

Consumer Protection in ASEAN (PROTECT)

Making markets work for businesses and consumers

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| Project name | Consumer Protection in ASEAN (PROTECT) |
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| Project region | ASEAN Member States |
| Lead executing agency | Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) |
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Context and Challenges

Effective consumer protection is essential in creating a conducive and competitive business environment. It serves to counter fraudulent or unfair trade practices, which is critical in the face of increased cross-border and online transactions. At the same time, it helps guarantee and enforce basic consumer rights, among others to safety, choice, representation and redress.

Promoting the interests and welfare of consumers is a central commitment towards a dynamic and people-centered ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2025. As consumers hold businesses to higher standards, their confidence and consumption drive competition and innovation. In the long run, this generates economic benefits for the entire region.

However, the heterogeneity of regulatory and institutional frameworks in the ASEAN Member States poses a challenge to legal certainty and cooperation across different jurisdictions. Moreover, particularly in countries with limited implementation records on consumer protection, consumers are not yet sufficiently empowered to assert their legitimate rights, including obtaining adequate compensation if they have suffered harm or losses.

Objective

The project strives to strengthen consumer protection systems in ASEAN, through regional and country-level assistance.

The project support is closely aligned with the Agenda 2030 and contributes to the realization of the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth through fair and equitable markets (Goal 8),
- Reduce inequalities by ensuring that consumers have access to essential products, services and facilities (Goal 10),
- Encourage sustainable production and consumption patterns and practices (Goal 12),
- Enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies as well as provide access to justice for all consumers (Goal 16), and
- Promote multi-stakeholder partnerships at the regional and global levels (Goal 17).

The above is in the understanding that consumer protection cuts across multiple sectors, requiring a holistic approach that accounts for interfaces with other policy areas, notably competition policy and law.



Images:

Page 1 (left to right): Workshop on the ASEAN Consumer Protection Self-Assessment Toolkit and ACCP Website Operationalization; ASEAN Flags

Page 2 (both pictures): Preparatory Workshop on 2019 ACCP Priority Deliverables



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Approach

The project applies a two-tier approach by:

- Facilitating regional dialogue and cooperation within the ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection (ACCP);
- Fostering a “pro-consumer” culture in selected Member States, through the engagement of public and private stakeholders, as well as civil society.

Project activities are primarily guided by the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Consumer Protection (ASAPCP) 2016-2025, with a view towards bridging the implementation gap between regional initiatives and national reforms.

Among others, this comprises country-specific advice to:

- Develop or improve legal and institutional foundations, notably for complaints-handling and dispute resolution;
- Raise broader awareness about emerging consumer issues, among others within the context of the digital economy.

The project also facilitates the continuous knowledge transfer in an “ASEAN helps ASEAN” approach. This complements the work with the International Consumer Protection Enforcers Network (ICPEN), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and other development partners.

Expected Results

- There is a clear regional vision for necessary actions on consumer protection to be carried out in the medium term until 2025.
- Guidelines for progressive regional cooperation are in place, as the basis for initiating and intensifying joint or coordinated efforts between ASEAN Member States.
- The ASEAN High-Level Principles on Consumer Protection constitute the benchmark against which national consumer protection systems can be assessed, among others as part of peer reviews.
- The degree of consumer empowerment in ASEAN is periodically measured and monitored, to demonstrate the progress and impact of consumer protection actions.
- Mechanisms for B2C dispute resolution are gradually upgraded to deal with online and cross-border transactions.
- The ACCP website (www.aseanconsumer.org) delivers up-to-date information and features an innovative system for online complaints and product recalls.
- The ASEAN Consumer Associations Network (ACAN) effectively (re-)presents the collective concerns of consumer groups across the region.

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