WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY
KEY INSIGHTS

By Consumers International for eTrade for all
Q. Can you tell us a bit more about the World Consumer Rights Day and its main focus this year?

R. World Consumer Rights Day takes place every year to highlight consumer protection and empowerment issues and brings together the global consumer movement to make lasting changes for people around the world.

Q. Consumers International is calling for fairer digital market places- why do you think it’s so high on the international agenda now and what does it actually mean for the consumers?

R. Digital marketplaces, or e-commerce sites, are where the buying of products or services happens online and has transformed the world for consumers. E-commerce has given people more choice, more convenience and has opened up the global marketplace. It has revolutionised the way people buy and sell goods.

Strong, safe and secure internet access is essential to be able to shop online with confidence. That is why on World Consumer Rights Day many consumer organisations will be calling for better access to the internet. Currently only half of the world’s population have internet access, making accessing digital market places impossible.  

A CIGI-Ipsos survey asked people who have internet access but choose not to shop online, why they don’t. The most common answer was a lack of trust, with half of respondents giving that as the reason. A major contributor to this lack of consumer trust is the fear of incurring unexpected and unscrupulous costs. These can arise from illegal and fraudulent scams or from unfair, unclear and confusing business practices. To address this lack of trust it is vital authorities take action to prevent scams and companies must have clear terms and conditions, fair pricing and good redress procedures.

The issue of e-commerce is high on the international agenda as it’s such a growing consumer issue. Global retail e-commerce sales are set to more than double between 2017 and 2021 to $4.48 trillion. Growing cross-border e-commerce is also seen by national governments as important for economic development. Connecting producers in poorer countries with larger markets has clear benefits for boosting trade. Proposals made at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for new rules covering e-commerce attracted controversy last year. Although new WTO rules look unlikely, the fast pace of change in e-commerce means that the conversation is unlikely to stop there.
Q. What do you feel have been the main progresses over the last few years towards reaching the goal of allowing consumers to benefit from fairer digital market places?

R. There are a lot of factors that need to be in place for consumers to benefit from fair digital marketplaces. Besides access to the internet on fair terms, via a stable connection, consumers need the infrastructure that allows goods to be transported and delivered. They also need access to means of payment, consumer protection laws applied to the digital world and access to redress if something goes wrong.

The complexity of this picture, along with very varied country conditions, means that there is no one major point of progression to point to. In terms of more people coming online, the explosion in mobile connectivity is probably the biggest change in this respect. In policy terms it’s a struggle to keep up with the pace of change.

We think that initiatives like the GDPR could have an important global impact, in terms of boosting consumer trust when it comes to data, since it will shape practice beyond Europe. We would also like to see the OECD recommendations on consumer protection in e-commerce that were revised in 2016 widely implemented.

Q. What role does Consumer International play in making sure that consumers are able to reach digital market places that they can trust? And how can multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as eTrade for all, contribute to the development of a favourable environment for consumers?

R. Consumers international will work with our members, regulators and businesses, to tackle common consumer challenges and find solutions that deliver positive outcomes for consumers. With technology and markets changing at such a rapid pace we simply cannot succeed in helping to protect consumers if we don’t work with a broad range of stakeholders. UNCTAD ‘eTrade for All’ is an important example of this. It is a rich source of information for policy makers and other stakeholders with national examples and international guidelines covering all aspects of e-commerce including consumer protection issues.

Amanda Long, Director-General, Consumers International

1 ‘Internet Users in the World’, Internet World Stats, 2018
2 ‘Global Survey on Internet Security and Trust’, CIGI-Ipsos, 2017