Consumer groups call on regulators to investigate generative AI risks & enforce existing legislation

Consumer groups from 14 European countries[1] are alerting their national authorities to launch urgent investigations into the risks of generative AI, such as ChatGPT, and to enforce existing legislation to protect consumers.

These calls are timed with the publication of a [new report](#) today from Forbrukerrådet, a BEUC member and Norwegian consumer organisation, which sheds light on the many risks of generative AI, on the existing rules which can protect consumers and on which rules still need to be developed.

Ursula Pachl, Deputy Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "Generative AI such as ChatGPT has opened up all kinds of possibilities for consumers, but there are serious concerns about how these systems might deceive, manipulate and harm people. They can also be used to spread disinformation, perpetuate existing biases which amplify discrimination, or be used for fraud.

"We call on safety, data and consumer protection authorities to start investigations now and not wait idly for all kinds of consumer harm to have happened before they take action. These laws apply to all products and services, be they AI-powered or not and authorities must enforce them.

"In parallel, the EU is working on a law that will be the world's first comprehensive regulation to tackle AI systems. It is crucial that the EU makes this law as watertight as possible to protect consumers. All AI systems, including generative AI, need public scrutiny, and public authorities must reassert control over them. Lawmakers must require that the output from any generative AI system is safe, fair and transparent for consumers."

BEUC already wrote to [consumer safety](#) and [consumer protection](#) authorities in April calling on them to start investigations because of the breadth and speed of the rollout of generative AI models, such as ChatGPR, and the possible harms resulting from its deployment. The European Data Protection Board has already created a [taskforce](#) to look into ChatGPT.

Summary of report
The report published by Forbrukerrådet summarises various current and emerging challenges, risks, and harms of generative AI. These include:

- **power, transparency, and accountability**, where certain AI developers including Big Tech companies have closed off their systems from external scrutiny, making it very hard to understand how data has been collected or decisions are made.

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- **wrong** or **inaccurate** output, where generative AI systems have not understood context or even made-up non-existent sources to support the content generated. For example, if an AI-powered chatbot provides wrong medical advice to a consumer, it could lead to real-life harm.
- using technology to **manipulate** or **mislead** consumers. For example, by emulating human speech patterns and using emotive language, AI chatbots can trick consumers into interacting with them and make them feel guilty about not taking certain actions or manipulate them into paying for a product or service.
- **bias** and **discrimination**. Because generative AI models scrape enormous amounts of information from the internet, their outputs may contain, perpetuate or create new biases. If the data sets are not curated and cleaned, these factors may become embedded in the systems' outputs. For example, image generators tend to sexualise women, particularly women of colour, at a much higher rate than men.
- **privacy** and **personal integrity**. For example, image generators can use datasets taken from search engines or social media without a lawful legal basis or the knowledge of the people in the pictures. Text generators could include personal data from individuals which may be taken out of context.
- **security** vulnerabilities. Generative AI systems could be used by scammers to generate large amounts of convincing-looking text to deceive victims.

[1] The following consumer organisations are taking part in this action: dTest (Czech Republic), Forbrugerrådet Tænk (Denmark), EKPIZO and KEPKA (Greece), Neytendasamtökin (Iceland), Adiconsum (Italy), Latvijas Patērētāju interešu aizstāvības asociācija (Latvia), Ghaqda tal-Konsumaturi (Malta), Consumentenbond (Netherlands), Organizacija na potrosuvacite na Makedonija (North Macedonia), Forbrukerrådet (Norway), ZPS (Slovenia), CECU (Spain), Sveriges Konsumenter (Sweden). Consumer groups in both the US and EU are also writing to US President Biden on behalf of the Trans-Atlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) to alert about the risks of generative AI for US consumers. UFC-Que Choisir (France) has also supported this action by publishing an article online to warn consumers about the risks of generative AI.

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