

Consumer Protection in ASEAN II (PROTECT II)

Making markets work for businesses and consumers

Project name	Consumer Protection in ASEAN II (PROTECT II)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	ASEAN Member States
Lead executing agency	Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
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Context and Challenges

Effective consumer protection is essential in creating a conducive and competitive business environment. It serves to counter fraudulent or unfair trade practices, which is critical in the face of increased cross-border and online transactions. At the same time, it helps guarantee and enforce basic consumer rights, among others to safety, choice, representation, and redress.

Promoting the interests and welfare of consumers is a central commitment towards a dynamic and people-centered ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2025 and beyond. As consumers hold businesses to higher standards, their confidence and consumption drive competition and innovation. In the long run, this generates economic benefits for the entire region.

However, the heterogeneity of regulatory and institutional frameworks in the ASEAN Member States poses a challenge to legal certainty and cooperation across different jurisdictions. Moreover, particularly in countries with limited implementation records on consumer protection, consumers are not yet sufficiently empowered to assert their legitimate rights, including obtaining adequate compensation if they have suffered harm or losses.

Objective

As the first phase of the project ended in 2022, the follow-on project continues to strengthen consumer protection systems in ASEAN, through regional and country-level assistance. The project support is closely aligned with the Agenda 2030 and contributes to the realization of the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- Reduce structural poverty and social injustice in the medium to long term through sustainable and fair trade (Goal 1),
- Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth through fair and equitable markets (Goal 8),
- Reduce inequalities by ensuring that consumers have access to essential products, services, and facilities (Goal 10),
- Encourage sustainable production and consumption patterns and practices (Goal 12),
- Enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies as well as provide access to justice for all consumers (Goal 16), and
- Promote multi-stakeholder partnerships at the regional and global levels (Goal 17).

The above is in the understanding that consumer protection cuts across multiple sectors, requiring a holistic approach that accounts for interfaces with other policy areas, notably competition policy and law.



Images:

Page 1 (left to right): the National Consumer Conference Cambodia 2023 in Phnom Penh; Dissemination and Training Workshop on Consumer Protection in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR (2023).

Page 2 (left to right): National Consumer Protection Conference Viet Nam 2019; Joint Workshop ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection (ACCP) and ASEAN Consumer Associations Network (ACAN) – both in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 2019.



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Approach

The project applies a three-tier approach by:

- Facilitating regional exchange and cooperation within the ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection (ACCP);
- Modernising consumer protection policies in selected ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam);
- Fostering an innovative and a “pro-consumer” culture in selected Member States, through the engagement of public and private stakeholders, as well as civil society.

Project activities are primarily guided by the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Consumer Protection (ASAPCP) 2016-2025, with a view towards bridging the implementation gap between regional initiatives and national reforms.

Among others, this comprises country-specific advice to:

- Develop or improve legal and institutional foundations, notably for complaints-handling and dispute resolution;
- Raise broader awareness about emerging consumer issues, among others within the context of the digital economy.

The project also facilitates the continuous knowledge transfer in an “ASEAN helps ASEAN” approach. This complements the work with the International Consumer Protection Enforcers Network (ICPEN), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and other development partners.

Expected Results

- There is a clear regional vision with feasible actions on consumer protection for the medium term until 2025.
- Guidelines for progressive regional cooperation provide orientation for joint or coordinated efforts, among others on cross-border complaints-handling and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR).
- The ASEAN High-Level Principles on Consumer Protection constitute the benchmark against which the adequacy and effectiveness of national consumer protection systems is assessed.
- Member States draw on ideas from the regional dialogue to optimise consumer protection policies and take active steps to ensure that consumer rights are enforced effectively in the growing regional and online trade.
- The degree of consumer empowerment in ASEAN is periodically measured and recommendations derived on how to strengthen consumer advocacy and outreach.
- The ACCP website (www.aseanconsumer.org) delivers up-to-date information and features an innovative system for online complaints, product recalls and e-learning.
- The ASEAN Consumer Associations Network (ACAN) represents the collective concerns of consumer groups across the region and international dialogue fora.

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