on policymakers' crucial role in promoting such practices. It provides a platform for policymakers to share experiences, strategies and best practices in integrating sustainability into consumer protection policies. Discussions will revolve around raising consumer awareness, incentivizing sustainable choices, and fostering collaboration with businesses and civil society. The session aims to inspire policymakers to develop effective strategies and policies that address economic, social and environmental aspects, and to formulate recommendations for a sustainable future. Policymakers will discuss the challenges they face, and the policies and strategies employed to overcome those challenges.

This session will serve as a platform for member States to share their progress, case studies and best practices, and the challenges encountered in developing and strengthening frameworks for consumer protection policies aimed at promoting sustainability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Session coordinator: Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Kingdom of Bahrain

Moderator: Entesar Abdulaal, Consumer Protection Director, Government Innovation Ambassador, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Kingdom of Bahrain

Speakers:

- Mohamad Abou Haidar, Director-General of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, Lebanon
- Pedro Gaspar, Director-General for Consumer Affairs, Portugal
- Arnau Izaguerri Vila, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD
- Robin Simpson, Expert (UNCTAD consultant) and former Consumers International expert

Developments in member States

Open discussion

12.30–1.30 p.m.	Lunch break
1.30–3.00 p.m. Format: Open session/hybrid	<p>Session II. Strengthening legal frameworks for consumer protection</p> <p>Legal frameworks for consumer protection are essential to creating a fair and balanced marketplace where consumers can make informed choices, businesses can compete fairly, and disputes can be resolved efficiently. They provide a crucial framework that supports consumer empowerment, economic growth, and sustainable development.</p> <p>This session will examine the legal aspects of consumer protection, and assess the effectiveness of existing laws and regulations. It will explore strategies to enhance consumer protection frameworks, including reviewing and updating legislation, improving enforcement mechanisms, and fostering collaboration among regulatory agencies. Discussions will focus on challenges and opportunities in adapting legal frameworks, so as to address emerging issues and ensure robust consumer protection in an evolving marketplace.</p> <p>At this session, member States will showcase their progress, case studies, best practices, and challenges encountered in developing comprehensive legal frameworks for consumer protection.</p> <p>Session coordinator: ESCWA</p> <p>Moderator: Tarik Alami, Cluster Leader, Governance and Conflict Prevention, ESCWA</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nathalie Khaled, Economic Affairs Officer, Coordinator of competition, consumer protection and national planning and development projects, ESCWA • Bahjat Abu Al-Nasr, Delegate Minister and Director of the Arab Economic Integration Department, League of Arab States • Thierry Bourgoignie, Professor of Law, Director, Research Group in International and Comparative Consumer Law, the International Law Association Committee on International Protection of Consumers, Montreal • Ibrahim Al-Nahedh, Director of the Consumer Protection Policies and Regulations Division, and project manager for the new Saudi Consumer Protection Law, Ministry of Commerce, Saudi Arabia • Muna Al Alawi, Inspection Director, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Kingdom of Bahrain <p>Developments in member States</p> <p>Open discussion</p>