



**BUSINESS**atOECD

# ***Empowering Consumers Together: A Roadmap for OECD Policies***

---

*Business at OECD (BIAC) Vision Paper on Consumer  
Policy Priorities for the 2024 OECD Committee  
on Consumer Policy Ministerial*

**Established in 1962, *Business at OECD* (BIAC) is the officially recognized institutional business stakeholder at the OECD. We stand for policies that enable businesses of all sizes to contribute to economic growth, sustainable development, and societal prosperity.**

**Through *Business at OECD*, national business and employers' federations representing over 10 million companies provide perspectives to cutting-edge OECD policy debates that shape market-based economies and impact global governance. Our expertise is enriched by the contributions of a wide range of international sector organizations.**

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Priorities for Action</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Transitions as a Catalyst for Business Innovation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Co-constructing Innovation and Consumer Product Safety</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Boosting Consumer Welfare through Open Trade and Investment</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Fostering an Environment for Business to Thrive</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. Future Trends and Policy Considerations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>12</b>

# Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving global marketplace, the relationship between businesses and consumers is more dynamic and complex than ever before. The private sector, as the critical driver of economic growth and innovation, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer experiences and expectations. In turn, consumers are weighing on businesses with their consumption habits. As such, the vision for consumer policy within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states must reflect a collaborative approach that harnesses the strengths of both private enterprises and policy frameworks. This paper aims to present the private sector's perspective on actively nurturing an environment that prioritizes consumer empowerment, trust, and protection.

The OECD has long been at the forefront of promoting policies that enhance consumer welfare and market efficiency. However, the unprecedented pace of technological advancements, the rise of sustainability concerns, and the increasing complexity of global supply chains offer opportunities for strengthening existing consumer policies. These policies must address not only current challenges but also anticipate future trends and opportunities. By presenting a cohesive vision from the private sector, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on how best to empower consumers in a way that supports sustainable economic growth and innovation.

In constructing this roadmap, we explore key areas where private sector insights can inform policy development. These include fostering digital literacy and inclusivity, ensuring data privacy and security, promoting fair competition, and enhancing consumer redress mechanisms. We also examine the importance of cross-sector collaboration and public-private partnerships in achieving these goals. By integrating the perspectives and expertise of businesses, this paper underscores the potential for creating consumer policies that empower consumer choice, enable consumers and support innovation.

We recognize the consumer benefits from innovation and technology and would like to ensure that potential future consumer benefits are not limited by consumer policies that are singularly focused or not enforceable, thereby missing the broader potential for consumer well-being. Together, we can develop policies that enhance consumer protection, whilst providing space for continued innovation and delivering a level playing field for technological development. Consumers are best placed to benefit from the digital transition and together we can help realize the potential of the digital transition.

*Business at OECD* (BIAC) advocates for a synergistic approach where the strengths of the private sector and the policy frameworks of OECD countries converge. Such an approach is essential for building resilient and trust-based consumer markets that can adapt to the changing economic landscape. As we navigate the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, it is through this collaborative effort that we can ensure consumers are well-informed, protected, and empowered to make decisions that drive economic and social progress.



# Priorities for Action

## 1. Transitions as a Catalyst for Business Innovation

The dual imperatives of green and digital transitions are reshaping consumer markets and driving business innovation across OECD countries. As many consumers increasingly value more sustainable and digital solutions, businesses adapt to meet evolving demands. By ensuring business practices align with new consumer behaviors, companies can stay competitive while contributing to a sustainable future. We support and have sought to emphasize the focus on global collaboration between policymakers, businesses, civil society, academics, and other contributors to consumer policy. We also need to address the role of bad actors, such as the organizations behind impersonation scams, fake reviews, and counterfeit products. It is our combined responsibility to protect consumers from bad actors in all markets.

### ***1.1. Shifting Business Practices to Reply to New Consumer Behaviors and Demands***

Businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to pivot their practices in response to shifting consumer behaviors and demands. To thrive in this dynamic environment, companies must be agile and ready to reimagine business models, including by experimenting with circular economy principles, and embracing renewable energy sources. To that end, the general policy frameworks should also evolve to allow for more flexibility and integration of sustainable practices, enhancing transparency, and utilizing data-driven insights to anticipate and address consumer needs. It is crucial to ensure that policy frameworks remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate shifting consumer behaviors and demands, enabling businesses to maintain agility and adaptability.

### ***1.2. Embracing the Digital Transformation in Consumer Markets***

The digital transformation has reshaped how consumers interact with products and services. From e-commerce to personalized recommendations, digital solutions are now integral to daily life. Companies that embrace digital tools and platforms can streamline operations, enhance customer experiences, and access new markets by leveraging data analytics, artificial intelligence, and automation to enhance customer experiences. We recognize the benefits that innovation and technology offer to consumers and aim to ensure that consumer policies do not inadvertently restrict the broader potential for enhancing consumer well-being. Together, we can develop consumer policies that enhance consumer protection, whilst providing space for continued innovation and technological development. Consumers are best placed to benefit from the digital transition and together we can help realize the potential of the digital transition.

### **1.3. Advancing Sustainability and Accompanying Eco-Friendly Consumer Choices**

Sustainability is becoming a strategic priority for consumer-facing companies, opportunities and challenges spanning their entire value chain, as well as a potential key driver in consumer decision-making. Consumers' evolving demand for eco-friendly products, transparent supply chains, and reduced environmental impact is leading businesses to align with sustainability goals and rethink their entire value chain, from sourcing raw materials to manufacturing processes and packaging.

Consumer policy has a key role in accompanying trends set by consumers by supporting green innovation, including through accurate and substantiated environmental information, and fostering competitive markets that can deliver cost-effective solutions for consumers. These goals can be effectively accomplished through collaborations between policymakers and the private sector, including producers and manufacturers.

#### **Business recommendations to the OECD and governments**

- We call on governments to support the transitions businesses face to meet evolving consumers' needs through supportive economic policies.
- We encourage the OECD to foster collaboration by encouraging industry-wide initiatives to learn from each other and promote responsible business conduct.
- We encourage governments, businesses, and consumer advocates to work together in developing awareness campaigns for new and emerging threats, such as impersonation scams.
- Governments should support digital literacy programs and infrastructure development to ensure businesses and consumers alike can fully leverage digital technologies, driving widespread adoption and innovation.

## **2. Co-constructing Innovation and Consumer Product Safety**

Innovation is a cornerstone of economic growth and consumer prosperity, yet it must be compatible with safety to protect public welfare and maintain consumer trust. As businesses continue to push the boundaries of technology and product development, adaptive and forward-looking product safety regulations are essential to mitigate risks while fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

### ***2.1. Innovation is Driving Economic Growth and Prosperity for Consumers***

Innovation is a key catalyst for economic development and enhancing consumer well-being. By introducing advanced healthcare solutions, smart home technologies, and other cutting-edge products and services, businesses can significantly improve quality of life and create new opportunities for consumers. These innovations not only drive economic growth but also empower consumers by providing them with better choices and more efficient solutions. Our vision emphasizes the importance of supporting continuous innovation to sustain this momentum for economic and consumer benefits. Further, as businesses innovate, they require regulatory environments that are both protective and flexible, evolving with technological progress to mitigate risks and leverage approaches compliant with the World Trade Organisation without stifling innovation.

### ***2.2. Businesses Need Adaptive and Forward-Looking Safety Regulations***

Ultimately, for innovation to thrive, businesses require regulatory environments that are both protective of public safety and flexible enough to accommodate rapid technological advancements. Adaptive regulations that evolve alongside technological progress can help mitigate risks without stifling innovation. It is essential that policymakers adapt and develop frameworks that support the dynamic nature of innovation, ensuring the safety of products while allowing businesses the freedom to explore new frontiers. Policies promoting the right to repair and waste reduction should be mindful of the various objectives faced by companies. We advocate for regulatory approaches that are proactive, evidence-based, flexible, and responsive to the changing landscape of technology and market needs.

### **2.3. Fostering Public Trust**

Trust is at the core of successful innovation. Consumers must have confidence in the safety and reliability of the products they use. A single safety lapse can significantly damage trust, private sector reputation, and sustainability transitions, underscoring the need for robust product safety standards. The private sector recognizes that aligning innovation with safety is vital for long-term success. Our vision is to foster an ecosystem where innovation flourishes within well-defined safety boundaries, ensuring that consumer trust remains intact. Consumer policies should therefore promote an environment where product safety and innovation coexist, enabling businesses to innovate responsibly and sustainably. At *Business at OECD*, we are committed to working with policymakers to develop and implement regulatory frameworks that foster innovation and ensure consumer safety. In order to deliver consumer policies that provide the room to innovate, we also recognize the importance of effective enforcement mechanisms. We therefore encourage the Organisation to raise the visibility of Safety Pledges among its membership and track their success, to amplify the positive effects of these initiatives. By doing so, we can create a thriving, trust-based market that benefits both businesses and consumers alike.

#### **Business recommendations to the OECD and governments**

- Policymakers should adapt current and develop flexible regulatory frameworks that accommodate rapid technological advancements while maintaining rigorous product safety standards to ensure consumer protection.
- We call on the OECD to ensure consumer policy enforcement remains a priority and we encourage initiatives to share information, best practices, and ways to leverage technology to protect consumers and provide a level playing field for businesses.
- We support the implementation of regulatory sandboxes and regular review mechanisms to allow businesses to test new products and services in a controlled environment, ensuring safety while fostering innovation.
- We encourage governments and policymakers across jurisdictions to align with risk-based principles provided by the World Trade Organisation Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement and associated 2024 guidelines.
- We encourage governments to establish innovation hubs and provide R&D tax credits to stimulate innovation, ensuring that the benefits of technological advancements are widely accessible to consumers.



## **3. Boosting Consumer Welfare through Open Trade and Investment**

The OECD has long provided evidence-based analysis highlighting the benefits of open trade and investment for all, including consumers. Yet, an increasingly polarized world and rising protectionist rhetoric risk undermining the achievements from decades of economic integration and open markets. In light of the current “cost-of-living crisis”, the OECD is instrumental in supporting governments and their efforts to safeguard market benefits to consumers, enable more resilient supply chains, and ensure consistent product availability at affordable prices.

### **3.1. Open Markets for Affordable Lives**

Countering the current populist narratives against international trade and investment is a challenge faced by several OECD members. The OECD should seek ways to communicate more effectively existing insights to public audiences and governments with clear messages, concrete facts, and examples. Therefore, we look to the Organization to build upon its expertise and evidence-based analysis emphasizing improve the current “cost-of-living crisis” through encouraging open trade and investment. In response to years of exceedingly high inflation, such an effort should underline how reducing trade barriers directly lowers prices for essential goods and services, benefiting all consumers, but particularly those in low-income households.

### **3.2. Enable Businesses to Build More Resilient Supply Chains**

Companies in OECD countries and beyond are confronted with increasing risks of supply chain disruptions including escalating trade tensions, geostrategic challenges, natural disasters, financial stresses, infiltration by organized crime groups to trade illicit products, or cybersecurity threats. As these challenges can impact product availability and price stability for consumers, the OECD and governments should prioritize actions to help businesses build more resilient supply chains. Therefore, international trade and investment agreements that foster economic resilience through supply chain diversification should be negotiated, agreed and ratified in a timely manner, especially among OECD countries.

### **3.3. Product Lifecycle Management and Safe Repairs**

Many businesses are fully committed to advancing circular economy business models, including reuse, repair, refurbishment, and remanufacturing to strengthen environmental sustainability in our economies. While this may also include providing consumers with access to repair information, parts, and tools, it is crucial to strike the right balance, enabling businesses to ensure the continuous safety of their products and responsible use by consumers. In this regard, policymakers should work closely with the private sector to consider how to address safety risks associated with repairs outside the original manufacturer's oversight. Conformity assessments ensure that products meet regulatory standards before they enter the market. These assessments need to consider the lifespan and intended use of the products and must also adapt to prevent unauthorized repairs or the use of non-standard parts that could compromise safety and performance when products are refurbished or reused. However, when products are reintroduced through refurbishment or secondary use, these evaluations must adapt to prevent unauthorized repairs or non-standard parts from compromising safety and performance.

### **3.4. Support Effective Recall Mechanisms through Better Technology**

In order to prioritize product reliability and safety, companies are committed to establishing effective traceability and recall mechanisms within supply chains. Businesses are increasingly using technology to achieve real-time visibility and traceability, which enhances their capacity to promptly and precisely address reliability and safety risks. As the implementation of technology solutions like Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) holds great promise in this regard, governments should work closely with the private sector to enable businesses to benefit from these technological advancements to enhance consumer safety.

By addressing these key areas, we aim to foster supply chains that not only withstand disruptions but also enhance consumer confidence and satisfaction. At *Business at OECD*, we are committed to working with industry leaders and policymakers to develop strategies that navigate supply chain challenges and turn them into opportunities for growth and consumer benefit.

### **Business recommendations to the OECD and governments**

- We call for standardized policy frameworks to enable recall protocols that will improve businesses' ability to manage supply chain challenges effectively, safeguarding consumers and maintaining market stability, including measures to detect and prevent the entry of illicit goods.
- We call for establishing appropriate protocols to verify the qualifications of repairers for the safe repair of products with clear safety implications, such as battery products or electrical equipment. This involves confirming if repairers are approved by manufacturers, have received relevant training, or if the repair is simple enough for consumers to perform. We call for policymakers to modernize the product recall processes and encourage sharing more information to help consumers use products safely.
- We encourage initiatives ensuring that product components destined for reuse in the circular economy are certified as fit for use in repair applications according to international standards and through repeatable, measurable test methods, and for consumers to have access to transparent, accurate information about refurbished, reconditioned, or remanufactured products.

## 4. Fostering an Environment for Business to Thrive

Creating a conducive environment for businesses is essential for sustaining economic growth, social prosperity, and innovation. At *Business at OECD*, we believe that achieving this requires enhanced regulatory cooperation among OECD countries and robust cross-sectoral and public-private partnerships. Consistent regulations and fostering collaboration are crucial steps for policymakers to support business growth and innovation, ensuring a stable and predictable environment that benefits both businesses and consumers.

### 4.1. Enhancing Regulatory Cooperation among OECD Countries

Regulatory cooperation among OECD countries is vital for creating a stable and predictable business environment. Compatible regulations not only reduce compliance costs but also facilitate international trade by providing a consistent framework within which businesses can operate. Such cooperation helps eliminate barriers to market entry, fostering a more competitive and dynamic marketplace. We need to encourage efforts to align policy frameworks across OECD countries through dialogue and cooperation between regulatory bodies to address emerging challenges and accompany technological advancements and market needs.

### 4.2. Strengthening Cross-sectoral and Public-Private Partnerships

Cross-sectoral and public-private partnerships are another effective way to address complex challenges and drive innovation. By leveraging diverse expertise and resources, these collaborations can deliver comprehensive solutions that benefit consumers and businesses alike. Public-private partnerships can bridge gaps between sectors, fostering innovation through shared knowledge, funding, and technological capabilities. Initiatives such as innovation hubs, joint research and development projects, and public funding for collaborative ventures can stimulate cross-sectoral partnerships that drive economic growth and innovation.

*Business at OECD* is committed to fostering an environment where businesses can thrive through enhanced regulatory cooperation and strengthened cross-sectoral partnerships. By working together, policymakers and businesses can create a conducive environment for innovation, ultimately benefiting consumers and driving sustainable economic growth.

### **4.3. Coherent Standards to Ensure Responsible Business Conduct**

Empowering consumers throughout a product's lifecycle is crucial for fostering a sustainable and resilient market. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting and responsible business conduct (RBC) compliance requirements, and the number of these requirements continues to grow rapidly. However, standard fragmentation and proliferation pose challenges for companies operating in multiple markets and geographies, as well as for consumers making responsible choices. The OECD is well placed to address this issue by enhancing dialogue on related policies amongst its members and beyond, ensuring that such standards are transparent, realistic, and implementable for companies operating on the ground.

#### **Business recommendations to the OECD and governments**

- We welcome the OECD initiatives to establish international multistakeholder dialogue avenues to discuss regulatory consistency and promote cross-sectoral initiatives to foster a supportive environment for business innovation and growth.
- We encourage the OECD to develop coherent information-sharing mechanisms to simplify cross-border operations for businesses and foster international collaboration and growth.
- We call on the OECD to encourage public-private partnership initiatives and create platforms for cross-sectoral dialogue to enhance cooperation, leading to more effective and innovative policy and enforcement solutions.

## 5. Future Trends and Policy Considerations

As we look to the future, stakeholders have the responsibility to analyze emerging trends and anticipate policy considerations that will shape consumer markets and business practices. Emerging technologies, shifting consumer preferences, and global challenges will require adaptive and forward-thinking policies to ensure market vitality and consumer protection. For the private sector, proactive policy development that takes into account business considerations is essential for addressing future challenges and leveraging new opportunities to benefit consumers and businesses alike.

### **5.1. The Role of Emerging Technologies and Innovation in Shaping Consumer Policy**

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things are revolutionizing consumer markets. These innovations offer significant benefits, including enhanced consumer experiences, improved product safety, and greater transparency. They also provide new ways in which consumers interact with products and services and thereby pose new regulatory and enforcement challenges. Embracing new technologies can greatly improve consumers' experience and satisfaction, especially when we prevent bad actors from using these technologies to harm consumers. Digital business models and technologies have empowered consumers with greater access to information from businesses, their suppliers, and also from fellow consumers for example via consumer reviews. Our goal is to ensure that every consumer review is trustworthy and reflects customers' actual experiences, thereby empowering consumers with useful information. Encouraging innovation while safeguarding consumer rights will require continuous dialogue between policymakers, businesses, and technology experts to ensure that policy frameworks are both supportive of innovation and protective of consumers.

### **5.2. Long-term Vision for a Resilient and Adaptive Consumer Policy Framework**

A resilient and adaptive consumer policy framework is essential for governments to ensure long-term consumer protection and market stability. Regulations should be capable of responding to rapid changes in the market and technological landscape while maintaining robust consumer protection. In that context, policymakers should adopt a long-term vision that prioritizes resilience and adaptability, including regular reviews and updates of consumer policies, incorporating stakeholder feedback, and ensuring that policies are flexible enough to address new developments. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within regulatory bodies will help create a dynamic policy environment that supports both consumer welfare and business growth.

At *Business at OECD*, we hope to strengthen collaboration with policymakers and other stakeholders to anticipate future trends and develop forward-thinking policies. By embracing a proactive and adaptive approach, we can ensure that consumer policies remain effective and relevant, fostering a thriving and resilient market that benefits all stakeholders.



## Business recommendations to the OECD and governments

- We welcome the OECD's evidence-based policy research and advice to governments and reiterate that empirical evidence should be the basis of sound policymaking. We believe the Global Forum on Consumer Policy will provide opportunities to strengthen robust, peer-reviewed, and transparent policy analysis, and *Business at OECD* recommends further dialogue in this area.
- We call for the OECD to encourage policymakers to support businesses in adapting to evolving consumption behaviors and support multistakeholder initiatives that create consistent enforcement authority and greater funding to hold bad actors accountable.
- We encourage OECD member countries to invest in consumer education and literacy programs to support the evolution of markets. These programs should focus on financial literacy, digital literacy, environment literacy, and understanding consumer considerations.
- We encourage OECD member countries to stand against illicit trade and work closely with the private sector to develop strategies that address illicit aspects of trade, promoting safer marketplaces and protecting consumer welfare in all contexts.

# Conclusion

Cooperation between policymakers, businesses, and consumers toward a comprehensive framework for fostering innovation, ensuring consumer protection, and promoting sustainable business practices is needed. By offering an enabling policy framework supporting transitions towards eco-friendly products and digital adoption, governments have the potential to drive business innovation and meet evolving consumer demands, and the OECD has a significant role in facilitating collaboration globally and across industries.

Creating an environment conducive to business growth through international dialogue, coherent information-sharing mechanisms, and public-private partnerships will further drive innovation and cross-border collaboration. Further, we need to ensure that innovation aligns with safety through adaptable regulatory frameworks and that innovation hubs support technological advancements while serving consumers and upholding stringent product safety standards. Additionally, standardized policy frameworks for supply chain management and product repairs will safeguard consumers and enhance market stability. Finally, investing in consumer education programs will empower consumers to navigate evolving markets with confidence and awareness.

Together, these recommendations provide a robust pathway for OECD member countries to support businesses and consumers in a rapidly changing global landscape, fostering an environment both innovative, safe, and sustainable.





## **BUSINESS**atOECD

*Business at OECD (BIAC)*

13-15, Chaussée De La Muette - 75016 Paris

Tel: + 33 (0) 1 42 30 09 60

[www.businessatoecd.org](http://www.businessatoecd.org)

  @BusinessatOECD