



Consumers' Awareness, Protection And Blockchain For Traceability In The Digital Economy G20 Italy - Multistakeholder Forum 6th May 2021

Civil 20 contribution to Parallel Session 1 – Consumers' Awareness and Education

Civil 20 gathers more than 500 organizations and networks from 100 countries. We submit our contribution on behalf of this wide constituency.

As civil society organizations we want to call everybody on setting any consideration on digital economy, and in particular on ecommerce and consumers' role, in the framework of the **Human Rights** and of the principles of **sustainability** as per the **2030 Agenda**. Economy is not delinked from the other dimensions of our societies and communities, so, together with the technical instruments, we need an ethical and political compass to design, rule and manage digital economy and digital markets.

With this perspective we address six main points.

1. **Consumer protection and awareness can only be provided through participation. Consumer protection starts with effective policy design** of the digital economy systems, with **full and meaningful engagement of consumers/citizens throughout all the process**, from the rule-making to the selection and impact assessment of the systems, including the design of business liability, dispute resolution, right to withdraw/cooling-off period, and regulatory agency(s) in charge, using accessible language and referenced in terms and conditions.
2. Digitalization can provide a dramatic **increase of available information on products**. This is a considerable **advantage for the consumers**, that count on a better and wider information on the products they demand and purchase. But tracing products and consumption, on the other hand, **can become a relevant risk**, with the traceability applied to people and consumers, resulting in an **invasion of citizens privacy**, with possibly no limits to the **monitoring of private life of citizens, including political preferences and private relations**
3. **Geolocation and qualitative traceability** are relevant tools to qualify products and to enable consumers to choose and exert a **responsible consumption**. Consumers pressure can influence the behaviors of the producers. International laws and regulation should support digital systems that can help in monitoring not only the **geographic story** of the goods but also their ethical **holistic story: the respect of environment and people involved in their production**. This can **influence the global supply chains** in their impact on environment and social condition of the people who participate in the productive process, in particular the **most vulnerable workers in the first part of the chain**.
4. **Certification systems** must be promoted, using the technical opportunities provided by the digitalization. Certification systems must **not be left to market**. **Parliaments** must be involved in setting certification systems accessible to small producers. In agriculture and food sectors, relevant experiences exist in Latin America of **participatory certification systems** provided by networks of small scale farmers (Sistemas de Garantía Participativos) and recognized and approved by the state, that can be dramatically improved by digitalization, for the benefit of both consumers and ecological producers. (In the following link an example from Mexico: <https://www.gob.mx/senasica/documentos/certificacion-organica-participativa?state=published>).

5. As well as we ask for supporting networks of small scale producers, in particular small scale farmers, there is a need for supporting networks of consumers. Fiscal and legal facilitations are needed to promote **experiences of direct buying of 'purchasing groups of households' or 'ethical purchasing groups'**, that **channel a qualified demand**, able to **influence the supply and fuel the awareness of consumers and of all actors involved in the market**. In too many cases these kinds of experiences have not yet an easily accessible legal status.
6. The **role of states is fundamental** in managing data and in guaranteeing the respect of human rights and privacy, **preventing monopolistic roles** at the global level. While we have legal instruments at the national level, weak or no tools are exist at the global level. The **private actors can't be the main player of the management of the net and of its data flows**. There a strong need of concertation and dialogue among stakeholders: a concertation that provides effectiveness and shares awareness (ref. **p.1**).

Moreover, **E-commerce platforms should be provided by the state and public authorities**. In the case of real markets in our towns and villages, **physical spaces and technical facilities are provided by the (local) public authorities**. The same must happen for e-platforms. Several private actors are not only buying and selling on the net, but they provide digital spaces to make buyers and sellers meeting together. This is a fundamental role of the state, **that it can't and mustn't abdicate**.

In conclusion we need **proactive public institutions** and **strong participatory dialogue** in order to protect and guarantee **HRs and sustainability** to promote People, Planet, Prosperity and not forgetting Peace.