



Note on the Joint Webinar (UNCTAD / ISO-COPOLCO / Consumers International)

UNCTAD held its first UNCTAD / ISO-COPOLCO / Consumers International joint webinar on “using standards as a tool for consumer protection” on 8 April 2020 (15:30 – 17:30) (Agenda in annex). This initiative was born following two webinars held within the UNCTAD Working Group on Consumer protection in E-commerce (WG) on (i) social retail sales through social media and (ii) challenges and best practices in influencers’ endorsement disclosure. Following these webinars, Consumers International representative in the WG informed the UNCTAD secretariat (represented by Ebru, Hyejong and Elizabeth) that there are some standards related to e-commerce, which are developed or currently being developed by ISO at the behest of the ISO Committee on consumer policy (ISO/COPOLCO) and can benefit consumers. It was agreed that it would be useful to bring together standards experts and consumer agencies’ representatives to inform both communities about the work of COPOLCO and the standards it promotes.

The webinar was hosted by ISO/COPOLCO and moderated by Ms. Ebru Gokce, UNCTAD. Mr. Guillermo Zucal gave a brief history of COPOLCO and introduced its work. COPOLCO’s mission is to advise ISO on consumer issues and incorporate consumer interests in standards. ISO has two basic principles for consumers in standards, which COPOLCO applies: Consensus and participation. Understanding the importance of consumers’ participation in the standardization process, ISO set up COPOLCO in 1978 to strengthen and mainstream their participation. COPOLCO has 128 members, comprising national standards bodies and acting as ISO representatives of the consumer interest in their respective countries. COPOLCO facilitates the inclusion of consumers in the development of standards. COPOLCO reports to the ISO Council, which appoints its Chair. COPOLCO has six working groups, including one on product safety, consumer participation and training, and consumer protection in the global marketplace.

Ms. Dana Kissinger-Matray informed the meeting that ISO works with various stakeholder groups, including Governments and academia, and gets their inputs into the development of standards. COPOLCO as coordinator of the consumer stakeholder group is ISO’s “ear to the ground”. The roles of COPOLCO include: To advise ISO Council on the need for new or revised policies or actions within ISO as they relate to consumers’ needs; help consumers benefit from standardization; provide a forum for exchange of information on the experience of consumer participation in the development and implementation of standards; and advise ISO on policies and actions that will benefit consumers. Consumers’ views in standards are shaped by eight fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection:

- The right to safety
- The right to be informed
- The right to choose
- The right to be heard
- The right to satisfaction of basic needs
- The right to redress
- The right to consumer education
- The right to a healthy environment



Consumer priorities for ISO standards concerning consumers include product safety, fitness for purpose, sustainability, ease of use (interoperability), accessibility, vulnerable consumers, product information and labelling, verifiable claims, complaints handling and redress mechanisms, privacy and data protection. Past success in standardization includes a very successful standard on social responsibility. Emerging standards work includes areas such as online reviews, unit pricing, privacy by design and consumers' vulnerability.

Mr. Antonino Serra Cambaceres provided an overview of some of standards related to e-commerce. He informed the audience about some of the standards related to e-commerce. These include: ISO 10008 (2013) on B2C e-commerce transactions (quality management and consumer satisfaction); and ISO 20488 (2018) on online consumer reviews (principles and requirements for their collection, moderation and publication). New standards, which are being developed, include the sharing economy, privacy by design and terms and conditions. The sharing economy standard is about terminology and principles to give a background and context to the transaction on the platform. The privacy by design standardization work aims at introducing a set of principles on minimum privacy standards that platforms should have. Other new areas for standards include Internet of Things, privacy and data protection, and artificial intelligence.

Ms. Saral James talked about how they work with consumers and consumer agencies at the Malaysian Association of Standards Users (Standards Users). Standards Users is the only NGO in Malaysia which specializes in safety standards for consumer products and services. She said that the national standards body in Malaysia, DSM, plays an important role in providing a platform for consumer organizations to voice out and help improve product quality and safety by enabling the standards.

Ms. Sadie Dainton informed the meeting that the British Standards Institution (BSI) works with regulators, including Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), regulator for the communications services (Ofcom), Financial Conduct Authority and the Information Commissioner's Office (responsible for data protection), and with consumer groups. BSI Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN) and Child Accident Prevention Trust are some of the important supporting arms to BSI's work. In market surveillance and enforcement, BSI works with the Office of Fair Trading, Trading Standards Service and other regulators. In the UK, Which? conducted an investigation into fake reviews. On online terms and conditions (T&Cs), there is research carried out by BSI CPIN led by Robin Simpson and Peter Stonely. CPIN is a group of trained volunteers who are experts in consumer issues and represents UK consumers in the development of standards. National standards bodies develop standards solutions, which take on board consumer concerns by working with Governments and consumer protection agencies. BSI published a guidance document for businesses to help consumers understand the T&Cs.

Anna Koroleva, Programme Manager, Conformity Assessment, ISO Central Secretariat, moderated the Q&A Session. Some of the issues and remarks which came up include:

- Dr. Laura Best suggested that we include this webinar in the report of the Working Group to the 8th UN Review Conference.
- To a question from Ying Yu on how standards can relate to cross-border e-commerce transactions across jurisdictions, and their recognition by consumers, Ms. Dainton replied that the customer



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services standards series on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) systems gives guidance to businesses but they are voluntary standards. Dana Kissinger-Matray and Antonino Serra added that standards can be made mandatory by referring to them in the relevant legislation and that COPOLCO worked to strengthen cooperation between consumer agencies and national standards bodies in each country.

- Antonino Serra described a standard on the sharing economy under development based on earlier work (an International Workshop Agreement), comprising terms and definitions, and basic principles; with input from various stakeholders. Court cases involving platforms, including labor disputes, often arise from problems of terminology. The draft is not yet available.
- Mr. Guillermo Zucal specified that experts can join the national mirror committee of an ISO member to input into the work, and by extension, work on the international standard.
- To a question on whether it is possible to give companies rewards to voluntarily adopt these standards, Dana Kissinger-Matray mentioned that there are several tools available to governments such as fiscal incentives or certification mechanisms, and she recommended to check such programmes in each country.
- It was mentioned that in Mexico, there is a mandatory e-commerce standard and online monitoring of compliance with consumer protection law.
- Robin Simpson cited the failure of intergovernmental agreements to provide applicable law across jurisdictions as a strong argument in favor of international standards. If an international platform adopts an ISO standard it provides some assurance to consumers in each country where the platform is active. Antonino Serra concurred and suggested that a future revision of the UNGCP consider this.
- Dana Kissinger-Matray indicated that she would provide information on ISO contacts in each country and useful resources as part of the record of the meeting (see annex).
- Ebru Gokce concluded that there was a great deal of interest in the presentations, and she thanked participants, speakers and COPOLCO Secretariat, webinar hosts. Ms. Gokce and Mr. Serra mentioned useful articles on Consumers and COVID-19 on the UNCTAD and CI websites.
- Guillermo Zucal also thanked all for their support and valuable contributions.
- Participants were invited to contact the UNCTAD Secretariat for any further questions and information.

Webinar on “Using standards as a tool for consumer protection”

8 April 2020, 15:30 (Geneva Time)

Agenda

1. Introduction - Consumers and Standards: Mr. Guillermo Zucal, ISO Consumer Policy Committee (COPOLCO) Chair
2. ISO/COPOLCO and consumer protection: How it works, landmarks and examples of cases and good practices: Ms. Dana Kissinger-Matray, COPOLCO Secretary
3. Overview on standards related to e-commerce, which exist or are being developed: Mr. Antonino Serra Cambaceres, Advocacy Manager, Consumers International
4. How to work with consumers and consumer agencies - A practical experience: Ms. Saral James, Secretary-General, Malaysian Association of Standards Users
Mr. Sadie Dainton, Consumer Policy Manager, British Standards Institute.



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ANNEX: USEFUL REFERENCES FOR FOLLOW-UP ON STANDARDS FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION

ISO's website: www.iso.org

The network of ISO members in each country: <https://www.iso.org/members.html>

About COPOLCO: <https://www.iso.org/copolco.html>

For updates: [E-newsletter, ISO Consumer update](#)

About standards and regulation: <https://www.iso.org/iso-and-policy-makers.html>

Proceedings of the Webinar, [Using standards as a tool for consumer protection](#)

See [past COPOLCO training and outreach events](#)

About Consumers International: www.consumersinternational.org

Contact us: copolco@iso.org