

The Consumer Voice in Europe

TOWARDS TOXIC-FREE CONSUMER LIVES

BEUC's take on the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability



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EC register for interest representatives: identification number 9505781573-45



Co-funded by the European Union

Ref: BEUC-X-2021-038 – 03/05/2021

Why it matters to consumers

Consumers worry about their own – and their children’s – exposure to harmful chemicals. Swedish consumer group *Sveriges Konsumenter* for example recently [found](#) that nine out of ten surveyed consumers are concerned that chemicals can harm current and future generations and the environment. Four out of five Europeans likewise expressed concerns about chemicals in everyday products, according to a 2017 Eurobarometer [survey](#). This is up from 43% in [2014](#). The Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability acknowledges those concerns and commits the EU to address them through an ambitious action plan.

Consumers at the heart of EU chemicals policy

On 14 October 2020, the European Commission [published](#) its Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, outlining a new long-term vision for EU chemicals policy. In line with the European Green Deal, the Strategy “strives for a toxic-free environment, where chemicals are produced and used in a way that maximises their contribution to society including achieving the green and digital transition, while avoiding harm to the planet and to current and future generations.”

BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation fully supports this vision. Consumer groups keep finding dangerous chemicals in products where they are not supposed to be. For example, of the 500+ toys and children’s products tested¹ by BEUC member Forbrugerrådet TÆNK since 2015 21% contained one or more chemicals of concern, including many that are illegal. The Chemicals Strategy is a real chance to tackle this problem – and the broader issue of hazardous chemicals in consumers’ lives – head-on.

While the Chemicals Strategy promises to eliminate toxic chemicals from consumers’ lives, its detailed roll out lies ahead. It is imperative that the Commission acts swiftly and with ambition to ensure that the Strategy delivers the necessary changes for consumers on the ground. EU and national policymakers must likewise keep the level of ambition high when designing and implementing the initiatives outlined in the Strategy.

BEUC and our members look forward to contributing to making the intended and needed changes a reality. Consumer organisations can play a key role, not only in bringing the consumer perspective to the policy debate, but also in mobilising consumers for the transition to a clean circular economy and a toxic-free environment. This paper outlines BEUC’s initial recommendations on how the Strategy can translate into an EU chemicals policy that places the needs of people and our planet centre stage.

A stepping-stone towards a toxic-free environment

A revitalised EU chemicals policy is essential to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including the sustainable use of resources and the protection of human health.² The

¹ Forbrugerrådet TÆNK. [Mange børneprodukter indeholder problematiske kemikalier](#). May 2019.

² See BEUC, EEB, and ETUC. [The European Green Deal must revitalise EU chemicals policy to protect European citizens and environment](#). December 2019.

COVID-19 crisis further highlights the paramount need to reduce the impacts of future pandemics and to support socio-economic recovery by incentivising production of safer, sustainable chemicals. The Chemicals Strategy is thus a crucial stepping-stone for the necessary societal and industrial transformations outlined in the European Green Deal.

We here highlight five major thematic areas where the Strategy promises to deliver important changes for consumers.

Stepping up protection against harmful chemicals

The EU urgently needs new solutions to minimise consumers' exposure to harmful chemicals, including an integrated policy on chemicals in products, better protection of vulnerable groups, and a response to known policy gaps, such as combination effects and endocrine disruptors. The Chemicals Strategy is a first step towards delivering those solutions to Europe's consumers and the environment, notably committing the EU to phase out the most harmful chemicals³ unless their use is proven essential to society.

To protect the health of current and future generations, the EU should:

- **Target the most harmful chemicals for group restrictions under REACH**, as proposed in the Strategy. We further strongly support the proposal to extend the generic risk management approach⁴ as the default option for such chemicals, in particular as regards their use in toys, cosmetics, food packaging, textiles, and other consumer products. This will help ensure that consumers, vulnerable groups, and the natural environment are more consistently protected against harmful chemicals.
- **Prohibit the most harmful chemicals** unless they are proven necessary for health and safety or their continued use is critical for the functioning of society. Potential exemptions for essential uses of these chemicals should only be considered where no acceptable alternatives from a health and environment perspective are available. Industry alone must be responsible for demonstrating that a use is essential for society, according to pre-defined criteria decided by the Legislator.⁵
- **Better protect children, pregnant women, and other vulnerable groups** against harmful chemicals by reinforcing the legislative framework, as correctly observed in the Strategy. We especially welcome the commitment to ensure children are safeguarded⁶ against hazardous chemicals in childcare articles and other children's products by providing at least the same level of protection as in toys. Children are however also exposed to harmful chemicals present in clothing, furniture, carpets, building materials, and other everyday products.⁷ To adequately protect children – and other vulnerable groups – the EU must urgently reduce chemical exposures from *all* sources, and not just from a single product category.

EU toy safety rules are moreover deficient, as recently acknowledged by the Commission, in particular with respect to the current exemption for cancer-causing chemicals that "tolerates their presence in concentrations too high to ensure effective

³ Such as chemicals that cause cancers, gene mutations, affect the reproductive or endocrine systems, or are persistent and bioaccumulative as well as chemicals affecting the immune, neurological, or respiratory systems and chemicals toxic to a specific organ.

⁴ That is, risk management measures automatically triggered by a hazard classification under the Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation based on hazardous properties and generic exposure considerations (e.g. widespread uses, uses in products for children, or non-controllable exposure). Examples of EU laws that apply the generic risk management approach include the automatic ban on cancer causing chemicals in cosmetics and toys.

⁵ BEUC. *Comments to Doc. CA/61/2020: Essential Uses – A possible concept for REACH?* December 2020. Available upon request.

⁶ Through new legal requirements under the General Product Safety Directive and REACH.

⁷ Danish Environmental Protection Agency. [Exposure of children and unborn children to selected chemical substances](#). April 2017.

protection according to current scientific knowledge.”⁸ We expect the Commission to present without delay a solution to the identified deficiencies to ensure children’s health is protected, including by significantly lowering the tolerated thresholds for chemicals of concern. Obviously, these solutions must be mirrored in the announced new safeguards for childcare articles and other children’s products.

- **Address skin sensitisers**, such as fragrance allergens. Skin sensitisation is a severe and growing concern for consumer health, with an estimated 27% of the EU population sensitised to one or more allergens.⁹ Consequently, we strongly regret that the Strategy fails to identify actions to reduce consumer exposure to these harmful chemicals. The EU urgently needs to improve both primary prevention (avoiding sensitisation) and secondary prevention (avoiding relapses in those already sensitised). We urge the Commission to swiftly present clear priorities for identifying relevant skin sensitisers and adequate risk management measures, including measures to protect subgroups at particular risk such as adolescent consumers.¹⁰

Endocrine disruptors: safeguarding consumers against everyday toxicants

Despite the clear evidence linking endocrine disruptors (EDs) to infertility, cancers and other severe diseases and disorders, consumers are still widely exposed to these everyday toxicants through the food they eat, the water they drink, and the products they use.¹¹

Against this background, the Chemicals Strategy signals an important, if overdue, leap forward in the EU’s efforts to protect the health of current and future generations. To achieve this goal, the EU must:

- **Minimise human and environmental exposures from all sources.** BEUC fully supports the commitment to ensure that EDs are banned in consumer products as soon as they are identified and urges the Commission to act without delay. In June 2020, the EU for example identified¹² butylparaben, a widely used cosmetic ingredient, as an endocrine disruptor. Consequently, we expect the Commission to immediately ban butylparaben in cosmetics and other consumer products.
- **Tackle both known and suspected EDs.** We welcome the proposals to create a separate SVHC category for endocrine disruptors under REACH as well as the introduction of new hazard classes in the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation. Doing so will greatly expedite coherent identification and risk management of these harmful chemicals, including in downstream legislation on cosmetics, toys, and food packaging.

It is imperative that future CLP hazard classes capture all chemicals that may disrupt the hormonal system; that is, both those chemicals we know are endocrine disruptors and those we suspect. Consistent with EU practice for substances of equal concern, such as those that cause cancer, change DNA or harm reproductive health (CMR substances), endocrine disruptors should be classified using categories that express the degree of concern based on available evidence. This would further enable authorities to prioritise chemicals for regulatory attention.¹³

Future CLP criteria should build on the current ED criteria for pesticides and biocides. These criteria were however developed exclusively based on a sectoral view, and are not directly applicable to other sectors, such as cosmetics. When designing the future

⁸ European Commission. [Executive summary of the evaluation of Directive 2009/48/EC on the safety of toys](#). November 2020.

⁹ T. Diepgen et al. 2016. Prevalence of contact allergy in the general population in different European regions. *British Journal of Dermatology* 174(2).

¹⁰ See BEUC. [Labelling Fragrance Allergens](#). December 2018.

¹¹ See BEUC. [Endocrine disruptors throughout your day](#). June 2019.

¹² ECHA. [Candidate List update: Four new hazardous chemicals to be phased out](#). June 2020.

¹³ BEUC. [Hormone-disrupting chemicals: when will the EU act against these everyday toxicants?](#) July 2016.

CLP criteria, sectoral variations need to be reflected, in particular with respect to data availabilities.¹⁴ Updating the information requirements in relevant legislation to allow identification of EDs is thus a priority, as correctly outlined in the Strategy. In parallel, new guidance and testing methodologies are also urgently needed, e.g. to identify potential low dose effects.

- **Regulate EDs consistent with chemicals of equivalent concern**, such as CMRs. The Commission's intention to implement a parallel approach through amendments to the REACH 'fast-track' restriction procedure, the Food Contact Materials Regulation, the Cosmetic Products Regulation, and the Toy Safety Directive is therefore welcome. We however urge the Commission to propose a legislative route for other consumer products such as detergents or textiles without delay.

Given the scientific uncertainties on whether safe thresholds for EDs exist at all, a coherent, protective approach across the legislative framework should be established. Consistent with the approach taken under REACH,¹⁵ EDs should be treated as non-threshold substances by default unless industry can demonstrate that a threshold exists.

- **Act without delay.** Until the measures outlined in the Strategy are in place, we urge Member States to advance their efforts to identify substances with endocrine disrupting properties and, depending on the outcome, to nominate those substances for the REACH Candidate List for Authorisation. Priority should be given to substances likely used in consumer products or with widespread or non-controllable uses.

Transitioning to a clean circular economy

The circular economy will only succeed if consumers trust that products made from recycled materials are safe. A scandal, such as a toxic substance recycled into food packaging or a toy, could both create unacceptable health risks and do tremendous damage to consumer confidence in the circular economy.¹⁶

As such, the Strategy rightly aims to minimise the presence of chemicals of concern in products and recycled materials, while also acknowledging that as a principle the same rules for hazardous chemicals should apply for virgin and recycled materials. To detoxify the circular economy, we further recommend the EU to:

- **Ensure better upstream chemicals management** through group restrictions and generic risk management approaches, as outlined in the Strategy. This will not only speed up implementation of legislation meant to protect consumers, but also represents a practical and efficient solution to achieve toxic-free material cycles.¹⁷
- **Minimise the presence of chemicals of concern¹⁸ in products.** The Sustainable Products Initiative needs to play a core role in this regard. We agree that introducing legal requirements for product categories affecting vulnerable populations, such as

¹⁴ A solution must in particular be found for the concern expressed by the Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety that "[d]ue to the ban on animal testing for cosmetic ingredients [...] it will be extremely difficult in the future to differentiate between a potential ED and an ED, if the substance is registered solely for use in cosmetic products." SCCS. [Memorandum on Endocrine Disruptors](#). December 2014. See further SCCS. [Feedback on "Harmful chemicals – endocrine disruptors, review of EU rules"](#). July 2019.

¹⁵ Cf. the review of REACH with regard to substances having endocrine disrupting properties. [COM\(2016\) 814 final](#).

¹⁶ See BEUC. [How to detoxify the circular economy](#). July 2017.

¹⁷ For example, research indicates that improved sorting of recycled paper and board only decreases the content of BPA and DEHP by 19% and 3% respectively, while chemical removal can get rid of 9% and 46% respectively. A complete end to using these toxic substances would mean 100% removal. See K. Pivnenko *et al.* 2016. Material Cycles and Chemicals: Dynamic Material Flow Analysis of Contaminants in Paper Recycling. *Environmental Science & Technology* 50(22).

¹⁸ As defined in the Strategy, that is, substances having a chronic effect for human health or the environment as well as those which hamper recycling for safe and high quality secondary raw materials.

toys and other children's products, as well as those with the highest potential for circular economy, e.g. textiles, furniture, and electronics, are a priority.

- **Close the regulatory gaps** that could afford chemicals of concern a second lease of life in consumers' homes. The REACH exemption for authorised substances in imported articles is one of the most obvious barriers to a sustainable EU circular economy: a large and growing share of consumer goods on the EU market are imported. Yet, manufacturers in third countries are exempted from the authorisation regime and can therefore export products containing authorized substances into the EU, where they will eventually contaminate waste and materials streams.

This regulatory gap risks undermining the transition to a clean circular EU economy and also misleads consumers who instinctively expect that the same protections apply for all products available for purchase in the EU. Consequently, the EU needs to impose parallel REACH restrictions covering authorised substances present in products – whether domestically produced or imported. This will thus contribute both to improved consumer protection and the circular economy transition as well as to ensure a level playing field for products produced in the EU and for those imported from abroad.

Reducing simultaneous and cumulative exposures

Consumers are simultaneously exposed to chemicals released from products as well as through other media such as food, water, soil, and air – a fact sadly ignored by most EU laws. As a result, risks to human health may be systematically underestimated.¹⁹ To effectively protect consumers, the EU urgently needs to:

- **Modernise its approach to assessing and managing chemical risks.** The Commission's proposal to introduce or reinforce provisions addressing combined exposures in legislation on water, food, and consumer products is a good start. The announced revision of REACH is another much-needed opportunity to ensure that industry accounts for combination effects in their registration dossiers.²⁰ Testing requirements should further be updated to fully assess the impact of total chemicals exposures and of cumulative impacts. Research funding to develop new tools to assess and prevent combination effects should in parallel be increased significantly.
- **Establish a horizontal legal framework for chemicals in products** to protect consumers against health risks associated with combined exposures from multiple sources. This framework should for example enable the adoption of cumulative indoor air emission requirements for products – such as furniture, carpets, paints, or air fresheners – which are currently covered by various separate pieces of legislation.²¹
- **Strengthen regulation of persistent chemical pollutants** such as perfluorinated compounds (or PFAS) as outlined in the Strategy. PFAS are used in hundreds of consumer products, including cosmetics, food packaging, and textiles,²² often with no clear benefit to consumers. Beyond their extreme persistence in nature, some PFAS have also been associated with cancer, developmental toxicity, immunotoxicity, and other health effects. BEUC therefore fully supports the proposed PFAS action plan, including the announced ban on all non-essential uses²³ as well as the actions to significantly reduce PFAS contamination in food, water, and soils.

¹⁹ See EDC-MixRisk. [Policy brief](#). March 2019.

²⁰ See further BEUC. [REACH for a non-toxic environment](#). January 2017.

²¹ See ANEC and BEUC. [Achieving a higher level of consumer safety through a revision of the General Product Safety Directive](#). August 2020.

²² BEUC. [PFAS survey](#). April 2018.

²³ See BEUC. [Comments to Doc. CA/61/2020: Essential Uses – A possible concept for REACH?](#) December 2020. Available upon request.

Swift action on early warning signs

The EU must ensure swift action on early warning signs, including across sectors: where health concerns are raised in one area, it should automatically trigger risk evaluations across legislative silos to enable rapid, protective action. A 'one substance, one assessment' process as outlined in the Strategy should support this objective. The EU must further:

- **Avoid paralysis by analysis.** There are tens of thousands of chemicals on the market, and for most we lack even the most basic information about the risk they pose to consumers.²⁴ Consequently, the EU should extend the REACH registration requirements, as proposed in the Strategy, to ensure all substances with critical hazard properties are identified and that information on the overall environment footprint of chemicals is available. This is indeed a much-needed response to widely recognised deficiencies, including the often-glacial pace of current REACH processes.²⁵
- **Streamline the REACH authorisation and restriction procedures**, as proposed in the Strategy. This should include revisions to the legal text to better allow the EU to take early and precautionary action before a risk becomes prominent – that is, before use of a chemical becomes widespread, and not just as today against risks that are already existing and are 'not adequately controlled.'
- **Extend the generic risk management approach as the default option** for the most harmful chemicals as this will – as mentioned above – contribute to greatly speed up the implementation of legislation meant to protect consumers. In parallel, we encourage the EU to introduce an automated trigger for all substances that meet the REACH SVHC criteria to be included on the Candidate List for Authorisation.

Zero tolerance for non-compliance

Compliance with EU chemicals laws remains woefully incomplete. In 2019, 23% of total notifications to the EU Safety Gate system were for example related to chemical risks.²⁶ There must be zero tolerance for companies breaching EU chemicals laws, as stated in the Strategy. We therefore strongly support the commitment to considerably step-up enforcement of EU chemicals rules, including at the EU's borders and on online marketplaces. To achieve this, the EU should:

- **Deliver real change on the ground**, by ensuring that Member States urgently and significantly increase their enforcement capacities, in line with legal requirements.²⁷ The Strategy includes some welcome measures in this regard, such as the commitment to establish – under the Market Surveillance Regulation – uniform conditions and frequency of checks for certain products where specific risks or serious breaches of legislation have been continuously identified, such as online sales or imported goods. This should also include more joint testing and coordinated enforcement actions among Member States. The proposal to introduce a European Audit Capacity to strengthen

²⁴ European Environmental Agency. [The European environment – state and outlook 2020](#). December 2019.

²⁵ See further BEUC. [REACH for a non-toxic environment](#). January 2017.

²⁶ European Commission. [2019 results of the Rapid Alert System for dangerous non-food products](#). July 2020.

²⁷ REACH for example requires Member States to ensure that their competent authorities have the necessary resources to fulfil their tasks in a timely and effective manner; nonetheless, the Fitness Check of EU Chemicals Legislation found that cutbacks in the capacity, available resources and expertise of competent authorities presents significant challenges for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of chemicals legislation. In the food area, BEUC has recently documented a similar disturbing decline in resources and in the overall number of official controls carried out by Member States. See BEUC. [Keeping food in check](#). October 2019.

Member State enforcement capacities is likewise promising and should draw on lessons learnt in the food area.²⁸

- **Strengthen the 'no data, no market' principle under REACH**, as proposed in the Strategy, including by requiring ECHA to perform compliance checks on all registered substances. ECHA should indeed be given the tools, backed by a clear political mandate, to revoke poor quality registrations.
- **Hold online marketplaces accountable** for the safety of goods they sell or facilitate selling on their apps and websites. Research by consumer groups has found that many unsafe products end up in people's homes via online marketplaces such as Amazon, eBay or Wish.com that allow third-party traders from around the world to sell on their platforms.²⁹ Neither guidance for national authorities³⁰ nor voluntary initiatives have to date proven sufficient to keep consumers safe.³¹

For this reason, we doubt that promoting cooperation with the online marketplaces as proposed in the Strategy will result in significant improvements – too often, the platforms are at the root of the problem, enabling EU safety rules to be circumvented.³² Rather the EU needs to impose and enforce comprehensive due diligence obligations on the platforms. As a last resort, online marketplaces must be held liable for the safety of goods they sell, or facilitate selling. Consumers should also be able to seek damages and other remedies for a platform's failure to abide by their obligations. The proposed Digital Services Act³³ and the upcoming revision of the General Product Safety Directive³⁴ represent unique opportunities to do so.

Close liaison between market surveillance and custom authorities must in parallel be ensured, drawing on the lessons from the recent ECHA project on strengthening cooperation with customs authorities for better enforcement of the REACH and CLP Regulations.³⁵

- **Improve cooperation between authorities and consumer groups.** Our members are often the first to detect non-compliant products. Acting upon this information is crucial to improve compliance with EU chemicals legislation. In our experience, however, national authorities too often do not follow up when our members inform them about unsafe and non-compliant products.³⁶

We therefore urge the Commission to launch a broader reflection with Member State authorities on how to improve the cooperation with consumer organisations in the context of EU chemicals legislation such that consumers' health and interests, including that of vulnerable consumers, are better protected in the future. Inspiration could for example come from the approach and principles set out in the revised CPC Regulation, such as to allow consumer organisations to notify authorities of suspected infringements and to give their opinion about investigations or infringements.

²⁸ See BEUC. [Keeping food in check](#). October 2019.

²⁹ For example, six consumer organisations found two-thirds out of 250 tested products failing EU safety laws. See BEUC. [Two-thirds of 250 products bought from online marketplaces fail safety tests, consumer groups find](#). February 2020.

³⁰ See [Commission Notice on the market surveillance of products sold online](#) (2017/C 250/01).

³¹ Whereas many of the platforms have signed the voluntary EU Product Safety Pledge, it is not leading to satisfactory results. In 2019, Danish public broadcaster, DR for example revealed that Amazon, eBay, and Wish continued to sell illegal toys, despite previous promises to remove them. Some of the toys had been notified to through SafetyGate.

³² BEUC. [Dangerous products sold on online marketplaces – action urgently needed to keep consumers safe](#). October 2020. Available upon request.

³³ See BEUC. [The Digital Services Act proposal](#). April 2021.

³⁴ See ANEC and BEUC. [Achieving a higher level of consumer safety through a revision of the General Product Safety Directive](#). August 2020.

³⁵ ECHA. [Forum pilot project on cooperation with customs in enforcement of REACH restrictions and CLP labelling – project report](#). September 2020.

³⁶ See e.g. BEUC. [Member State market surveillance falls short, recent test by consumer organisations show](#). November 2019. Available upon request.

Empowering consumers to drive the transition to a toxic-free environment

Empowered and informed consumers can more easily change their lifestyle and consumption patterns contributing to the improvement of their health, more sustainable behaviour, and a greener economy. For this reason, we strongly welcome the Strategy's recognition of the need to empower consumers – and consumer organisations. Doing so will indeed be key to drive industrial change and to improve compliance with EU chemicals legislation, including at the EU's borders and on online marketplaces.

Consumers frequently report that they lack information about chemicals in the products they buy: a 2014 Eurobarometer survey for example found³⁷ that the health impact of chemicals used in everyday products is the issue most people (39%) would like more information about. More recently, our Swedish member Sveriges Konsumenter found³⁸ that nearly nine out of ten (86%) surveyed consumers want more information about the content of harmful chemicals in clothing, children's products, electronics, and other consumer goods to be available at the time of purchase. The current woeful lack of product information makes it near impossible for consumers to make informed purchasing choices, thus impeding their crucial role as a driving force for substitution and innovation in safer, sustainable alternatives.

To empower consumers, the EU should therefore:

- **Enhance transparency on chemicals in products** as this will afford consumers an informed choice as well as facilitate identification and handling of exposure sources. Consumer groups and other NGOs could further contribute to disseminating information about chemicals in products in a way that is understandable to consumers. Better information – and consumer demands – will in turn reinforce incentives for industry to replace harmful chemicals with safer alternatives and greener technologies. The proposal to introduce legal information requirements through the Sustainable Products Initiative is therefore most welcome. An obligation to declare the chemical content of toys and products for children should be implemented as a priority.

The EU must further reinforce the consumers' right to be informed under REACH, notably by urgently ensuring that companies comply with their obligation to respond to consumer requests for information about the presence of SVHCs in products. Research by our French member, UFC Que-Choisir has for example found³⁹ that almost 70% of companies provide incorrect answers to consumer enquiries – or fail to reply altogether. In parallel, we urge the Commission to extend the right to be informed to all substances of concern as defined in the Strategy and to impose an obligation on suppliers to always respond – within a shorter timeframe than the current 45 days – to a request for information, regardless of whether an SVHC is present in the product or not.⁴⁰

- **Make product labels work for consumers.** Clear, reliable, and readily accessible information about products and their characteristics is an essential safeguard of consumer health, rights, and interests. As such, it is imperative that the methods to communicate this information to consumers is continuously improved. For example, labels on cleaning products are too often overloaded with information;⁴¹ at the same time, manufacturers are not required to declare certain crucial information, such as

³⁷ European Commission. [Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment](#). *Special Eurobarometer 416*. September 2014.

³⁸ Sveriges Konsumenter. [Ny undersökning: konsumenter oroade för kemikalier](#). October 2020.

³⁹ UFC-Que Choisir. [Substances toxiques. Nos analyses sur 39 produits du quotidien](#). November 2018.

⁴⁰ See BEUC. [Comments to Doc. CA/88/2018: Second REACH Review Action 4 – Tracking substances of concern in the supply chain](#). January 2019. Available upon request.

⁴¹ See European Commission. [Executive summary of the evaluation of Regulation \(EC\) No 648/2004 on detergents](#). July 2019.

the full ingredient list. Consequently, consumers may not easily understand or access essential information with potential negative results for their health and the environment.

Digital technologies hold significant potential to increase both the available product information and the effective capacity to communicate it to consumers. Smartphone apps, e-labels and other digital information tools must however not replace established means of communicating mandatory product information to consumers, such as on-pack labels or paper leaflets. Doing so risks undermining, rather than enabling, informed consumer choices, e.g., by making access to information more time-consuming and burdensome or by outright excluding some consumers from information essential to their health and well-being.⁴² Digital tools could however play an important *complementary* role.

- **Fund digital information tools that complement on-product labels**, e.g., by improving legibility for visually impaired consumers or by helping to translate mandatory on-pack information to useful advice for consumers. The hugely popular smartphone apps⁴³ launched by several BEUC members offer an instructive example: these apps provide advice based on widely accepted lists of ingredients of concern, such as the EU list of potential endocrine disruptors. Hence, rather than replace the mandatory ingredient list, the apps complement it, helping to translate ingredient names into meaningful recommendations for consumers. We strongly encourage the EU to provide funding to allow these tools to be replicated in more countries.
- **Support consumer organisations as core partners** in achieving the Strategy's aims and intentions. Our members play an essential role as market watchdogs and in mobilising consumers for the transition to a clean circular economy. In line with the new EU Consumer Agenda, the EU should therefore support consumer organisations in delivering their contribution to a toxic-free environment. This could include EU and national funding for product testing by consumer organisations or support to develop their capacities with regards to collective redress actions related to breaches of EU chemicals legislation.⁴⁴ In parallel, the EU should invest in awareness raising campaigns targeting consumers so they better understand chemicals' impact on their lives.

While empowering consumers in short *is* a core priority for achieving the Strategy's aims and intentions, doing so must **under no circumstance shift responsibility to the consumer for avoiding exposure to harmful chemicals**. Achieving the systemic changes outlined in the European Green Deal likewise cannot rely solely on 'informed' choices by individual consumers but instead requires a revitalised EU chemicals policy, as outlined above.

Achieving policy coherence

The EU must ensure consistency among its policy tools. Trade, notably, is a key policy area that needs to be brought into coherence with the Chemicals Strategy's objectives. We thus agree that the EU must lead by example, including by swiftly closing the loopholes which allow production for export of chemicals banned in the EU. Reversely, trade policy also needs to align with and complement the initiatives outlined in the Strategy, in particular in relation to enforcing chemicals legislation at the EU's borders and on online marketplaces.

⁴² See further BEUC. [Why moving essential product information online is a no-go](#). February 2021.

⁴³ For example [Kemiluppen](#) by Forbrugerrådet TÆNK, [QuelProduit](#) by UFC-Que Choisir or [Tudatos Vásárlók Egyesülete](#).

⁴⁴ See further BEUC. [Consumers in the recovery economy – a strategy](#). September 2020.

Measures to promote the EU's strategic autonomy for chemicals essential to society should be implemented under the Industrial Strategy, supported by the trade policy review and in full respect of existing EU rules. This would enable the EU to achieve synergies with actions foreseen in these initiatives, thus allowing efforts under the Strategy to target protective actions, while incentivising innovation in new safer, sustainable chemicals and supporting the ability of frontrunners to compete vis-a-vis incumbents.

Finally, the Chemicals Strategy must be implemented in close connection with other relevant Green Deal initiatives such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and the Zero Pollution Action Plan.

ENDS



This publication is part of an activity which has received funding under an operating grant from the European Union's Consumer Programme (2014-2020).

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BEUC would like to thank the European Environment and Health Initiative (EEHI) for providing funding for the development of this publication.