

CONSUMERS AT THE VERY CENTER - UOKiK CONFERENCE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ICPEN

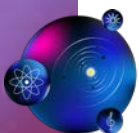
- UOKiK currently leads the work of the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network - ICPEN.
- The first conference under the Polish presidency is being held in Warsaw on 4-6 October.
- The priority is to empower responsible consumer choices and strengthen global cooperation among institutions protecting their rights.

[Warsaw, 4 October 2023] Comparing ICPEN international network to a planetary system, we may say that it revolves around consumers who play the role of its central star. Institutions from more than 70 countries around the world and organizations such as the European Commission, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are rallying around protecting their rights, looking after their interests and watching out for their safety.

This year, after 17 years, Polish Office of Competition and Consumer Protection - UOKiK is once again [leading ICPEN](#). The first conference under the one-year Polish presidency is being held in Warsaw on 4-6 October 2023. Workshops, presentations of activities, summaries of ongoing projects are on the schedule, and the entire event will provide a platform for dialogue and direct exchange of experiences. The theme of the event is "Empowering responsible consumer choices".

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"During our presidency, we will take special care of the synergy between networks, organizations and institutions protecting the most vulnerable market participants - consumers. By improving coordination within ICPEN and other cooperation platforms, such as the OECD and UNCTAD, we are strengthening the ability of individual consumer rights protection institutions around the world to enforce the law. We believe that economies of scale and synchronization of work will allow for an even more effective protection of



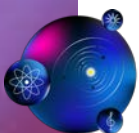
consumers' rights in today's increasingly digital reality," says Tomasz Chróstny, President of the UOKiK.

During the conference, UOKiK will launch a project called "**Online marketing**," focused on issues related to digital marketing. As the Internet, e-communication and e-commerce grow, companies develop new ways to contact consumers and encourage them to buy the goods and services they offer. We keep an eye on innovative strategies, channels and tools that are dynamically changing our reality and becoming yet another part of everyday life. The plethora of stimuli received by consumers can make it difficult for them to make informed and responsible decisions - especially if they encounter unfair and misleading practices. Consumers must be wary of fake online reviews and testimonials, content (for instance, by influencers) whose commercial nature is withheld, or so-called dark patterns that employ social engineering and knowledge of user behavior to influence their preferences and manipulate their decision-making processes. These are the problems that are faced and counteracted by consumer protection authorities.

Poland is also the leader of the program "**Protecting Consumers on the Internet - Finance of the Future: services and scam**," whose goal is to analyze the e-market for new financial services and emerging scams. The technological leap in this area requires detailed risk analyses. Online services, influencer activities and cryptocurrency manipulations are all under scrutiny. The groups that are particularly vulnerable and exposed to such risks are seniors and younger consumers.

Moreover, nowadays it is impossible at the international forum to avoid a discussion about **artificial intelligence**, its potential and its impact on every area of life. Key is a prudent approach and cooperation between public and private entities in order to better understand AI and use it to the benefit of the consumers. Therefore, during the conference UOKiK will share its experience regarding development of solutions to facilitate detection of prohibited contractual provisions.

In line with the theme of the presidency - "Empowering responsible consumer choices" - it is important to keep **environmental and ethical issues** in mind as well. ICPEN has for several years been conducting a project dedicated to the problem of misleading, unclear or false messages created by entrepreneurs, suggesting an ecologically sustainable approach to the





Office of Competition and Consumer Protection

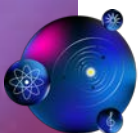
products and services they offer. The work will continue so that consumers are not misled when making purchasing decisions guided by a concern for the welfare of the environment.

Informed consumer choices will also be discussed in the context of the rising cost of living. In times of energy crisis and high inflation, the risk of fraudulent business activities is increasing; therefore, it is important for consumers' rights protection institutions to stay vigilant when it comes to enforcing regulations and educating about sustainable consumption. At the domestic level, UOKiK conducts research activities to identify public attitudes toward the issue of reducing the weight of product packaging while maintaining or increasing the product price. This is an increasingly common practice for entrepreneurs.

For UOKiK and the entire ICPEN, the priority at the very heart of its ongoing work is consumers. The conference in Warsaw is the first of two planned meetings of representatives of institutions protecting consumers' rights from around the world. Subsequent events - a high-level meeting, a best practices workshop and a conference - will be held **May 7-10, 2024 in Gdańsk**.

UOKiK is pursuing intensive efforts to expand ICPEN. The Office invites bilateral cooperation partners to participate in the work and encourages more countries to join the network. All this in order to strengthen the power and outreach, as well as to expand the range of tools for consumer protection through the widest possible exchange of experience and joint initiatives of international partners.

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ICPEN
EMPOWERING RESPONSIBLE
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