



BEUC The European
Consumer
Organisation

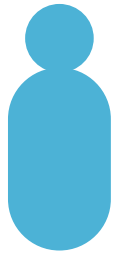
The Consumer Voice in Europe

➤ Who we are and what we do.





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> Who are we?

We are The European Consumer Organisation – BEUC – which comes from the French acronym ‘Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs’.

Comprised of more than 40 member organisations from 30-plus European countries, we are a non-governmental organisation whose job it is to bring the voice of Europe’s consumers to the European Union legislative institutions of Commission, Parliament and Council.

> A long and reputable history

BEUC was founded in 1962 by consumer organisations from 6 Member States of what was then the European Economic Community (EEC). With over a half century of experience under our belts, BEUC is one of the longest standing representative associations in Brussels.

The modern European Union is built on the founding principle of the Single Market and its inherent ideals of competitive markets, high quality products and services, consumer choice and fair commercial practices.

However, these are ongoing challenges, ones to which consumers and their confidence will always be central. So whether it be sustainability, product safety, air passenger rights, fairer energy pricing or robust data protection standards, it’s clear we have many more years of work ahead.

> What is our vision?

The EU decision making machinery in Brussels is surrounded by an estimated 25,000 interest representatives. BEUC strives for consumer protection and consumer choice as drivers of the market economy. These must be realised amidst the cacophony of many competing interests.

In times of economic strife, the consumer voice can go unheard, or worse yet, be put to one side. It is our responsibility to ensure the EU realises that emboldening consumer confidence is much more than advisable, it is absolutely critical for a truly well-serviced European Single Market. That is why our motto is “the consumer voice in Europe”.

We work towards EU consumer policy which is sustainable, results in products and services that do not endanger health or safety, while protecting consumers’ legal and economic interests.

The economic crisis provoked soaring costs of living and necessitates policy which improves quality of life for current and future generations. Achieving ‘more with less’, resource efficiency and a smarter way of living are also key. This concept of sustainability underpins all our campaigns.

> How do we work?

BEUC receives funding from our members, a grant from the European Union and specific grants to participate in targeted projects funded by the EU and private foundations.

The BEUC secretariat is based in Brussels where it coordinates and centralises the input of BEUC’s members to the EU decision-making process.

BEUC is acknowledged as a trustworthy consumer representative by both decision-makers and other stakeholders alike. This is particularly due to the collective skills, knowledge and expertise of our member organisations, who are in daily contact with European consumers.

> Our members

Mirroring the evolution of the EU itself, BEUC’s membership has grown significantly, blossoming to more than 40 well-respected national consumer organisations from 30-plus European countries (EU, EEA and applicant countries).

We have two types of members – those with full membership and affiliates. We also work in ad hoc partnerships.

> Our policy priorities

BEUC investigates EU decisions and developments likely to affect consumers. Our prioritised topics are: Financial Services; Food; Consumer Rights & Enforcement; Digital Rights; Sustainability.

The objectives of these are as follows:



Financial Services

- Strengthen regulation and supervision of retail financial services.
- Decrease financial exclusion and guarantee the right of consumers to basic banking services.
- Make essential payment services efficient, fair, affordable and secure.
- Ensure financial services information is easy to understand and comparable – also across borders – and that advice on financial services is affordable and reliable.
- Advocate for financial services suitable to those buying them.



Food

- Facilitate informed and healthy choices by consumers, including vulnerable groups.
- Prevent misleading information and ensure information can be trusted.
- Protect children from the promotion of unhealthy food.
- Ensure food sold to consumers is safe and sustainable.



Digital Rights

- Ensure consumers enjoy a high level of personal data protection.
- Ensure the Telecoms Single Market delivers to consumers' expectations of fair competition, better pricing and stronger consumers' rights.
- Restore and protect Net Neutrality at EU level, so that users can be assured of the freedom to access the online content, services and applications of their choice.
- Put an end to 'roaming costs' for voice, SMS and data communication in the EU while prompting competitively priced domestic telecoms services.
- Ensure consumers have access to diverse and consumer-friendly legal offers for content online
- Ensure that measures for the enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights are proportionate and respect consumers' fundamental rights
- Reform the current system of copyright levies and launch a discussion on their progressive phasing out and the development of alternative models for fair compensation



Consumer Rights & Enforcement

- Ensure the EU continues to update and modernise the existing consumer law acquis, particularly on legal guarantees, since the Consumer Rights Directive's adoption in 2011.
- Check that EU consumer law measures meet a truly high protective level, are fully adapted to new technologies and address consumers' real needs.
- Improve and complete EU air passenger rights legislation.
- Improve the legal and practical co-operation of national enforcement bodies and ensure better remedies for EU infringements of consumer legislation are available.
- If insurance contract regulation at EU level is to happen, guarantee it is robust, offers a very high level of protection and is mandatory for all businesses.



Sustainability

- Help to further develop the Ecodesign, Energylabel and Ecolabel projects.
- Improve the sustainability of products by reducing their impact on the environment.
- Give consumers the possibility to make informed and sustainable choices between different products using independent and verified labels. Seeking the removal of unsustainable products from the market.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of transport in Europe while ensuring consumers benefit from improved information and cost reductions.

Additionally, we also work on Energy, Safety and Health issues.

BEUC is closely following the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations where our aim is to ensure consumer interests are at the heart of the agreement. This trade deal could benefit consumers by lowering prices and increasing consumer choice, but could also have serious implications for example for the safety of our food or our data protection standards.

The plight of consumer organisations in central, eastern and south eastern Europe (CESEE) is sometimes very difficult. Therefore, BEUC has established and launched a capacity building programme focussed on its CESEE members. The aim of the programme is to support them to become self-sustaining.

We are an associate member of Consumers International (CI), while we also play an active role in the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD).

> Transparent lobbying

We are convinced law making which affects consumers in their daily lives should be done so transparently. We aspire to be an organisation which practices what is preached.

We have subscribed to the EU lobby register (our registration number: 9505781573-45).

We firmly believe this should be mandatory for all lobbyists and only registered organisations or businesses should be allowed to lobby the EU institutions.



Some of our achievements over the years

The nature of our daily work and that of European legislation drafting is often incremental and highly technical. Therefore, it is not always easily visible and also cannot necessarily be attributed to a single influence. A large amount of work and effort can be expended in succeeding to have consumer-friendly amendments made to the text of legislative provisions, amendments, parliamentary reports or Commission consultations for example. Here are some of the more visible achievements of BEUC staff down through the years.

○ CO₂ emissions targets

As fuel prices soar, so does the cost of driving a car. Strict CO₂ emission limits help counteract this. So in 2014, the EU resolved to limit emissions for new cars to 95g/km by 2021, despite last minute loopholes proposed to placate the car manufacturing industry. Consumers will potentially save several hundred euro in fuel costs yearly.

In what promises to be another uphill struggle, stricter thresholds for 2025 are due to be deliberated in 2015. We intend to use this juncture to secure more efficiency from car manufacturers and thereby reduce fuel costs.

○ Alternative Dispute Resolution

ADR introduces systems for consumers and businesses to resolve disputes without going to court by involving neutral third parties e.g. Ombudsmen or Consumer Complaints Boards. The third party can impose a decision or mediate a compromise.

ADR in 2013 represented our latest battle in making sure rights make it off the paper they are written on and become effective defences for consumers.

This is valuable because in a recent survey 48% of EU consumers said they would not go to court individually for harm valued at less than €200 and 8% would not go regardless of the value.

○ Consumer Rights Directive

In 2011, the Consumer Rights Directive was adopted to introduce substantial changes to 'distance selling' (including e-commerce) and 'doorstep selling' contracts. For example, the new legislation provides better protection when shopping online against exorbitant credit card fees and 'pre-ticked' additional services, as well as new information obligations on the operability and functionality of digital products.

○ Labelling of nanotechnology in cosmetics and food

Nanotechnologies make incredibly small scale materials – one nanometre being a millionth of a millimetre. They are now used in European food, cosmetics, textiles, electrical appliances and medicines. While they can offer benefits, nanomaterials have not been subjected to proper safety assessments.

BEUC campaigned against this highly risky approach and advocated clear labelling of nanoproducts with which we come in close contact such as food and cosmetics.

Pharmacovigilance

Pharmacovigilance is the monitoring of medicines and treatments after they go on sale. In 2012, we helped shepherd EU pharmacovigilance legislation towards more fulsome and clearer information to patients as well as measures easing the reporting of adverse effects.

BEUC campaigned alongside the European Medicines Agency to improve post-market surveillance of drugs. One clear outcome was the development in September 2013 of an inverted black triangle on medicines indicating further monitoring is needed.

X% less claims

A BEUC survey in 2005 proved that manufacturer claims influence consumers' perceptions of the healthiness of foods and strongly inform their buying patterns. In 2012, BEUC succeeded in stymying European Commission plans to allow "X% less" claims used by the food industry e.g. "20% less fat".

Nutrition claims are often used by food manufacturers as enticements to buy. While claims such as "low fat" can spur the food industry to make healthier foods, the "now contains X% less" claim could have misled consumers as it could still contain high amounts of sugar, salt and fat.

Health & nutrition claims

The expanding Single Market has brought many benefits in the quality and diversity of food choices. But without sensible safeguards, some products would still boast inaccurate or downright misleading claims on their packaging.

Our 2004 survey of 3,000 consumers found most are heavily dependent on advertised claims. The survey highlighted many untrue examples on the market such as "Food adapted to healthy living" – "Good for you" – "Relaxes your soul" – "ideal weight".

The survey was valuable in our work with the Commission. The resulting Health and Nutrition Claims Regulation raised standards by requiring stronger scientific proof of claims. A list of authorised claims arrived in 2012 simultaneously eradicating many misleading claims from shop shelves.

○ Roaming

Mobile phones and cross – border travel have become commonplace for many Europeans, but the prices for calling, texting and downloading data when abroad were prohibitively high. In 2007 a 4 minute call home for a Spanish customer roaming in Latvia cost €9.19, €12 for a Cypriot in Belgium and €13.16 for an Irish person in Malta.

Following a major BEUC survey in 2003, the European Commission regulated and prices continue to fall. However, a 2014 Eurobarometer survey by the European Commission showed the extent of the work still needing to be done - almost 1 in 2 mobile internet users would ‘never’ use it in another EU country (47%) due to concern over expense.

○ Cross-border bank payments

Extra costs to make cross-border payments or withdraw money while abroad have long been consumer frustrations and contrary to the Single Market.

In 2001, the EU heeded BEUC’s calls by regulating cross-border Euro payments – the basic principle being a bank can only charge for transactions and withdrawals within the EU as they would domestically. This applies to all electronically processed payments, including credit transfers, direct debits and ATM cash withdrawals.

The following successes are almost taken for granted these days but represented momentous progress and still serve consumers well today.

○ Ban on leaded petrol

Europe’s petrol used to contain lead as standard, a product very dangerous for our health and harmful to the environment.

In a real David vs. Goliath scenario BEUC and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) sealed an invaluable ban on lead in petrol. It helps contribute to a greener environment and our petrol fore-courts are supplying us with safer fuel.

○ Improving Toy Safety: Ban on dangerous phthalates

Toy safety standards in Europe have considerably improved and consumer organisations have played a significant role. An important victory was won when, after an alert by our Dutch member Consumentenbond and a BEUC campaign, a ban was introduced on phthalates (a chemical then used in children's PVC toys).

These chemicals had been found to seep from the toys and small infants who put them in their mouths were especially at risk.

○ GM Labelling

In the late 1990s, we teamed up with our American colleagues to successfully campaign for consumer choice whether or not to eat Genetically Modified (GM) food. Our clear demand was for GM foods and ingredients to be labelled separately and so since 1997, labelling has been mandatory in the EU for products consisting of GMO.

Further measures were brought in as of 1998 and 2000 when labelling of GM maize, soya, additives and flavourings also became compulsory.

○ Consumer rights standards

Over the last 30 years, the EU has steadily accrued a very valuable body of consumer rights including protection against misleading and aggressive marketing practices; a 2 year legal guarantee on products; rights of return and refund when products are defective; transparent and fair contracts; right to important consumer information.

○ Product Liability Directive

Manufacturers' liability for products took over 10 years to achieve. An EU law in 1985 settled this important protection and gave consumers 3 years in which to act on a harm or loss due to a defective product, even if no fault could be proven on behalf of the producer.

BEUC secured an extension to primary agricultural products after the mad cow disease crisis in 1999 so it now covers products such as meat, cereals, fruit and vegetables.


Want to
know more?


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www.beuc.eu



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AT	Arbeiterkammer - AK	IS	Neytendasamtökin - NS
BE	Test-Achats/Test-Aankoop	IT	Altroconsumo
BG	Bulgarian National Association Active Consumers - BNAAC	IT	Consumatori Italiani per l'Europa - CIE
CH	Fédération Romande des Consommateurs - FRC	LU	Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs - ULC
CY	Cyprus Consumers' Association	LT	Alliance of Lithuanian Consumers' Organisations
CZ	Czech Association of Consumers TEST	LV	Latvia Consumer Association - PIAA
DE	Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband - vzbv	MK	Consumers' Organisation of Macedonia - OPM
DE	Stiftung Warentest	MT	Ghaqda tal-Konsumaturi - CA Malta
DK	Forbrugerrådet	NL	Consumentenbond
EE	Estonian Consumers Union - ETL	NO	Forbrukerrådet
EL	Association for the Quality of Life - E.K.PI.ZO	PL	Federacja Konsumentów - FK
EL	Consumers' Protection Center - KEPKA	PL	Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich - SKP
ES	Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios - CECU	PT	Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa do Consumidor - DECO
ES	Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios - OCU	RO	Association for Consumers' Protection - APC Romania
FI	Kuluttajaliitto - Konsumentförbundet ry	SE	The Swedish Consumers' Association
FI	Kilpailu- ja kuluttajavirasto - KKV	SI	Slovene Consumers' Association - ZPS
FR	UFC - Que Choisir	SK	Association of Slovak Consumers - ZSS
FR	Consommation, Logement et Cadre de Vie - CLCV	UK	Which?
HU	National Association for Consumer Protection in Hungary - OFE	UK	Consumer Futures
HU	National Federation of Associations for Consumer Protection in Hungary - FEOSZ		



30 plus
countries



The Consumer Voice in Europe

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