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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine
DEPREZ, Director

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To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the
European Union

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Subject: COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION Ex post Evaluation Consumer
Programme 2014 - 2020

Delegations will find attached document SWD(2026) 16 final.

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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**

Ex post Evaluation Consumer Programme 2014 - 2020

{SWD(2026) 10 final}

The Consumer Programme 2014-2020 was designed to ensure a high level of consumer protection, empower consumers, and place them at the center of the EU's internal market. Its overarching objective was to build consumer trust and support cross-border trade, contributing to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. The Programme had a total budget of EUR 194.4 million and funded 270 projects in the form of grants and 573 projects in the form of procurement in all EU Member States, as well as Norway and Iceland, targeting challenges such as digitalisation, increasing market complexity, and consumer vulnerabilities. The Programme also served as a vital tool to harmonise consumer protection policies across the EU, ensuring a consistent approach in addressing key issues and reducing disparities among Member States.

Context and Objectives

The Programme was implemented between 2014 and 2020, as a continuation of the Consumer Programme 2007-2013. It responded to evolving consumer issues, such as the rapid growth of e-commerce, the globalisation of supply chains, and the increasing use of digital tools by traders. The Programme's specific objectives included:

1. Consolidating and improving product safety through enhanced market surveillance and risk analysis.
2. Boosting consumer information and education while supporting consumer organisations to improve their capacities.
3. Strengthening consumer rights and improving access to alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and online dispute resolution (ODR) mechanisms.
4. Supporting enforcement by fostering cooperation between national authorities and providing tools to ensure compliance with EU consumer law.

The Programme's design also recognised the importance of addressing challenges faced by vulnerable consumers, including those with lower digital literacy, limited financial resources, or specific accessibility needs. Its multifaceted approach allowed for targeted actions across different sectors and population groups, ensuring no consumer was left behind.

Key Findings

The ex-post evaluation of the Consumer Programme 2014–2020 found that the Programme was broadly effective, efficient, relevant, and coherent, and demonstrated a clear EU added value, particularly in areas such as product safety, consumer enforcement, and cross-border cooperation. However, the evaluation also highlighted important methodological and data limitations, including incomplete project documentation, inconsistent indicator reporting, and an overreliance on output-based metrics, which constrained the ability to fully assess longer-term impacts. These shortcomings were compounded by a lack of baseline and counterfactual data, making it difficult to measure behavioural or systemic changes attributable to the Programme.

Effectiveness

The Programme was broadly effective in achieving its objectives across key areas:

- **Safety Gate/RAPEX** played a central role in improving product safety across the EU by enabling faster information exchange and coordinated enforcement. However, uneven Member State capacity and enforcement inconsistencies continued to hinder impact in some cases.

- **Support to EU-level and national consumer organisations**, in particular BEUC, helped strengthen policy input, coordination, and information-sharing, including on issues affecting vulnerable consumers such as energy poverty and online fraud. Nonetheless, the impact of such activities on consumer behaviour and outcomes remains difficult to quantify.
- **Consumer information and education initiatives** showed mixed effectiveness. Campaigns often met engagement targets but lacked long-term behavioural impact, partly due to limited integration into national systems. Consumer Law Ready and Consumer PRO were rated highly effective in capacity building, while Consumer Classroom had limited uptake and faced technical and structural challenges.
- **Behavioural and market studies** informed EU-level consumer policy and legislation (e.g. Digital Markets Act, Consumer Credit Directive). These studies were valued for their strategic insights and supported smarter regulation.
- **ADR and ODR mechanisms** increased visibility and awareness of redress options but achieved limited practical results. The ODR platform, despite high traffic, had very low-resolution rates due to low trader participation and was eventually discontinued. ADR systems remained fragmented across Member States.
- **CPC Network and ECCs** contributed substantially to dispute resolution and consumer support, handling hundreds of thousands of cases. However, some performance indicators stagnated or declined, reflecting rising workloads and the need for additional resources to sustain performance.

Efficiency

In the absence of a full cost-benefit analysis, available evidence indicates that several Programme components were implemented efficiently:

- The **Safety Gate/RAPEX system** was cost-effective in preventing consumer harm, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Behavioural studies and support to BEUC** delivered valuable insights and policy input at proportionate cost.
- While **ADR funding** had low uptake and ODR performance fell short, existing ADR systems offered low-cost solutions that could be further optimised through digital tools and coordination.
- **ECC-Net** provided strong returns on investment, resolving a large volume of cross-border complaints and supporting consumer trust.

Coherence

The Programme's objectives and activities were largely coherent, both internally and with broader EU policy frameworks such as the Consumer Agenda 2012 and the Digital Single Market Strategy. However, synergies between ECC-Net, CPC, and ADR bodies could be improved, and coherence with sectoral legislation or national initiatives was not always clearly articulated.

Relevance and EU added value

The Programme remained relevant to the evolving needs of consumers, particularly in light of digitalisation, cross-border trade, and the growing complexity of online markets. It offered clear EU added value by enabling cross-border enforcement and cooperation (e.g. CPC

sweeps, ECC support); by delivering economies of scale through joint actions (e.g. CASP); by supporting consistent application of EU law across Member States; and by strengthening consumer trust and market surveillance in areas beyond the reach of national programmes alone.

Lessons learned

The evaluation identified several key areas for improvement to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of consumer protection programmes:

- **Improved data collection and record-keeping:** Systematic and comprehensive data recording must be ensured for all funded actions, including grants and procurement. Incomplete documentation and gaps in project-level reporting significantly limited the ability to assess impacts. Future programmes should mandate more consistent record-keeping and archiving practices.
- **Stronger outcome and impact indicators:** Monitoring frameworks should go beyond output metrics and include qualitative indicators that assess effectiveness and behavioural impact. For example, the influence of BEUC’s advocacy or the concrete consumer benefit of ECC and CPC actions should be systematically captured.
- **Targeted and sustainable communication campaigns:** Communication and education efforts should prioritise high-impact topics, such as air passenger rights or green claims, tailored to specific audiences and vulnerable groups. School-level programmes should be expanded and mainstreamed to embed consumer education early on.
- **Strategic use of behavioural studies:** Both large-scale and targeted behavioural studies have proven valuable. Their continued use should be coupled with improved access to underlying data for researchers, national authorities, and civil society actors to strengthen evidence-based policymaking.
- **Technological readiness and innovation:** Future actions should anticipate digital developments, particularly in e-commerce. AI-supported tools, such as chatbots or large language models, could enhance consumer complaint handling, provide real-time trend analysis, and support enforcement authorities in detecting systemic risks.
- **Reinforced cross-border collaboration:** More structured cooperation between consumer protection actors, ECCs, CPC authorities, ADR bodies, and consumer organisations, should be promoted. Joint planning, staff exchanges, and shared digital tools can improve coherence, efficiency, and knowledge transfer.
- **Strengthening the Safety Gate/RAPEX:** Under the new General Product Safety Regulation, the Safety Gate could be further enhanced through improved risk assessment training, better integration of emerging risks (including digital and mental health-related aspects), and reinforced capacity to handle a growing number of alerts while maintaining high data quality.
- **ADR system improvements:** To overcome fragmentation, especially among smaller ADR entities, funding rules should be simplified and co-financing thresholds adapted. Greater networking and thematic coordination between ADR bodies should also be encouraged, with stronger Member State engagement.
- **Enhanced enforcement capacity:** The CPC Network’s effectiveness can be further improved by expanding training, updating IT tools, and prioritising cross-border enforcement. Persistent resource disparities across Member States should be addressed to ensure consistent application of consumer law across the EU.