



Consumer protection: manipulative online practices found on 148 out of 399 online shops screened

Brussels, 30 January 2023

Today, the European Commission and national consumer protection authorities of 23 Member States, Norway and Iceland (CPC Network), released the results of a screening ("sweep") of retail websites. This check covered 399 online shops of retail traders selling products ranging from textiles to electronic goods. It also focused on three specific types of manipulative practices that are often known to push consumers into making choices that may not be in their best interest, so-called 'dark patterns'. These include: fake countdown timers; web interfaces designed to lead consumers to purchases, subscriptions or other choices; and hidden information. The investigation showed that 148 sites contained at least one of these three dark patterns.

Commissioner for Justice, Didier **Reynders**, said: *"Our screening shows that nearly 40% of the online shopping websites rely on manipulative practices to exploit consumers' vulnerabilities or trick them. This behavior is clearly wrong and against consumer protection. Today we already have binding tools to help tackle such issues and I call on national authorities to make use of their enforcement capacities to take relevant action and fight these practices. In parallel, the Commission is reviewing all consumer legislation to ensure it is fit for the digital age, including to assess whether dark patterns are adequately covered."*

- **42 websites used fake countdown timers** with deadlines to purchase specific products;
- **54 websites directed consumers** towards certain choices - from subscriptions to more expensive products or delivery options - either through their visual design or choice of language;
- **70 websites were found to be hiding important information or making it less visible for consumers.** For example, this included information related to delivery costs, the composition of products, or on the availability of a cheaper option. 23 websites were hiding information with the aim of manipulating consumers into entering into a subscription;
- The sweep also included the **apps of 102 of the websites screened**, 27 of which also deployed at least one of the three categories of dark patterns.

Next steps

National authorities will now contact the traders concerned to rectify their websites and take further action if necessary, according to their national procedures.

In addition to this sweep and as part of its broader efforts to tackle dark patterns to complement the work of the CPC network, the Commission will also contact online traders identified in a 2022 [study](#) on unfair commercial practices in the digital environment to ask them to rectify the issues identified here.

In addition, the Commission is gathering feedback on three directives related to consumer protection, to determine whether they ensure a high level of protection in the digital environment: the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, the Consumer Rights Directive, and the Unfair Contract Terms Directive. A [public consultation](#) is open until 20 February 2023.

Background

The [Consumer Protection Cooperation](#) (CPC) is a network of authorities responsible for the enforcement of EU consumer protection laws. To tackle cross-border issues, their actions are coordinated at EU level.

National authorities are responsible for the enforcement of EU consumer protection laws. Thanks to the updated [Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation](#), they now have stronger powers to detect irregularities and take speedy action against rogue traders.

The new [Digital Services Act](#) will prohibit dark patterns on online platforms. It will complement rules

such as the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#) or the [General Data Protection Regulation](#), ensuring that no regulatory gap is left for platforms to manipulate users.

Moreover, the [new Directive on better enforcement and modernisation of Union consumer protection rules](#), amended existing EU consumer law instruments by further enhancing transparency for consumers when they buy on online marketplaces.

Sweeps are carried out by the network using a set of common criteria prepared by the European Commission. Information on previous sweeps can be found [here](#).

For More Information

[Sweeps: Website checks](#)

[Consumer protection regulation: Factsheet](#)

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