

# NINTH CONFERENCE ON COMPETITION & CONSUMER PROTECTION

## **Roundtable on 'Protecting and empowering consumers in the circular economy'**

Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Thursday, 10 July 2025

Time: 3 - 4:30 p.m.

- Today I'll be sharing insights on how consumer protection can become a powerful enabler of circular economies and climate action. This conversation draws from India's Mission LiFE, but the lessons apply globally as we move toward more sustainable and just consumption systems.
- Nearly two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions are linked to household consumption, either directly or through supply chains. While we've made progress in technology and regulation, we cannot overlook the crucial role of individual and community behaviour in driving systemic change.
- Empowering consumers with the right tools, rights, and incentives makes them active participants in the transition, not passive bystanders. In fact, the intersection of consumer rights and environmental responsibility is where the real transformation begins.
- Mission LiFE, launched by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at COP26, shifts the focus of climate action from systems to citizens. It encourages individuals to adopt simple, planet-positive behaviours in daily life - from saving energy to reducing waste.
- The mission promotes a new identity: the 'Pro-Planet Person,' someone whose lifestyle choices align with ecological balance. It's a scalable model that reframes sustainable living not as sacrifice, but as mindful citizenship - and that's a message that resonates far beyond India.
- In a linear economy, consumer rights were largely about safety, price, and redress. But in a circular economy, they must evolve to include access to lifecycle information, sustainable alternatives, and participation in shaping greener systems.
- We propose five globally relevant pillars: the rights to information, sustainability, access, redress, and environmental participation. These ensure that consumers are not only protected from harm but also enabled to make meaningful, low-impact choices. Together, these rights create an enabling environment where responsible consumption becomes a norm, not a burden, and where circularity is driven by informed, empowered citizens.
- Consumers need reliable, easy to understand information to make informed environmental choices. Tools like digital product passports, carbon footprint labels, and clear disclosures help translate sustainability into something tangible.
- At the same time, we must guard against misleading claims. Strong legal frameworks against greenwashing, combined with Extended Producer Responsibility and eco-design standards, build the trust necessary for large scale behaviour change.

- Many consumers want to live sustainably, but structural barriers like high costs, poor infrastructure, and limited options often stand in the way. We must use policy tools such as tax incentives, support for repair and reuse models, and investments in green infrastructure to make sustainability the default choice.
- This also means ensuring inclusivity. Sustainability cannot become the privilege of the few, it must be affordable, accessible, and relevant across regions, income levels, and cultures. Governments can also lead by example through “green defaults” in procurement and services.
- Mission LiFE aligns with key global frameworks, particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). It also supports the goals of the Paris Agreement, especially Article 6, which promotes voluntary cooperation between countries through both market and non-market approaches - including education, lifestyle change, and public participation. Furthermore, its emphasis on circularity, behavioural change, and citizen engagement resonates strongly with the EU’s Circular Economy Action Plan, which calls for product durability, right to repair, and consumer empowerment. While conceived in India, Mission LiFE presents a scalable and adaptable model that can inspire similar citizen-led sustainability initiatives around the world.
- Countries can adopt tailored approaches: launching behaviour campaigns like Japan’s Cool Biz, standardising eco-labels like in the EU, and incentivising circular business models through grants and partnerships. Most importantly, it encourages building broad coalitions including civil society, youth, and business to amplify and localise sustainable living.
- Consumers are not just buyers, they’re changemakers. When empowered, they can influence markets, accelerate innovation, and hold institutions accountable for environmental performance.
- Mission LiFE offers a model where behaviour, policy, and rights work together to reshape our relationship with the planet. The future demands collaboration, smart regulation, and sustained education because protecting consumers is no longer enough. We must empower them to lead.