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Date: 20/09/2023
Reference: BEUC-PR-2023-039

New survey shows digital environment needs urgent changing to be fair to consumers

- Consumers do not feel **in control** of content they are shown and decisions they take online.
- **Consumers find business' monitoring and tracking online unfair.**
- They want greater **regulation of commercial influencers and more protections for children** online.

Consumers are too often ill at ease, feel insufficiently protected in the digital world, and want greater protection and rights in certain areas, according to survey results¹ published today on various aspects of the online environment.

The findings must serve as a warning to the European Commission which is currently assessing whether EU consumer law is able to deal with the realities of today's digital environment.

The survey's main findings are:

- Despite spending more and more time online, **fewer than half of consumers** (43%) **feel in control** of the content they are shown and the decisions they take.
- Respondents generally felt unhappy with how they are **protected by their authorities**. This dissatisfaction level was highest in Romania (46%) and France (40%) and lowest in Sweden (26%) and Italy (28%).
- Respondents disapprove of **being monitored and tracked online**. Less than one in five consider it fair that they are targeted with ads based on their lives or vulnerabilities.
- Consumers want greater regulation of **influencers on social media**. Almost half (44%) of people who come across influencers saw them promoting possible scams or problematic products. Almost three quarters (74%) of people think the platforms hosting them should also be responsible for their content.
- **Children** deserve greater protection online, according to consumers. 75% agree that children need more protection from online tracking and from being influenced by digital services.
- Consumers also feel there should be more protection of gamers, with almost seven in ten people (69%) say they want more regulation around the exchange of real-world money for virtual items in games.
- People want to have **greater choice** over how much data connected devices collect. Only 7% do not want to choose how much data is collected on them.

¹ The survey of 4,929 participants took place in France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden during February and March 2023.

- The big majority of consumers (77%) would also like to be able to turn off the internet connection on a device if it is not essential for its functioning.

Ursula Pahl, Deputy Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: “Despite clear advantages to a more connected world, there are significant downsides to its current setup which undermine the ability of consumers to protect their rights, stay in control and make their own choices. The survey we are putting out today makes clear that there are big issues which consumers want policy makers to solve.

“The pervasiveness of online monitoring and tracking of people’s lives is unacceptable. We must also do much more to protect children. The survey also raises serious concerns about the role influencers play in the market. What we now need is for the Commission to address these concerns in its ongoing fitness check of EU consumer law and propose amendments to legislation. It is only by tackling these problems that consumer law can stay up to date and the EU can keep its promise of a high level of consumer empowerment and protection.”

BEUC’s recommendations for the Commission, based on the survey findings, include to:

- Make the online environment **fair by design and by default** by supporting free choice and protecting consumers from unfair practices.
- Create a **right to be free of all online tracking**.
- More strictly regulate **influencer marketing**.
- Give consumers a right to decide how much data their **smart devices** collect, and a **right to disconnect** the internet connection where it is not essential.
- **Introduce** stricter regulation to protect **children**.

ENDS

The full survey findings are available [here](#).

