European Commission

HELP AND ADVICE ON YOUR PURCHASES ABROAD

ECC-Net

The European Consumer Centres Network
2012 Annual Report

Health and Consumers

ECC-Net is co-financed by the European Commission and national governments.

This report describes activities of ECC-Net in 2012.

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http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm

More information about ECC-Net at:
http://ec.europa.eu/ecc-net

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HELP AND ADVICE
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The European Consumer Centres Network
2012 Annual Report

Foreword

500 million empowered and confident European consumers are a powerful driving force for Europe's economy. The choices that they make in their daily transactions are buttressed by EU consumer protection rules, which are among the most advanced in the world. My task is to make sure that these rules produce the desired result in the daily lives of Europeans.

I am therefore very proud to promote the work of the European Consumer Centres, which are co-funded by the European Union and the national consumer authorities in all EU countries, Norway and Iceland. Thanks to this financing, the European Consumer Centres can help European citizens with practical cross-border consumer problems every day and offer them professional advice without charging them, thus contributing to strengthening the perceptions that consumers have of the Single Market and their confidence in it.

In particular I would like to commend the impressive work of the Centres: in 2012 they dealt with more than 72,000 contacts with consumers, of which 32,000 were complaints. Thanks to their work the great majority of cases brought to them ended in an amicable solution between consumer and trader.

European Consumer Centres are also particularly active in raising the awareness on consumer rights through joint studies and campaigns. To cite a few highlights this year: on 4 July they were at hand at 28 airports across Europe to talk about air passengers' rights and fans in the UEFA EURO 2012 championship and in the London 2012 Olympics were offered key consumer tips to plan stress-free trips to these venues.

This activity report will give you an array of detail and testimonies on the value of this network. I would really like to thank the European Consumer Centres, the Member States' consumer authorities and the host organisations for their strong commitment to help European consumers to participate in the Single Market and reap the benefits that it can deliver to them.

Tonio BORG
Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy

Main abbreviations used in this publication:

ECC	European Consumer Centre
ECC-Net	European Consumer Centres Network
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
NEB	National Enforcement Body for Air Passenger Rights (Regulation (EC) No 261/2004)
CPC Network	Consumer Protection Cooperation Network (Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004)

We are grateful to the ECCs for their substantial contributions to the preparation of the chapter on national activities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012, the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) had more than 72,000 contacts with consumers asking for advice about their rights or for help with cross-border shopping problems. Since 2005, the year in which the ECC-Net was created, the number of contacts has constantly increased.

The ECC-Net handled more than 32,000 complaints from consumers who experienced problems while purchasing goods or services from a trader located in a different country. The ECC-Net data shows that the number of cross-border complaints is considerably higher than in previous years (e.g. in 2011, ECCs handled almost 27,000 complaints). This demonstrates that European citizens know how to act and whom to turn to if they feel that their consumer rights have been infringed. At the same time, the number of individual information requests decreased as a result of a better availability of information on EU consumer rights, for example on the ECC websites (26,000 information requests received by ECCs in 2012, compared to 28,000 in 2011).

These figures alone demonstrate that the 29 ECCs in the 27 EU Member States, Iceland and Norway form an efficient assistance network playing an important role in boosting consumer confidence in the internal market. By offering European citizens professional free consumer advice and help in case of cross-border problems they contribute to ensure that consumers are equally protected wherever they shop in Europe. ECC intervention leads to amicable settlements between traders and consumers in the vast majority of cases. The ECCs therefore also contribute to significantly reducing the cost of litigation for consumer complaints and towards the smooth functioning of the internal market.

In 2012, the ECC-Net was also particularly active in raising awareness on consumer rights. The Centres published several joint studies, e.g. research on how the European small claims procedure worked in practice or a study examining complaints from consumers who shopped online cross-border in 2010-2011. On 4 July, the ECCs were on hand at 28 airports across Europe to offer advice to European citizens about their air passenger rights. Football fans attending the UEFA EURO 2012 and spectators at the London 2012 Olympic Games were offered key consumer tips on how to plan stress-free trips to these events and how to avoid consumer hassle with travel, accommodation or shopping.

NINE GOOD REASONS TO CONTACT ECC-NET:

1. The service is free of charge due to financing by the EU and by national governments.
2. It is based in every EU country, Norway and Iceland.
3. It has a dedicated staff to provide cross-border shoppers with professional consumer advice.
4. It offers an effective, easy and quick alternative to legal action against traders.
5. It offers advice before buying goods or services to help save money and avoid problems.
6. It offers advice on consumer rights when shopping in Europe.
7. It offers help finding a solution when things go wrong.
8. It offers assistance in contacting foreign traders when a consumer has problems resolving a complaint.
9. It offers advice on other ways to deal with a complaint if an amicable solution is not possible.

PROFILE OF ECC-NET

What is ECC-Net?

ECC-Net is an EU-wide network that provides information to consumers on their rights when shopping cross-border and that helps them to find a solution if something goes wrong.

ECC-Net has been operational since 2005.

There are European Consumer Centres in 29 countries – every EU Member State, Norway and Iceland. For further information, please visit the website at:
http://ec.europa.eu/ecc-net

ECC-Net is co-financed by the EU and the participating countries. For actions undertaken in 2012, the EU contributed over €4.8 million to support the ECCs.

The services of the European Consumer Centres are free of charge.

The ECC-Net has had nearly 490,000 contacts over the past eight years.

In 2012, ECC-Net received more than 32,000 cross-border complaints, one third of which concerned the transport sector. Online purchasing was the selling method which caused most problems for consumers (60% of complaints). More than half of the complaints were resolved amicably or passed on to other organisations: 45% of the complaints were successfully closed after the ECCs reached an amicable settlement with the trader and 13% were passed on to other organisations.

32,000
complaints received per year

32%
of complaints concerned transport sector

60%
of complaints related to online purchasing

Over 50%
of complaints resolved amicably or passed on to other organisations

Why ECC-Net?

Informed and empowered consumers play a key role in strengthening competition in the internal market and stimulating growth. Providing consumers with clear information about their rights and assuring them that they can obtain effective redress in case of a cross-border problem improves their confidence and helps unlock the full economic potential of the internal market.

European consumers should feel as confident when buying in another EU country as they do at home. The aim of ECC-Net is to offer consumers a wide range of services, from providing information on their rights when shopping across borders to giving advice and assistance with their complaints when problems arise.

ECC-Net is the only European network that can inform citizens about their rights when shopping cross-border, offering them free help when they become entangled in cross-border problems.

What problems can ECC-Net help with?

ECC-Net deals with any cross-border problem between a consumer and a trader. It covers consumer related issues such as online shopping, buying goods and services, air travel, package travel, timeshare and holiday clubs, and car hire in Europe.

What problems can ECC-Net NOT help with?

ECC-Net cannot help with business to business issues, if there is no cross-border element involved (national cases) or if a trader is established outside the EU, Norway or Iceland. ECC-Net cannot deal with a case if the other party is a governmental body (ministry, national agency, etc.). ECC-Net cannot enforce the law and/or apply sanctions on traders; neither can it provide redress. ECC-Net cannot represent the consumer in court.

How can you contact a European Consumer Centre?

Consumers from the EU, Norway or Iceland who want to know more about their rights when shopping in Europe, or need assistance, can reach the ECC in their own country by phone, fax, e-mail or enquiry form. The contact details of the Centres are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/ecc-net

A consumer from Austria: *«...I would like to kindly thank you at ECC Austria and your Norwegian colleagues for your efforts concerning tickets to a U2 concert, for which I paid in advance but never received. It is more or less a Christmas miracle that I got my money reimbursed. Finally, this story has a happy end for all of us! Once again, thanks for your fantastic support to you and to your colleagues in ECC Norway. All the best and a Happy New Year...»*

What services does ECC-Net provide?

The services which ECC-Net provides to consumers focus on business-to-consumer problems when shopping cross-border, either in person or via distance purchases (mainly e-commerce). ECC-Net:

- Provides information on both EU and national consumer protection rules.
- Gives advice to consumers facing a cross-border related problem and helps them contact the trader with a view to reaching an amicable solution.
- Informs consumers on alternative ways to deal with complaints if they cannot be solved amicably with the trader, e.g. ADR[1] or a Court, using the European Small Claims Procedure[2] or the European Order for Payment Procedure[3].
- Co-operates with other EU-wide networks, such as the Consumer Protection Cooperation network[4], Europe Direct[5], FIN-NET[6], SOLVIT[7] and the EJN in Civil and Commercial Matters[8].
- Provides valuable input for the European Commission on consumer policy issues. ECC-Net is in a unique position to know the everyday concerns and problems of consumers and increasingly provides input to policy-makers at both EU and national levels.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/adr_en.htm
[2] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/consumers/protection_of_consumers/l16028_en.htm
[3] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/judicial_cooperation_in_civil_matters/l16023_en.htm
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/enforcement/index_en.htm
[5] http://europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm
[6] http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/finservices-retail/finnet/index_en.htm
[7] http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/site/index_en.htm
[8] http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/index_en.htm

How does ECC-Net work?

A consumer who has a problem with a trader based in another country must first contact the trader directly to try to find a solution. If no solution can be found, the consumer may contact the national ECC. The ECC in the consumer's country will liaise with the ECC in the country where the trader is located. Then the ECC of the trader's country which knows the national rules will contact the trader to try to reach an amicable solution.

Where ECC involvement does not lead to an amicable solution with the trader, ECCs will advise consumers – as far as possible – on how to access an appropriate national ADR entity and/or propose other options for solving the problem (such as the European Small Claims Procedure or the European Order for Payment Procedure) so as to try to avoid the normal court procedures, which can be lengthy and costly.

With the help of the European Commission, ECC-Net is developing and improving the efficiency of its tools: since 2007, the Centres have used a common IT tool to register and share consumer requests and compile statistics.

This could be you

Alice from Sweden and her daughter were scheduled to fly from Riga to Stockholm, with a Latvian air carrier. Due to technical issues, the plane was replaced with a smaller one and as result they were denied boarding. Passengers were re-routed and they also received assistance. However, the air carrier was not willing to compensate them for the denied boarding. Alice turned to ECC Sweden which forwarded the complaint to ECC Latvia. Since passengers were denied boarding in Riga, ECC Latvia transferred the complaint to NEB in Latvia – the Consumer Rights Protection Centre. After the intervention of the NEB, the air carrier paid compensation of €250 to each consumer.

HOST ORGANISATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER CENTRES IN 2012

COUNTRY	HOST ORGANISATION	TYPE OF ORGANISATION[1]
AUSTRIA	Verein für Konsumenteninformation, VKI (Austrian Consumers' Association)	NGO
BELGIUM	Organisation Indépendante pour la Protection du Consommateur a.s.b.l — OIPC, Test-Achats (Independent Organisation for Consumer Protection)	NGO
BULGARIA	Commission for Consumer Protection	G
CYPRUS	Competition and Consumer Protection Service, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism	G
CZECH REPUBLIC	Czech Trade Inspection Authority	G
DENMARK	Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen (Danish Competition and Consumer Authority)	G
ESTONIA	Consumer Protection Board of Estonia	G
FINLAND	Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority	G
FRANCE	Centre Européen de la Consommation - Zentrum für Europäischen Verbraucherschutz e. V.	NGO
GERMANY	Zentrum für Europäischen Verbraucherschutz e. V. - Centre Européen de la Consommation	NGO
GREECE	Hellenic Consumers Ombudsman	G
HUNGARY	Nemzeti Fogyasztóvédelmi Hatóság (Hungarian Authority for Consumer Protection)	G
ICELAND	Neytendasamtökin (The Consumers' Association of Iceland)	NGO
IRELAND	National Consumer Agency	I
ITALY	Adiconsum (Associazione Difesa Consumatori e Ambiente) CTCU (Centro Tutela Consumatori Utenti Alto Adige)	NGO NGO
LATVIA	Latvian Consumer Rights Protection Centre	G
LITHUANIA	State Consumer Rights Protection Authority	G
LUXEMBOURG	Centre Européen des Consommateurs - Groupement d'Intérêt Economique (GIE) Luxemburg	I
MALTA	Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority	G
NETHERLANDS	Stichting Het Juridisch Loket (Foundation the Legal Service Counter)	G
NORWAY	The Consumer Council of Norway	G
POLAND	Urząd Ochrony Konkurencji i Konsumentów (Office of Competition and Consumer Protection)	G
PORTUGAL	Direcção-Geral do Consumidor (Directorate-General for Consumers)	G
ROMANIA	Romanian Association for Consumer Protection	NGO
SLOVENIA	Zveza potrošnikov Slovenije, ZPS (Slovene Consumers' Association)	NGO
SPAIN	National Institute for Consumption (NIC)	G
SLOVAKIA	Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic	G
SWEDEN	Konsumentverket (Swedish Consumer Agency)	G
UNITED KINGDOM	The Trading Standards Institute (TSI)	NGO

[1]NGO: non-governmental organisation. G: governmental. I: independent.

ECC-NET STATISTICS

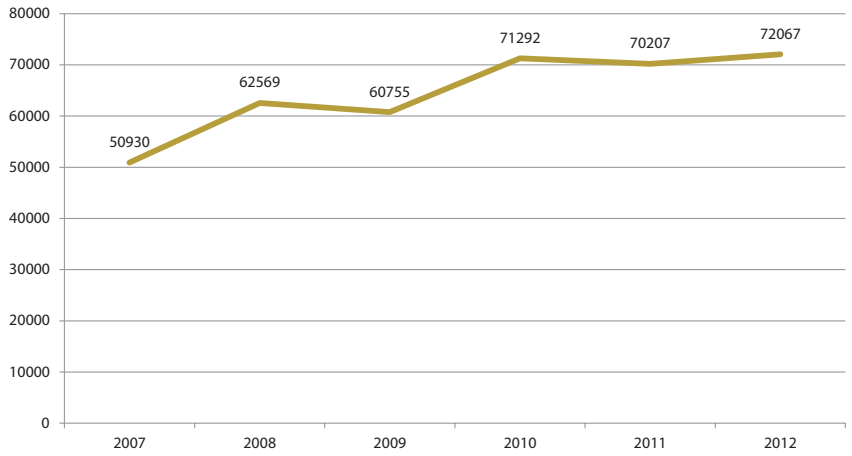
Consumers increasingly contact ECCs

In 2012, European Consumer Centres had more than 72,000 contacts with consumers. After a slight decrease in 2011, the number of contacts is again on the rise and the trend is clearly upward.

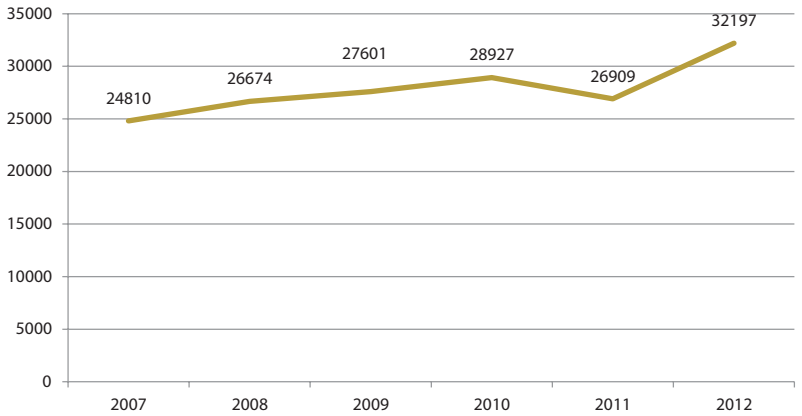
The number of contacts reflects how many times ECCs have been contacted, either by consumers or by another ECC in order to help solve a complaint from one of their consumers. Consumers can contact an ECC for information on their consumer rights, for advice when they have an issue with a trader or for help with the handling of their complaint after the first contact with the trader did not lead to a satisfactory conclusion.

In 2012, ECCs received more than 32,000 cross-border complaints, which is considerably higher than in previous years. The number of requests for information (not related to a specific complaint) on the other hand has decreased, which is most likely due to the fact that more and more information on consumer rights is available on the websites of ECCs.

Number of contacts



Number of complaints



Applicable EU law concerned by complaints

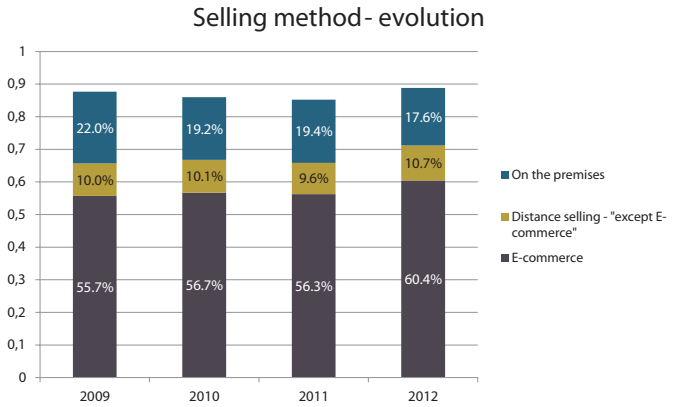
The majority of complaints received in 2012 concerned an infringement of the Directive on distance contracts which represented one fourth of all cases. The non-respect of the Directive on the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees and of passenger rights (Regulation on denied boarding and cancellation or long delay of flights) also accounted for a high number of complaints. These laws together with national legislation were the source of more than half of the complaints.

Applicable law	Percentage
Directive 97/7/EC distance contracts	24,1%
National Legislation	11,0%
Directive 1999/44/EC sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees	9,7%
Regulations (EC) No 261/2004 denied boarding and cancellation or long delay of flights	9,2%

Selling method

As in previous years, the majority of complaints related to online purchases (60%). This share had been growing slowly in recent years but increased markedly between 2011 and 2012.

This is in line with the trend of recent rapid growth in online shopping. According to a survey on Consumer attitudes towards cross-border trade and consumer protection, the proportion of internet shoppers has almost doubled since 2006: 53% of respondents made purchases through the internet in the past 12 months. Cross-border e-shopping is still less frequently used but 15% of respondents used it over the past 12 months, a proportion that has tripled in recent years[1].



[1]Flash Eurobarometer 358 will be published in May at: *http://ec.europa.eu/health/eurobarometers/index_en.htm*

Economic sectors

The transport sector is regularly the number one source of cross-border complaints: one third of the 2012 complaints were related to transport. Air transport was at the origin of more than 20% of all complaints (of which luggage issues represented only a minor proportion compared to other issues linked to the denial of passenger rights or unfair commercial practices). Car rental represented almost 3.5% of complaints.

Another area with a clear cross-border dimension is tourism: package holidays and timeshare related products were at the root of more than 7% of all complaints; hotels and restaurants almost 4.5%; and recreational, sporting and cultural services 7%.

Certain goods categories also feature highly in the complaints reflecting areas of strong development for cross-border e-shopping: for example furnishing and household equipment represented 6.8% of complaints; audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment more than 5%; communication 4.7%; and clothing and footwear 4.5%.

One sector that generated considerably more complaints in 2012 than the previous year is the health sector, in particular when related to the purchase of non-pharmaceutical medical products, therapeutic appliances and equipment. This reflects a growing trend to sell products over the internet with misleading or unfounded claims – slimming pills for example.

This could be you

Emma from the Netherlands ordered online 2 sorts of diet pills from a UK trader. After reflection, Emma cancelled the order, doubting the truth of the advertised effects of the products. The pills had already been shipped so when they arrived, Emma immediately sent them back to the trader asking for reimbursement. Only after ECC Netherlands and ECC UK intervened was Emma partially reimbursed.

It is also worth noting that personal care accounts for 3% of all complaints, and financial services and insurance 2.5%.

Main economic sectors concerned by complaints	Percentage
Transport, of which:	32,1%
air transport (including problems with luggage)	21,6%
car rental	3,4%
Timeshare related products and package holidays	7,4%
Recreational, sporting and cultural services	7,0%
Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance	6,8%
Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment	5,6%
Health	5,1%
Communication	4,7%
Clothing and footwear	4,5%
Hotels and restaurants	4,5%
Personal care goods and services	3,0%
Financial services and insurance	2,5%

Source of the problem

When consumers contacted ECC-Net in 2012 concerning a cross-border purchase, more than one third of the issues were linked to the very nature of distant purchases: the most common complaints arose from the non-delivery of the product or service, the product or service having defects or not conforming with the order.

This could be you

Miguel from Portugal ordered online a bike from a French trader. The bike was never delivered so Miguel contacted the trader. While the trader confirmed that the bike was probably lost on the way and requested an explanation from the delivery company, he did not take any action to reimburse the consumer. Thanks to ECC Portugal and ECC France, Miguel got his money back.

Other important issues concerned the rescission of the contract and the additional charging of supplements. These problems accounted for almost half of all complaints. Other reasons for complaints included cooling-off periods not respected, unordered products or services delivered with a request to pay, damages, delays in delivery, unsolicited goods, misleading commercial practices and refusal to sell.

Nature of complaint	Percentage
No delivery	16,4%
Product/service defective	11,9%
Product/service not in conformity with order	8,8%
Rescission of contract	6,0%
Supplementary charges	4,0%

Outcome for consumers

Only partial information is available on the outcome of the complaints. In many cases, ECCs simply inform consumers about their rights, so that they can contact the trader themselves. Consumers rarely come back to ECCs with information about the outcome of a resolved complaint. One can therefore assume that in many cases consumers come to an agreement with the trader once the ECCs had made them well aware of their rights and of what exactly they could claim or expect.

For more complicated cases, where ECCs assist consumers further with their cases by contacting the traders themselves, more information on the outcome is available (see table). In almost 45% of these complaints, an amicable settlement was reached with the trader. In another 13% of cases, the ECC transferred the complaint to, or advised the consumer to make contact with, another organisation – such as an Alternative Dispute Resolution entity, court or enforcement body. For the remaining share of complaints where no solution was found, this was mostly due to a lack of agreement on the part of the trader, but sometimes because the consumer did not agree with the proposed solution. In some other cases, it appeared that the claim was considered to be unfounded.

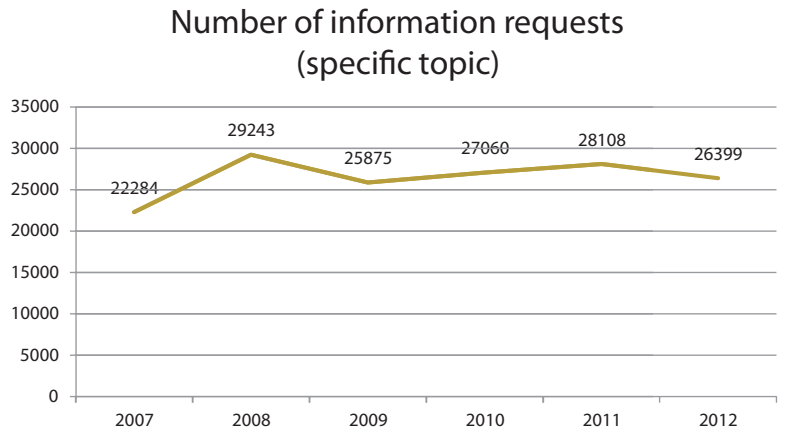
Closure of the complaint *	Percentage
Amicable settlement obtained with the trader	44,6%
No solution found, of which:	42,1%
lack of agreement from the trader	27,8%
lack of agreement from the consumer	2,9%
claim unfounded	8,2%
Transfer case to other organisation/agency, of which:	13,3%
ADR entity	8,7%
court	1,4%
enforcement body	1,2%

A Portuguese consumer: *«I am deeply grateful for ECC-Net assistance. Only with your help was it possible to get money back from the car rental company which did not react to my complaint. The ECC-Net existence is important and it should be better known to everyone. Many people still lose money because they do not know where to look for help in case of a problem.»*

*Statistics based only on complex cases opened and closed in 2012.

Information requests

In 2012, ECCs received fewer information requests than in previous years. This is most likely due to the fact that ECCs make more and more information on consumer rights available on their websites and participate in awareness raising events. For example, the number of requests for information on specific topics (i.e. not requests for publications) went down in France by half in 2012 compared to 2011, while the number of unique web visitors went up by 40%. This represents many more people in absolute terms, as web visitors numbered about 300,000 in France in 2012.

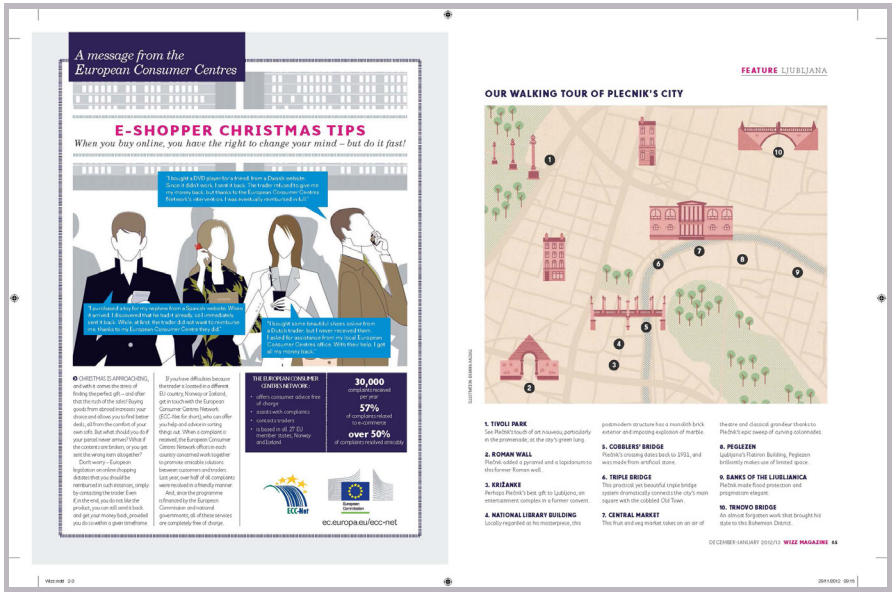


Information requests are not related to a specific complaint and can concern a publication or information on a particular topic. Depending on the national arrangements, ECCs can also handle requests on national issues.

A look at the economic sectors related to the information requests on specific cross-border issues reveals that the ranking of concerns is similar to that of complaints. Only the clothing sector and footwear sector appears higher up and this is likely to be linked to the recent surge in cross-border e-shopping in this sector.

STUDIES AND INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

In addition to directly helping consumers, ECC-Net is very active in promoting awareness of EU consumer rights among European citizens and economic operators by publishing specific studies and organising campaigns.



ECC-Net European Small Claims Procedure Report

When looking for cross-border bargains, European consumers should feel confident that if there is a problem with the goods or with their delivery, they can effectively enforce their rights. The European Small Claims Procedure is one of the solutions offered by the European Union to settle cross-border disputes in cases involving €2,000 or less. The aim of this procedure is to improve access to justice by simplifying small claims litigation in cross-border civil and commercial matters thereby reducing costs. However, a study by ECC-Net carried out in 2010 showed that the practical implementation of this procedure had significant shortcomings. First, it was relatively unknown – not only among consumers but among judges as well. Second, the enforcement of the judgement resulting from this procedure was often protracted by the losing party. Only a minority of the positive rulings made by the courts in consumers' home countries were actually enforced across borders. The European Commission will tackle these issues vigorously in order to make this procedure really work for European consumers.

The European Online Marketplace - consumer complaints 2010-2011

ECC-Net report «The European Online Marketplace – consumer complaints 2010-2011» highlighted the main problems that consumers faced with online cross-border transactions. During 2010 and 2011, ECC-Net collected approximately 31,000 consumer complaints per year, out of which 56% concerned online issues. The report showed that faulty delivery and defective products and services were the main sources of consumer discontent. In order to help consumers avoid these problems and many more, the report also provided a checklist of tips to avoid online traps. Based on the conclusions of this report, ECC-Net also published the e-shopper Christmas guidelines in the inflight magazines «Wizz» of Wizz Air and «Traveller» of easyJet.

Ski Resorts in Europe 2012/13

ECC-Net carried out a European market survey on winter sport resorts. The aim of this study was to give an overview of various skiing possibilities across Europe and offer a guide for all ski-lovers, whether they ski on a shoe-string budget, take a family holiday or change ski resort every year. ECC-Net compared numerous ski resorts across Europe enabling consumers to choose the most suitable ski resort for their personal winter vacation.

Full reports are available at the ECC-Net website:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/ecc/consumer_reports_en.htm

Air Passenger Rights Day 2012

One in 5 complaints received by ECC-Net concern the air transport sector. Lost luggage and cancelled or delayed flights can turn any holiday into a nightmare. On 4 July 2012, European Consumer Centres were on hand at 28 European airports to offer advice to European citizens about their air passenger rights. Passengers were also informed about the help they can get from ECC-Net if problems arise when travelling in the EU. There was a constant stream of visitors to the stands in all airports and the initiative attracted top media attention in most Member States.

Starting out as a national initiative in the main airports of Italy in 2009, this idea evolved into a European action, every year informing more and more consumers that there is someone they can turn to for help who will be able to «connect» to any other country or language on their behalf and resolve their cross-border problems quickly and easily.

4 July 2012, Air Passenger Rights Day - European Consumer Centres at the airports across Europe.

UEFA EURO 2012

On 1 June 2012, the European Commission and UEFA launched a consumer information campaign to advise football fans travelling to the EURO 2012 Championship in Poland and Ukraine. A website offering tips on how best to prepare the trip and what to do in case of a problem was created; the Europe Direct Contact Centres were on hand to answer any online query on general EU consumer rights in 23 languages; and a consumer Infoline in English provided legal advice to those who ran into consumer problems in Poland.

London 2012 Olympic Games

The European Commission, being aware of the challenges which sports fans might face when attending the biggest sporting event on the planet, put together a webpage with key consumer tips on how to plan a successful, stress-free trip to the Olympics in London and avoid consumer hassle with travel, accommodation or shopping. This webpage offered essential, hands-on information and links to services that could help visitors in case of a problem. It was established in partnership with Europe Direct, the UK Citizens' advice bureau and ECC-Net.

Posters about these services were displayed for the benefit of fans at popular hotels.
The EU-UEFA campaign was run with the support of ECC-Net.

European Consumer Centres at national events

In 2012, European Consumer Centres were very active at national events. Many useful conferences and seminars were organised, and numerous brochures were published and distributed among consumers. ECCs were also present at various fairs and other actions organised by stakeholders (EU networks, host organisations, national competent authorities and other partners). For more country-specific information, please see the chapter on national activities.

ECC Ireland's seminar on Alternative Dispute Resolution.

ECC Czech Republic at the Day of Europe festival in Prague.

The Baltic States' cooperation meeting.

International scientific-practical conference «Legal aspects of consumer protection in the EU».

ECC Belgium's seminar on E-commerce fraud.

ECC Sweden at International Travel & Tourism Trade Fair.

NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

AUSTRIA

As in previous years, ECC Austria was active in representing ECC-Net at several fairs, e.g. Holiday Fair Vienna. The Centre led a joint project 'Ski resorts in Europe 2012/2013', which produced a final report evaluating some 1 200 ski centres in 26 European countries. It also published a brochure on passenger rights (600 000 copies) and a flyer on the European small claims and European order for payment procedures (10 000 copies).

ECC Austria stressed the importance of these procedures for European citizens. It helped consumers to identify the competent court and to fill in application forms. In many cases courts decided in favour of consumers. If necessary, ECC Austria also assisted consumers in having the decision enforced in the other EU Member States.

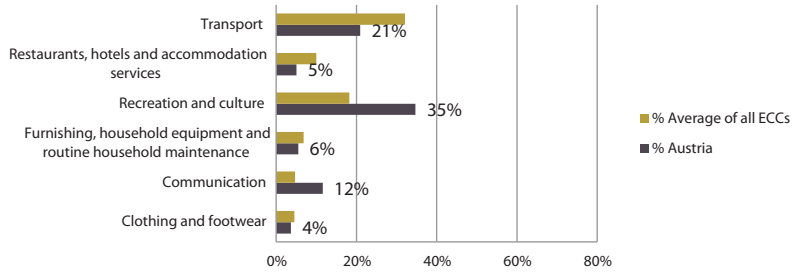
The Centre was also in regular contact with the main enforcement bodies in Austria, especially the NEB for train passenger rights.

This could be you

A Romanian couple booked flight tickets from Vilnius to Bucharest via Vienna with Austrian Airlines. The flight was cancelled for technical reasons. The couple lodged a compensation claim without any success. The airline refused to provide compensation, arguing that the cancellation was caused by extraordinary circumstances. After ECC Austria clarified when extraordinary circumstances apply and when they do not, in line with the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Wallentin-Hermann case (C-549/07), the airline agreed to compensate the consumers. Each of them received € 250.

Austrian consumers booked a ferry trip from Venice to Patras with a company called Minoan Lines. Due to economic reasons the route was cancelled but the consumers were not reimbursed. Thanks to ECC Austria and ECC Greece, the consumers were refunded € 800 each.

Main economic sectors



BELGIUM

In 2012, ECC Belgium received quite a lot of complaints about dating sites. After a discussion with the Belgian CPC authority on how to cooperate in solving this problem, ECC Belgium decided to publish a brochure, informing consumers about their rights when they subscribe to such sites. The CPC authority publicised this brochure on its Facebook page launched on Valentine's Day, 14 February.

ECC Belgium also published a brochure on online shopping, informing consumers on how to avoid falling into traps. On 24 October, the same day when the ECC-Net joint study on e-commerce was released, the Centre held a seminar on e-commerce frauds.

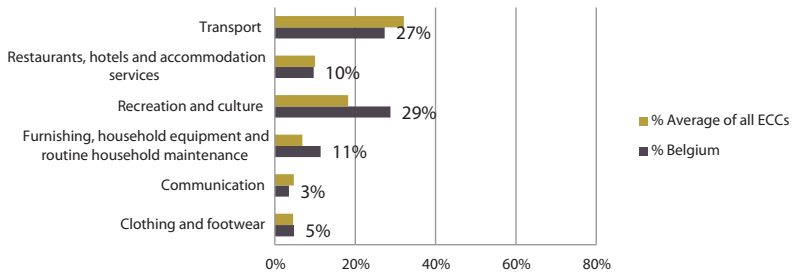
ECC Belgium noticed that during 2012 more and more consumers were complaining about deal-of-the-day websites (e.g. Groupon). In cooperation with the Belgian CPC authority, the Centre thoroughly examined the legal background to these specific purchases and will further monitor the situation in the future.

This could be you

A Belgian consumer booked a hotel in Marrakech via the website of a UK agency and paid € 145.47. However, when she arrived at the hotel, the management informed her that they had not received any room reservation in her name and that they never dealt with that UK agency. Since the consumer was unable to contact the agency over the phone, she had to look for a room in another hotel and had to pay for it again. She felt cheated. When back home, she lodged a complaint against the agency but never got a reply. She therefore asked ECC-Net for assistance. Thanks to action by ECC Belgium and ECC UK, she was refunded € 145.47.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Belgium: *«Here is someone who wants to thank you 1 000 times. I received a reimbursement of € 690. You made me very happy'; 'Many thanks for your quick reaction! What a service, I am impressed!»*

Main economic sectors



BULGARIA

One of the most representative events organised by ECC Bulgaria in 2012 was a seminar on air passenger rights, at which it met various stakeholders, exchanged experience and ideas and started fruitful cooperation with the Ministry of Transport. ECC Bulgaria took part in a major event for the 20th anniversary of the Single Market in October 2012, at which it gave a presentation on ECC-Net activities for the business sector and government officials. ECC Bulgaria also contributed to the joint project on e-commerce. A press conference held by ECC Bulgaria to announce the results of the project enjoyed huge media coverage. Another success was the joint project 'Ski resorts in Europe 2012/2013' in which it took part.

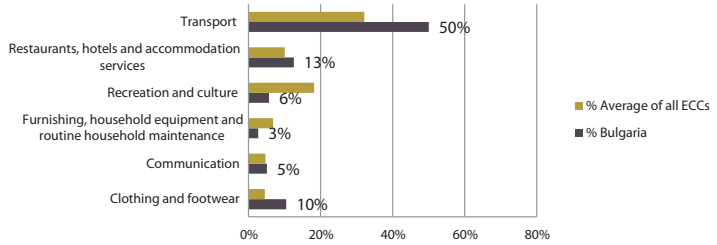
The bulk of the complaints handled by ECC Bulgaria in 2012 concerned the transport sector. The Centre also received a lot of complaints concerning online shopping, mainly for clothes, footwear and cosmetics. A major concern during the year was the bankruptcy of many traders — in these cases consumers faced many obstacles and received no refunds.

This could be you

A consumer from the UK purchased two bottles of perfume online from a Bulgarian trader. The consumer returned the order within the cooling-off period but did not get her money back. She asked ECC UK for assistance. After successful intervention by ECC UK and ECC Bulgaria, she was refunded € 75.

The luggage of a Bulgarian consumer was lost by an Italian airline. The consumer contacted the airline without success. He then lodged a complaint with ECC Bulgaria which was shared with ECC Italy. Since an amicable solution could not be reached with the airline, ECC-Net decided to transfer the case to the ADR entity. The consumer finally received compensation of € 520.

Main economic sectors



CYPRUS

In 2012, ECC Cyprus focused on the provision of information and advice to consumers when facing problems in their cross-border transactions. Presentations on the aims and activities of ECC Cyprus and on the new ADR mechanism were given at various high schools and other venues. In order to inform competent authorities, stakeholders and consumers on the new ADR mechanism, the Centre in cooperation with the Competition and Consumer Protection Service, participated in an information campaign (seminars/presentations, participation on TV and radio programmes, articles in newspapers/magazines). In cooperation with the Department of Civil Aviation, ECC Cyprus also participated in the ECC-Net Air Passenger Rights Day, at the International Airport of Larnaca. The event attracted a lot of media attention. Information material and gadgets were distributed during the day.

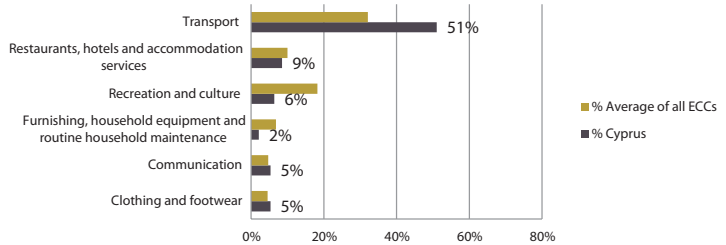
ECC Cyprus also participated in three joint projects carried out by ECC-Net (E-commerce, Ski Resorts in Europe and ADR in the air passenger rights sector).

Furthermore, ECC Cyprus participated in meetings held with representatives from the IMCO (the Parliamentary Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection) and BEUC (the European Consumers' Organisation). It also actively cooperated with stakeholders in the field of consumer protection and with other EU networks. The Centre was active on its social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn). Its website was redesigned in 2012.

This could be you

A French consumer participated in an online competition and won an iPad. However, he never received it from the trader. After several unsuccessful attempts to contact the trader, he turned to ECC France. Since the trader was based in Cyprus, ECC France shared the case with ECC Cyprus. Following the intervention of both Centres, the consumer received € 370.

Main economic sectors



CZECH REPUBLIC

ECC Czech Republic's highest-profile activities in 2012 were the media presentations for the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net, the ECC-Net joint project on ski resorts in Europe 2012/2013 and the UEFA Euro 2012 consumer information campaign. The Czech ECC also presented its activities at two tourism fairs and four fairs of the EU Information Networks organised by the European Commission Representation. The Centre distributed a large number of leaflets on consumer rights among passengers in international buses during the pre-Christmas period.

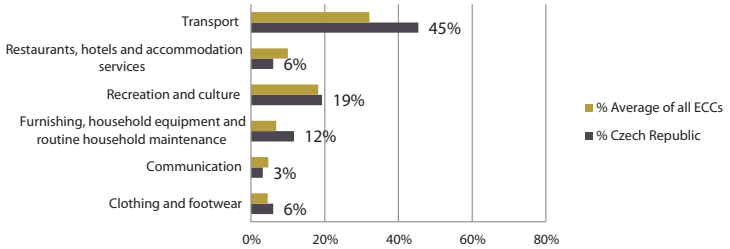
The bulk of cases handled by ECC Czech Republic in 2012 concerned air passenger rights and e-commerce. There were not as many consumer fraud cases as in previous years. When handling consumer complaints, the Czech ECC successfully cooperated with the Czech Trade Inspection Authority, the organisation hosting the Centre.

This could be you

Two Czech consumers purchased a tour to Gabon from a Dutch tour operator. A number of major problems emerged on the tour, e.g. the 'private boat' for transport was in fact a regular supply boat shared with other people and, besides accommodation problems, the highlight of the tour — a safari — lasted only two hours. The company did not answer the consumers' request for a refund. After ECC-Net intervened, the trader offered compensation amounting to € 1.385.

A Czech consumer ordered satellite TV services, but the company from Luxembourg billed much higher monthly fees than agreed and asked for a fee for installation although it was offered free of charge. The consumer refused to pay the fees, also because the service stopped operating almost immediately after installation, but the trader didn't react to claims and kept asking for further monthly fees. ECC-Net negotiated a refund and the trader amended his terms, advising consumers to turn to ECC-Net in the event of any cross-border problems with his services.

Main economic sectors



DENMARK

One of the highlights of 2012 for ECC Denmark was organising and hosting the ECC-Net Cooperation Day. Almost all ECCs and the European Commission were represented. The Centre also implemented a new procedure in order to have a better overview of pending cases. So far this procedure has been a great success.

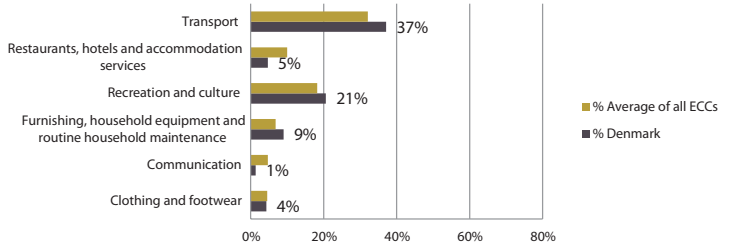
Most of the cases received by ECC Denmark related to the transport sector. In 2012, ECC Denmark also received a large number of complaints regarding samples or test packages. When handling these cases the Centre cooperated with the Danish CPC authority on how to stop the companies concerned. The Centre also pursued on-going collaboration with Danish ADR entities, especially the Danish Consumer Complaints Board.

This could be you

A Danish consumer travelled by train from Munich to Berlin and the train arrived more than 60 minutes late. The train operator claimed that the train was not delayed and refused to pay compensation. The consumer had also participated in a survey on a trader's website and was awarded a € 10 voucher but the voucher did not work on the trader's website. The consumer asked ECC Denmark for assistance. The case was sent to ECC Germany, who then forwarded the case to the ADR entity for passenger complaints in Germany. After the ADR entity intervened, the consumer was reimbursed.

A Polish consumer purchased a PC in a store in Denmark. After five months it stopped functioning and was repaired. During the third attempt to have the PC repaired, the consumer was informed that the manufacturer had experienced several other complaints regarding this specific model. The consumer then tried to cancel the purchase but the trader refused. The consumer contacted ECC Poland, who then shared the case with ECC Denmark. The Danish ECC sent the complaint to the Consumer Complaints Board, who managed to settle it on behalf of the consumer.

Main economic sectors



ESTONIA

The Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net was a great success in Estonia. ECC Estonia distributed leaflets at Tallinn airport; passengers were happy to get a free consultation. The event was widely covered by TV, radio and social media. Following publication of the ECC-Net report on the European Small Claims Procedure, ECC Estonia received coverage from international media channels such as Euronews and Euranet. The report produced by Euronews was a great opportunity to present ECC-Net activities to European viewers.

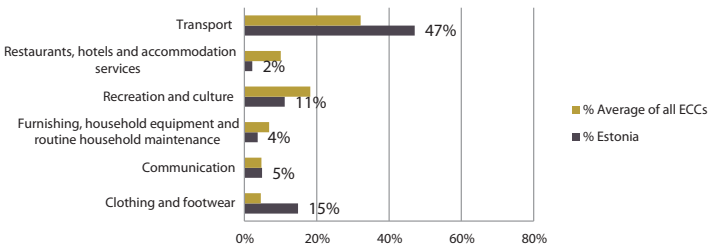
Thanks to ECC-Net's professionalism and experience, many complaints involving air passenger rights were resolved in favour of consumers. It was possible to reach amicable solutions and end the violation of consumer rights without enforcement proceedings.

This could be you

An Estonian consumer purchased five return flight tickets for Tallinn-Amsterdam-Bangkok-Siem Reap via a local travel agent. At Tallinn airport it transpired that the Tallinn-Amsterdam leg of the flight was missing for two passengers. They had to buy two new tickets that cost an extra € 325. The local travel agent who sold the tickets was not able to help, since the Dutch air carrier was not cooperative. The consumer turned to ECC Estonia and lodged a complaint, which was shared with the Dutch ECC. Finally, the air carrier refunded the consumer the cost of the additionally purchased tickets.

An Italian consumer rented a car at Tallinn airport. When he returned it, the rental firm's employee checked the vehicle and signed the final report without mentioning any damage. The day after the consumer was charged € 755.58 for damage to the car's fuel tank flap. Since no agreement was reached, the consumer asked ECC Italy for assistance. ECC Italy shared the complaint with the Estonian ECC. When ECC-Net intervened, the rental firm admitted that the additional charge was unfounded and reimbursed the consumer.

Main economic sectors



FINLAND

In 2012, ECC Finland focused on raising the Centre's visibility. The improvement in this regard was remarkable. With 31 press releases on various topics, the number of visits to the ECC Finland website went up by 57% on the previous year. The main events of 2012 were the Air Passenger Rights Day at Helsinki airport, a seminar on cross-border consumer fraud and a seminar, attended by some 500 high school students, to mark the 20th anniversary of the European Single Market. To round off the year, ECC Finland successfully stepped into the social media era, launching both Twitter and Facebook accounts.

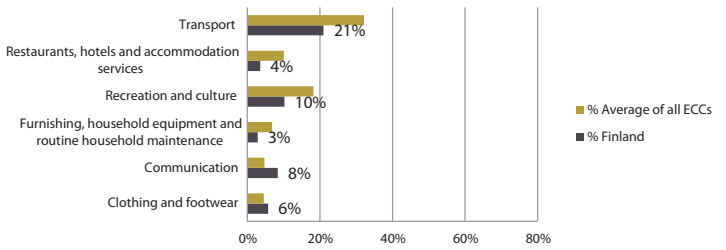
Airline bankruptcies and various problems with unsolicited goods in the context of misleading advertisements resulted in the highest number of contacts received so far by the Centre. Majority of cases handled ended in an amicable solution between consumer and trader. If it was not possible to reach an amicable settlement, the cases were transferred to the ADR entities or consumers were informed about other ways to deal with the complaints, e.g. courts using the European Small Claims Procedure.

This could be you

A Finnish consumer bought an iSD scale & dispenser from an Italian trader. The product delivered turned out to be defective. The consumer tried to contact the trader via its website several times, requesting delivery of a new product or a refund of the purchase price. The trader never replied and after some time its website stopped working. After ECC Italy and ECC Finland intervened the consumer was reimbursed € 199.

Finnish consumers ordered free product samples advertised on Facebook. However, they were requested to pay € 150 for additional regular orders. Consumers asked for all invoices to be cancelled. The trader was based in Hong Kong but the invoicing company was based in Sweden. ECC-Net negotiations with the Swedish company resulted in cancellation of the invoices of the 100 Finnish consumers concerned.

Main economic sectors



FRANCE

ECC France, in cooperation with ECC Germany, launched its new website, which registered around 400 000 visitors during the year. John Dalli, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, and Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, visited the Centre in 2012. ECC France also participated in a stakeholder conference on air passenger rights, a major event marking the 20th anniversary of the Single Market, a conference on the Consumer Rights Directive and a seminar on air transport and tourism. The Centre took part in a public hearing on the Consumer Agenda and a public consultation on air passenger rights and class action.

ECC France and Germany were leaders of the ECC-Net joint project on ADR in the air passenger rights sector, and they also hosted training for the European Journalism Centre. In 2012, the Centre worked in close cooperation with the CPC authority, the European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters, consumer organisations and ADR entities.

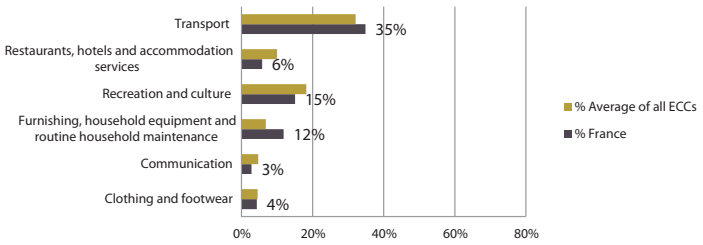
The bulk of the cases handled by ECC France in 2012 related to the purchase online of goods as well as services in the transport sector.

This could be you

A French consumer subscribed to a German dating website. The same day he decided to withdraw and notified his decision by e-mail. However, he was informed that he needed to send a handwritten registered letter. Although this condition was not indicated in the contract terms, he still did so, but was charged € 115 for automatic renewal of his subscription. He turned to ECC France and ECC Germany for assistance. The case was sent to the German ADR entity. Finally, the consumer obtained a full refund.

Two French students were travelling in Germany. They validated their urban transport ticket in the same way as was mandatory in their French city: every time they got onto a metro, tram or bus. In this German city the ticket should have been validated only once, otherwise it became invalid. Upon a check, the students were given a fine of € 40. ECC-Net sent this case to the German ADR entity and the fine was cancelled.

Main economic sectors



GREECE

The highlight of 2012 was the re-opening of ECC Greece which happened thanks to the voluntary contribution of its host organisation, the Hellenic Consumer Ombudsman, whose employees offered their services to the Centre with absolutely no extra salary. The Centre organised a celebration event attended by representatives of the European Commission and the Greek Government. ECC Greece participated in the annual meeting of Europe Direct. It also took part in the campaign 'Your passenger rights at hand' organised by the European Commission, during which it promoted a new smartphone application on air and rail passenger rights. The Centre played an active part in the consumer rights campaigns organised by the European Commission for football fans travelling to UEFA Euro 2012 and spectators going to the London Olympic Games. ECC Greece also contributed to the ECC-Net joint projects on ski resorts in Europe 2012/2013 and ADR in the air passenger rights sector. ECC Greece successfully cooperated with the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Hellenic Civil Aviation Authority and the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

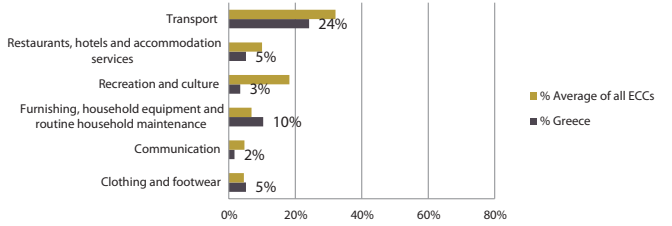
The main areas of complaints dealt by ECC Greece in 2012 were car rental, tourism/travel, accommodation and timeshare services (ECC Greece as a trader ECC), online shopping, education and accommodation services (ECC Greece as a consumer ECC).

This could be you

A consumer bought clothing accessories from an online catalogue. When the purchase was delivered, she discovered that some items were missing. She contacted the trader but never received the missing goods. She then decided to turn to ECC-Net for assistance. After ECC Greece successfully intervened, the consumer was reimbursed for the missing goods.

A consumer bought a one-way flight ticket to Costa Rica. At the stopover, he discovered that he could not continue his trip because foreign visitors to Costa Rica were legally obliged to have a return ticket when entering the country. Even though the situation was caused by his lack of knowledge about visa requirements in Costa Rica, ECC Greece managed to get him a refund.

Main economic sectors



GERMANY

One of the highlights of the year for ECC Germany, along with ECC France, was the launch of its new website, which allowed the Centre to inform consumers in a clear and interactive way about the whole range of topics concerning them. By using and promoting this tool, ECC Germany wanted to attract more attention not only from consumers but also from journalists.

The visit of John Dalli, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, and Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, ranked among the most important events for ECC Germany. These events helped to raise the visibility of the Centre among citizens and the media at regional and even national level. The increase in the number of press articles and reports on TV and radio (more than 500) seemed to indicate this trend.

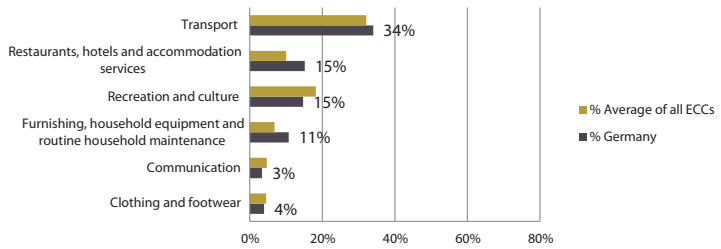
ECC Germany led a national project on cross-border health services. The Centre also participated in the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net and also led a joint project on ADR in the air passenger rights sector.

As regards cases handled in 2012, ECC Germany noticed that after the ruling issued by European Court of Justice on compensation for delayed flights, the airlines compensated consumers in more cases than before. Thanks to smooth cooperation with the German ADR entity for passenger rights ECC Germany was able to solve many cases against a German railway company relating to automatic renewal of subscription to the discount card (BahnCard).

This could be you

A holiday flight of a tour group of 10 people was delayed for 10 hours. Other than receiving drinks from the flight personnel, nothing was done: no alternative flights or reimbursement of costs was offered. The passengers demanded compensation of € 4 400 (€ 440 per person), which the airline refused. After the intervention of ECC Germany and ECC Netherlands the airline reimbursed the passengers.

Main economic sectors



HUNGARY

In 2012, ECC Hungary carried out an intensive media (seven press conferences), promotional (participation in large tourism fairs such as Travel Fair and High Season 2012) and educational campaign (nine presentations at seminars). The aim of this campaign was to raise the visibility of the Centre and ECC-Net among Hungarian citizens. ECC Hungary produced four new leaflets on car rental abroad, timeshares, useful tips for tourists and Christmas tips for consumers. It also ran a stand at Budapest airport in July for the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net. During that day the Centre gave advice and distributed leaflets with useful information on air passenger rights to hundreds of consumers. The Centre also organised a press conference with wide media coverage at national level. ECC Hungary actively participated in the ECC-Net joint projects on e-commerce and ADR in the air passenger rights sector. In its activities, the Centre cooperated actively with Europe Direct and the Enterprise Europe Network.

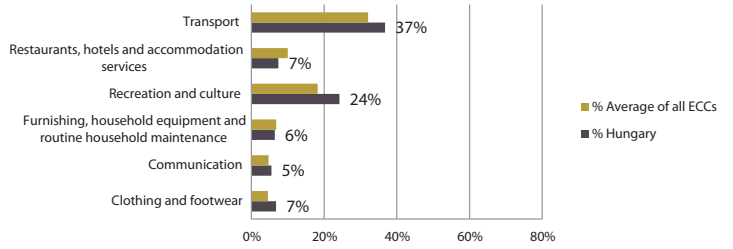
Concerning cases handled, 23% more complaints were submitted to the Centre by Hungarian consumers compared with the previous year. Air travel and e-commerce triggered the most complaints. Fruitful cooperation was established with the National Transport Authority concerning travel by rail or coach.

This could be you

A Hungarian consumer hired a car from an Italian rental company. A local agent of the company claimed an additional amount of insurance from the consumer although it was included into the contract terms. When back home, the consumer contacted the company, but it refused to give the money back. Following the assistance of ECC-Net the consumer was reimbursed € 282.

The Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised travellers not to go to Syria. Consumers who had booked tickets with a Hungarian airline therefore decided not to fly. They informed the airline that they wished to change their tickets to another destination or be reimbursed but the airline refused. After ECC-Net successfully intervened the consumers were reimbursed € 433.

Main economic sectors



ICELAND

During the year ECC Iceland hosted a meeting for the Nordic ECCs in Reykjavik, took part in a joint project on e-commerce and participated in various ECC-Net meetings. ECC Iceland received some media attention, from both newspapers and national radio. In May 2012 representatives from ECC Iceland took part in the European day, talked to consumers and distributed promotional material. During the summer the website of ECC Iceland ***www.ena.is*** was revamped to make it more extensive and user-friendly.

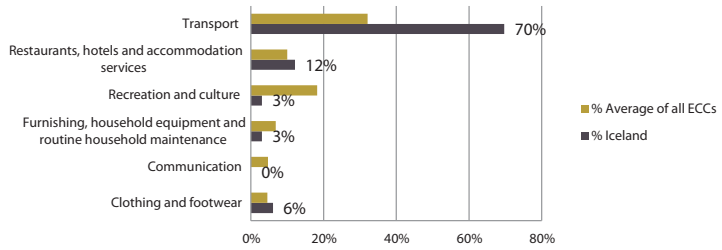
Concerning cases handled, ECC Iceland operated mainly as a trader ECC during the year. Therefore most of the complaints were tourism-related and regarded purchases of services (mostly air travel and car rental) from Icelandic traders. To solve cases regarding air travel ECC Iceland cooperated closely with the NEB, which started to deal with individual complaints and to decide on individual compensation.

This could be you

In 2010 an Irish woman was denied boarding because her flight with an Icelandic airline was overbooked. She was given a ticket on another flight the next day and the airline also supplied her with overnight accommodation. However, the woman claimed € 400 in compensation and tried repeatedly to contact the airline by phone and mail, but to no avail. Finally, she turned to ECC Ireland, which forwarded the case to ECC Iceland. At last, two years after the incident, she received the € 400.

A French consumer hired a car in Iceland. When he returned it there was a crack in one of the rear lights and he was charged an estimated repair cost of ISK (Icelandic krona) 57 000. He thought the cost was too high and sought assistance from ECC France, which forwarded the case to ECC Iceland. ECC Iceland asked to see an invoice for the repairs. It turned out that the repair cost was only ISK 37 000, so the traveller was refunded ISK 20 000.

Main economic sectors



IRELAND

ECC Ireland organised a conference on ADR opened by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and attended by national stakeholders. It ran, jointly with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, a Train the Trainer seminar for the community and voluntary sector on online shopping and scams. It led a joint ECC-Net project on airlines' currency and payment card fees and was a member of the working group for the ECC-Net e-commerce project.

ECC Ireland's main complaint areas in 2012 were air travel, electronics, entertainment services and car rental. Subscription services were problematic, with consumers signing up for 'risk-free trials of skin products' only to be charged fees on a monthly basis. ECC Ireland continued its cooperation with NEBs, especially in relation to air passenger rights. Car rental cases were also referred to the Leaseurope car rental ADR for resolution.

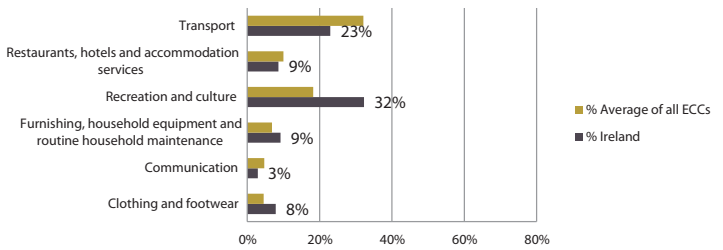
This could be you

A Spanish consumer downloaded from an Irish trader a free game advertised as suitable for children. His 11 year-old child played the game, making purchases (shown as a bag of coins) totalling € 1 440. The consumer argued it was not clear whether this symbol indicated real money or virtual coins but the trader refused to refund the charges. Following contact by ECC Ireland, the trader refunded the money to the consumer.

An Irish consumer booked a holiday via a UK agent. Due to a technical error on the agent's website, the consumer was advised that the booking had not been processed. Based on this information the consumer purchased the holiday again. However, the original booking had gone through and the consumer was charged twice. The agent refused to refund the consumer, stating that his contract was with the hotel and the airline. Following the intervention of ECC-Net, the consumer was able to recover the full amount of € 1 200.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Ireland: *«From the first contact to the last the representatives of ECC Ireland were efficient and friendly and helped me to resolve a problem which had seemed intractable.»*

Main economic sectors



ITALY

During 2012 ECC Italy provided thousands of consumers with advice and assistance on their cross-border problems. It also took part in the Air Passenger Day organised by ECC-Net and led a joint ECC-Net project on the European small claims procedure — both activities were initiated by the Centre in 2009. Three types of leaflets on air passenger rights were produced together with the NEB, and conferences on the tourism sector were organised. Lessons in schools on consumer rights and a meeting with the police on problems with dating agencies were arranged. The Centre was also successful in raising its visibility through the media.

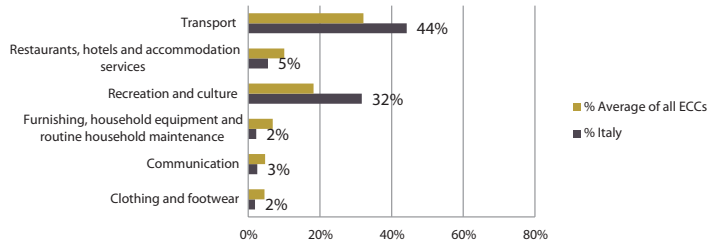
Cases relating to air transport still accounted for the most complaints, followed by car rental, recreational and accommodation services, furniture and clothes. Contracts were frequently concluded by e-commerce. The most significant infringements were notified to enforcement bodies; numerous cases against the main Italian airline were solved through their joint mediation. The Centre also received cases relating to the Services Directive 2006/123/EC. Strong collaboration with all stakeholders was therefore established in this area. Fruitful cooperation was arranged with the European Commission Representation and other EU assistance services.

This could be you

A Bulgarian consumer bought a pair of fashionable shoes in a luxury shop in Milan. Despite costing € 495, the sole began to split and finally came off after the shoes had been worn only four times. The consumer turned to ECC-Net for assistance. ECC Italy contacted the shop, which soon sent a new pair of the shoes to the consumer in Bulgaria.

An Italian passenger asked for compensation from a Belgian airline for a long flight delay on the basis of the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Sturgeon case. The airline refused to compensate. Only when the European Court of Justice in 2012 confirmed its previous ruling in Sturgeon regarding compensation to passengers whose flights are delayed by three hours or more and thanks to intervention by ECC Italy and ECC Belgium the company paid financial compensation of € 250 to the passenger.

Main economic sectors



LATVIA

The most representative activities of ECC Latvia in 2012 were: (1) organisation of a 'Buy smart online' information campaign to educate consumers not only about their rights but also about different practical issues (e.g. useful tips) to consider when buying online. A number of celebrities told their stories and talked about the lessons they had learned when shopping online, in order to encourage consumers to come forward when they encounter problems and to act properly; (2) participation in the 'Balttour' international exhibition and in the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net; and (3) organisation of the Baltic States cooperation meeting in Riga.

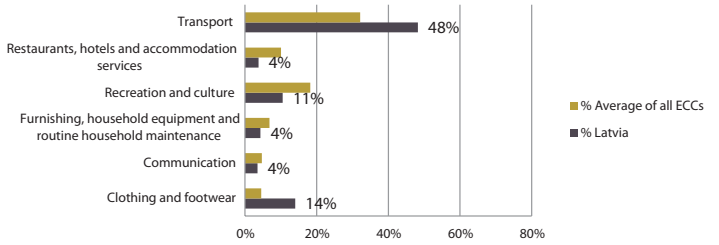
This could be you

A Lithuanian consumer booked online tickets to visit an aqua park in Latvia. The price of the tickets was charged to his credit card on the same day. However, the tickets were not delivered, even after the consumer sent a reminder by e-mail. Upon arrival at the aqua park, the consumer was able to purchase new tickets. He also asked for reimbursement of the price of the tickets that were not delivered. Since it was not possible to reach agreement with the management of the aqua park, he decided to turn for assistance to ECC Lithuania. ECC Lithuania shared the case with ECC Latvia and after its successful intervention the consumer was reimbursed.

A Latvian consumer booked a flight from London to Riga with a Hungarian airline. After the flight the consumer noticed that his luggage was damaged. He submitted all the necessary documents to the airline, which offered compensation of € 50 in reservation credits. The consumer was not satisfied with the airline's offer so he lodged a complaint with ECC Latvia. After the intervention of ECC Latvia and ECC Hungary, the airline agreed to pay the consumer compensation amounting to € 100.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Latvia: *«Many thanks for your letters and your efforts. We would like to tell you that we have received the item which was not delivered before. It is really nice that there are people who are working for us so hard and steadily.»*

Main economic sectors



LITHUANIA

In 2012, ECC Lithuania organised, together with Mykolas Romeris, Savoy and Santiago de Compostela Universities, the Second International Conference on the Legal Aspects of Consumer Protection in the European Union. European Consumer Day was also celebrated at the conference. Together with various stakeholders ECC Lithuania organised 25 seminars in the biggest cities. It played an active part in a number of joint research projects: the European Online Marketplace: Consumer Complaints 2010-2011, the European Small Claims Procedure report and others. Together with the Civil Aviation Administration, it organised the Air Passengers Rights Day at Vilnius International Airport.

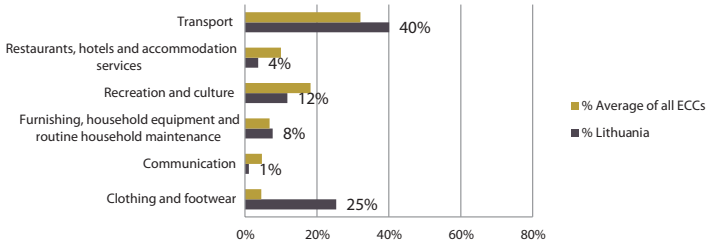
E-commerce caused problems in 40% of all cases. ECC Lithuania received a lot of complaints regarding the increase in delivery charges when buying various articles of clothing from an e-shop in France. A 25% delivery charge was applied instead of 5% as indicated in the trader's terms and conditions. Successful cooperation with ECC France resulted in a positive outcome in all justified cases.

This could be you

A consumer bought a biker jacket online. It was defective. The consumer contacted the trader and was asked to return the item. But later the trader answered that the tracking information provided by the consumer was invalid and therefore the refund could not be processed. The consumer approached ECC Lithuania, which gathered all the necessary case material and forwarded the claim to ECC Luxembourg, which successfully negotiated the case with the trader, and the consumer received a refund.

A consumer's luggage was delayed upon arrival in a foreign country. It was delivered the next day at midnight. The consumer had to buy some necessities. She sent all copies of receipts to the airline, hoping to receive a refund. Unfortunately that did not happen. After the intervention of ECC-Net the consumer was reimbursed.

Main economic sectors



LUXEMBOURG

To celebrate International Consumer Day on 15 March, ECC Luxembourg organised, in collaboration with the European Commission Representation, an open house day. At the European House, located in the centre of Luxembourg, consumers were informed about their rights when shopping across borders. ECC Luxembourg also issued a completely updated version of its brochure 'Guide for students signing a housing contract in Belgium, France or Germany'. Together with the European Commission Representation, it participated in the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net. The Centre had an information stand at Luxembourg Findel airport.

ECC Luxembourg continued to cooperate very closely with Luxembourg's CPC authority. The Centre held a meeting with it in December in order to discuss the pending cases it had sent to the authority.

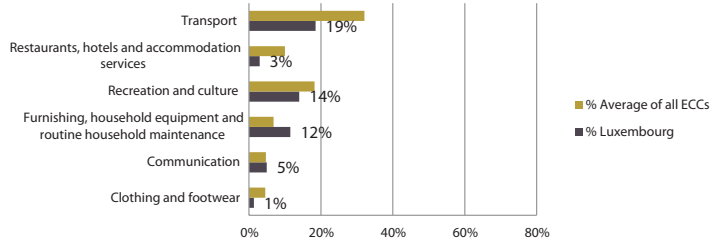
This could be you

A Luxembourg consumer ordered goods on a Dutch website. It proved impossible to deliver the goods to Luxembourg. However, the price had already been charged to the consumer's credit card. The consumer asked for the order to be cancelled and the amount paid to be refunded. The trader did not react. ECC Luxembourg shared the case with ECC Netherlands and the consumer was finally reimbursed.

A Luxembourg consumer moored his yacht in a harbour but it was damaged by another boat that was not properly docked. He unsuccessfully tried to get the cost of repairing his yacht refunded. He then contacted ECC Luxembourg, who shared the case with their Italian colleagues. ECC Italy got in contact with the insurance company of the boat that caused the damage and secured a full refund for the costs of repairing the yacht.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Luxembourg: *«I would like to thank you very much for the speed in handling my case. I will advertise your services to other people who get stuck in cross-border consumer problems.»*

Main economic sectors



MALTA

In 2012, ECC Malta participated in an event to mark World Consumer Rights Day. It took part in the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net, during which it had a stand at Malta International Airport. It also participated in a fair organised by the European Commission Representation to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Single Market. ECC Malta was invited to join the working group charged with drafting a National Strategy for Consumer Education.

During the year ECC Malta noticed an increase in complaints concerning penny auction sites and remote gaming. Complaints relating to e-commerce remained the main area of concern. There was also a decrease in timeshare-related cases, whilst complaints regarding car rentals increased slightly.

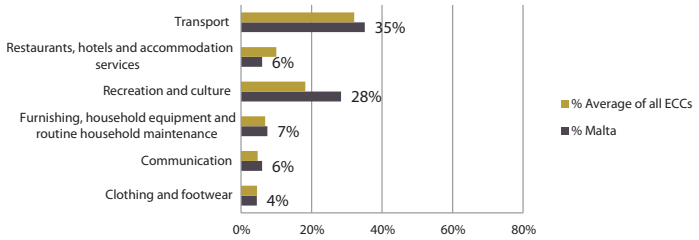
This could be you

A consumer hired a vehicle while on holiday and was involved in an accident. The conclusion of the police report was that the other driver was fully liable. The police report was given to the rental company, which nonetheless took € 530 from the consumer's credit card. The consumer contacted the company but never received a reply. After the intervention of ECC Malta, he was given a refund.

A consumer received an email from a penny auction site informing her that she had won a mobile phone and that she had to pay only the shipment charges. She ordered the product, but the trader charged her a membership fee as well. The consumer cancelled the subscription within the stipulated time and asked for a refund. The trader did not reply. After the intervention of ECC Malta, she received a refund.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Malta: *«I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the professional support you gave all the way along'; 'Thank you for the interest shown and the way you handled my complaint.»*

Main economic sectors



NETHERLANDS

ECC Netherlands took part as an ODR (online dispute resolution) expert in the ADR/ODR debates at the Dutch Social and Economic Committee, which contributed to the advice given to the Dutch Cabinet concerning implementation of the ADR/ODR legislation in the Netherlands. The Centre received a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Security for proactive participation in the innovative Uncitral (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) ODR Exchange pilot. It also led a working group in the ECC-Net joint project concerning e-commerce complaints in 2010 and 2011.

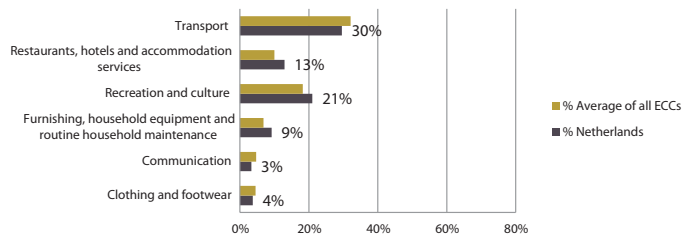
E-commerce was the sales method that caused most problems for consumers. During the year, the Centre cooperated fruitfully with the Legal Services Counter, the Consumer Authority and the Dutch Fraud Helpdesk.

This could be you

While on holiday in Greece, two consumers sent a registered letter to a Greek timeshare operator indicating that they wished to cancel their timeshare contract. They did the same also when back home. However, the Greek operator called them and explained that Directive 2008/122/EC regulating certain aspects of timeshares did not apply to their contract. The consumers asked ECC-Net for assistance. ECC Netherlands shared the case with their colleagues from ECC Greece. After ECC-Net contacted the Greek operator it sent the consumers a letter cancelling the timeshare contract and also reimbursed their expenses.

A consumer bought a sapphire watch for € 600 from a Dutch jewellery shop. He was told that the watch would not scratch. After some months the consumer noticed that there was a little air bubble in the glass. He went to the retailer, who told him that the scratches, which were the cause of the bubble, were caused by bumping into something. The consumer turned to ECC-Net for assistance. The Dutch ECC contacted the seller to discuss the consumer's rights under the legal guarantee. The retailer agreed to investigate the matter. Within a short period of time the consumer got his fully repaired watch back.

Main economic sectors



NORWAY

ECC Norway participated in two different joint events at Oslo Airport, Gardermoen together with its host organisation, the Consumer Council of Norway. The events took place in July (Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net) and December. The Centre handed out brochures with information on air passenger rights, referring to its websites for further details. The events received a lot of media coverage.

ECC Norway took part in the project on unsolicited goods. It also organised a seminar on the choice of law and jurisdiction in cross-border consumer contracts. The seminar welcomed two law professors from Oslo University and was attended by about 50 people.

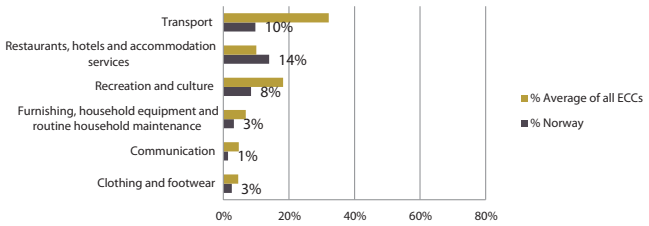
The major consumer issue in 2012 involved the Danish company FormLife. ECC Norway received about 800 complaints in a short period of time and was forced to contact the banks and companies in the payment system, urging them to terminate all agreements with the fraudulent company. In the end the company went bankrupt and the Centre believes that the large majority of consumers received a refund either from their bank or from the payment system companies. This case showed how ECC Norway's cooperation with stakeholders such as the Consumer Ombudsman and the Consumer Council and also the traders involved could secure a very favourable outcome for consumers. ECC Norway also handled a lot of consumer complaints against the Norwegian company Euroteam.

This could be you

A Norwegian consumer ordered online some car parts from a UK-based trader. He pre-paid for the goods, but did not receive them. The case was shared with the colleagues in the UK, and after their intervention the consumer received a refund of the amount paid (€ 287). The consumer was very pleased with the assistance received from ECC-Net.

An elderly couple claimed to have been cheated in a Madrid shop out of about € 14 000. After quick action by ECC Norway and ECC Spain the couple received a refund of about half of the amount from the shop. Part of the remaining amount will be refunded by the credit card company.

Main economic sectors



POLAND

In 2012, ECC Poland organised a Round Table on ADR/ODR (online dispute resolution) procedures aimed at settling disputes out-of-court. The event was attended by Róża Thun, Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur for the ODR, and key representatives of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, consumer NGOs and the business sector. The Centre also organised, together with Trusted Shops, an international conference on the Directive on Consumer Rights and ODR in e-commerce that was attended by the main public authorities (Ministry of Justice, Office of Competition and Consumer Protection), ECCs, ADRs, NGOs and the largest e-traders. The UEFA Euro 2012 Football Championship organised in Poland and Ukraine significantly raised the visibility of ECC-Net and Poland as a country worth visiting and shopping in.

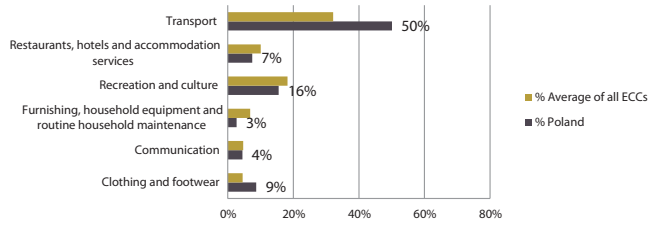
Regarding cases handled in 2012, the insolvency of air carriers and travel organisers was the main issue, which meant that transport and tourism were the most problematic national topics reported by consumers to ECC Poland. The problems with scams prompted ECC Poland to strengthen collaboration with the Polish National Police.

This could be you

A Swedish consumer travelled from Hanoi to Warsaw. Due to a technical problem the flight was delayed for 50 hours. The Polish air carrier claimed not to be responsible for unforeseen circumstances. After ECC Poland intervened the air carrier decided to reimburse the consumer and her family € 3 000.

A Hungarian consumer ordered weight loss pills from a Polish web store. As she was not satisfied with the product she used her right to withdraw during the cooling-off period. The pills were sent back with a withdrawal letter four days after delivery. In view of the lack of any reaction after a long period, the consumer asked ECC-Net for assistance. In a few days she was reimbursed € 38.

Main economic sectors



PORTUGAL

ECC Portugal was active in the field of air passenger rights. A cooperation agreement was signed between ECC Portugal, its host organisation (the Consumer Directorate General) and the NEB for air passenger rights (INAC — National Institute of Civil Aviation). The Centre, together with the NEB, promoted the Air Passenger Rights Day and information was delivered to passengers at Lisbon Airport.

ECC Portugal produced and distributed three brochures to inform consumers about the European Small Claims Procedure, consumer rights when travelling in Europe and new developments in out-of-court settlement in Portugal.

During the 20th anniversary of the Single Market celebrating week, an 'open door day' was organised and consumers were given the opportunity to visit ECC premises and receive information; posters advertising the centre were displayed in some outdoor locations in the capital.

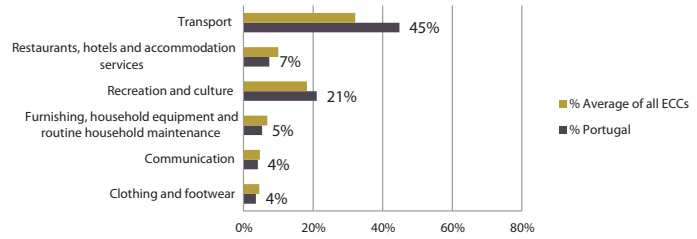
Cases handled by ECC Portugal in 2012 showed a steady increase in complaints where the Centre was acting as a trader ECC. Cooperation with ADR entities was therefore enhanced. Air passenger rights and online shopping were the sectors which continued to give rise to most consumer complaints in 2012.

This could be you

A French consumer booked a room online in a private house. After making the payment, the consumer requested information directly from the owner about the room. Following the information received, the consumer decided to cancel the booking but was refused. Thanks to intervention by ECC Portugal and ECC France the consumer was reimbursed € 149.25.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Portugal: *«I'm deeply grateful for your assistance. Only with your help was it possible to recover the money from the car hire company. The existence of ECC-Net is important and should be better known to everyone. Many people still lose money because they do not know where to look for help in similar cases.»*

Main economic sectors



ROMANIA

ECC Romania took part in the information campaign for Romanian consumers 'It's your right! Act!'. This involved meetings with stakeholders from the package travel sector, meetings with consumers in shopping centres and hypermarkets, and radio and TV interviews.

ECC Romania kept up its information efforts by handing out information material on luggage rights, ADR, the Services Directive 2006/123/EC, giving advice for consumers going to UEFA Euro 2012 and improving its website.

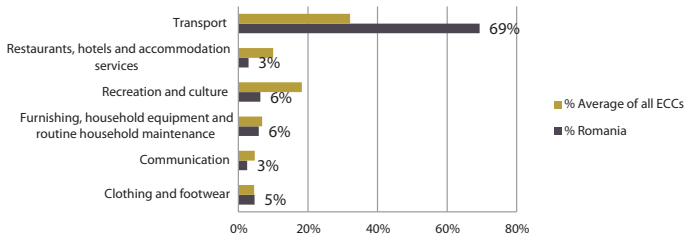
In 2012, air passenger rights again accounted for the largest number of cases handled. Consumers complained about not receiving assistance or compensation when flights were delayed or cancelled or when luggage was delayed or lost. Consumers also complained about the way compensation was calculated. Some consumers were affected by the insolvency of the Hungarian air company, not being able to recover their expenses. The air passenger rights sector was followed by complaints about legal guarantees, such as refusal to repair or replace faulty goods, and complaints related to online shopping, mostly concerning problems of delivery.

This could be you

A Romanian consumer travelled with a German airline. After passing through the boarding gate he was told that due to overbooking he could not travel on the flight in question. After reaching his destination he tried without success to obtain compensation from the airline. He therefore turned to ECC Romania, which shared the case with ECC Germany. Thanks to both ECCs the consumer received compensation of € 250.

A Romanian consumer booked a hotel in Austria. When she wanted to check out she was told that she had to pay a fine of € 150 for smoking in the room. Although she tried to prove that she did not smoke, the hotel did not change its mind. The consumer contacted ECC Romania and with the help of ECC Austria she was reimbursed € 150.

Main economic sectors



SLOVAKIA

Handling cross-border complaints and answering information requests formed the bulk of ECC Slovakia's work in 2012. The Centre also organised successful seminars for consumers in five cities, paving the way for future cooperation with the association of seniors. It produced brochures on unfair commercial practices, pocket calendars for 2013 with information on consumer rights and other promotional material. It distributed its promotional material in shopping centres and also prepared small quizzes for consumers.

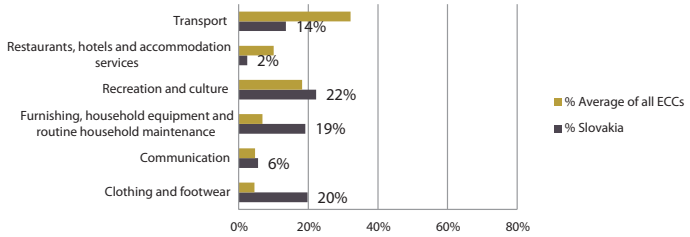
Most of the complaints handled by ECC Slovakia in 2012 concerned withdrawal from contracts within the cooling-off period and legal guarantees. Other major issues dealt with by the Centre in 2012 had to do with subscription traps and sales of new goods by private individuals on websites primarily intended for second-hand goods.

This could be you

Four consumers encountered problems with a Bratislava-Paris return flight in 2010. The flight back to Bratislava was cancelled due to a strike at the airport in Paris. The passengers were not driven from the city to the airport on the day of the strike, so they were only able to arrive at the airport the next day. The earliest flight to Bratislava was arranged five days later. The consumers had to pay all their expenses while waiting for five days for the flight. They felt cheated and when back home they turned to ECC-Net. The case was solved in 2012 when the airline finally reimbursed them € 1 507.70.

A consumer ordered coins from a trader in July 2009. The next day he received an e-mail from the trader which he misinterpreted as a confirmation of the order. He transferred the price of the purchase, € 1 153.90, via online banking. The trader replied in August 2009 explaining that the consumer's order had not been processed. Although the consumer never received his purchase, he was fully reimbursed only in 2012 after ECC-Net successfully intervened.

Main economic sectors



SLOVENIA

The most visible activities of ECC Slovenia in 2012 were related to promotion of ECC-Net and consumer rights through distribution of brochures and information on consumer rights at different occasions (Ljubljana airport, several national and international fairs and info points). ECC Slovenia organised six workshops for different groups of consumers and also prepared three new handbooks for consumers. Its work also included close cooperation with the European Commission Representation and the Slovenian Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Centre participated in ECC-Net joint projects on ski resorts, e-commerce and the European small claims procedure.

Most consumer complaints in 2012 related to online shopping and air passenger rights. There was an increase in the number of consumer complaints dealt with by ECC Slovenia compared to the previous year.

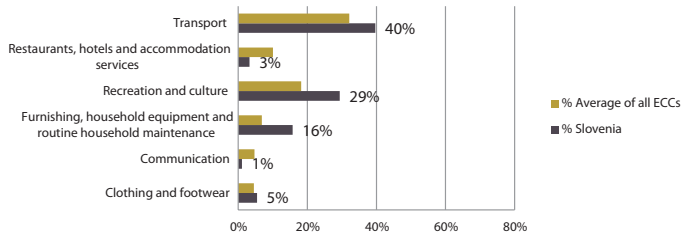
This could be you

After ordering wheel rims for his car for € 1 090 from a German web trader and not receiving the order, the consumer contacted the trader but did not receive any reply. He therefore decided to contact ECC Slovenia and, thanks to its intervention, he received the products ordered.

A consumer bought a trench coat in a shop in Italy for € 321 but, unfortunately, after a few months the zip broke. She contacted the trader, who refused to repair the zip. She thought that maybe the problem could be language-related, so she asked a friend to translate her complaint into Italian, but the trader's response was again negative. The consumer contacted ECC Slovenia for help and afterwards the trader reacted immediately. The zip was replaced with a new one and the coat was sent back to the consumer together with a nice letter of apology.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Slovenia: *«Today I received a refund and I am very pleased. I did not know about your network before I received a brochure at the airport. You provide a really good service to citizens. Thank you!»*

Main economic sectors



SPAIN

ECC Spain's main activity in 2012 was promoting ECC-Net at five different universities by giving presentations to students, who are regarded as an important target group with regard to foreign travel. ECC Spain was also very proactive in holding meetings with leading stakeholders, coordinating with the national consumer authorities, and participating in the most relevant ECC-Net joint projects, e.g. on e-commerce, ski resorts and the European small claims procedure. The Centre also had a stand at Madrid airport to provide information as part of the second pan-European campaign organised by ECC-Net on air passenger rights. It hosted a study visit by 11 ECCs dealing with complaints involving timeshare products. The conclusions of this meeting were considered very important for future ECC-Net joint projects.

Most of the complaints received in 2012 concerned air passenger rights, e-commerce and timeshare products. The number of cases handled was higher than in previous years. ECC Spain continued to cooperate effectively with the local consumer offices that provide the Centre with almost 50% of the complaints it handles.

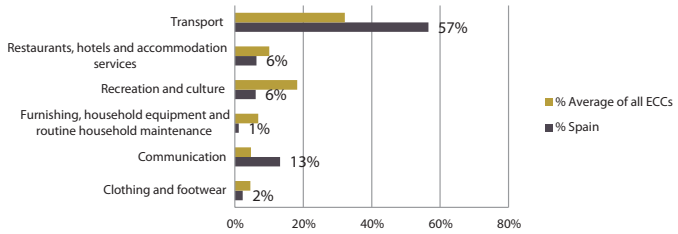
This could be you

A consumer who had ordered a generator on a trader's website never received it in spite of several reminders. After the intervention of ECC-Net, he was finally reimbursed € 1 190.

A consumer bought camera equipment for around € 12 000. However, he discovered the items to be of lower quality than justified by the price (a kind of scam). He sent the equipment back to the trader and asked ECC Spain to intervene in order to be reimbursed. Thanks to ECC-Net, he finally got a refund of € 6 500.

Some thank you messages from consumers to ECC Spain: *«I am really grateful indeed for all your help while handling my complaint. If it is resolved, you have my personal promise (in writing) that I will come to Madrid and invite you for lunch. Thank you very much for your efforts and professionalism.»*

Main economic sectors



SWEDEN

The highlights for ECC Sweden in 2012 were the launch of its website at ***www.konsumenteuropa.se***, participation in the ECC-Net joint project on e-commerce, participation in several events such as Europe Day and a week celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Single Market, together with the European Commission, the National Board of Trade and SOLVIT, participation in the Swedish International Travel and Tourism Trade Fair together with the Swedish Consumer Agency, and participation in the ODR (online dispute resolution) Exchange project.

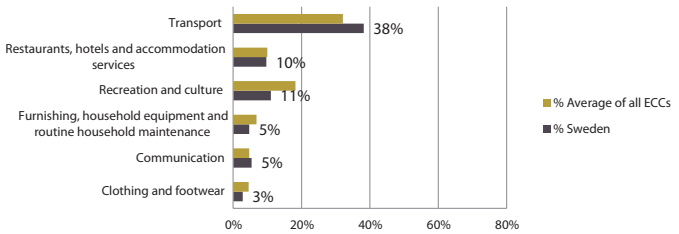
Many complaints received in 2012 concerned purchases of health products for which consumers entered into a subscription contract believing that they only had a contract for a sample or test package. ECC Sweden cooperated effectively with the Swedish Consumer Agency and the banks and successfully coordinated its work with other Nordic ECCs experiencing similar problems. Another focus of cases handled in 2012 was timeshares, long-term holiday products and similar products, mostly purchased in Spain. The main problem related to withdrawal from those contracts. After ECC Sweden's intervention, some cases were solved by partial reimbursement and in others complete refunds were obtained by initiating the charge-back procedure. There were also some cases regarding the bankruptcy of a Hungarian airline and deceitful behaviour by 'scam companies'.

This could be you

A Norwegian consumer who had received unsolicited goods from a Swedish company got in touch with ECC-Net. After ECC Sweden successfully intervened, the consumer received confirmation from the trader that the invoice had been cancelled.

Swedish consumers who had signed vacation club contracts with a Greek company wanted to withdraw from these contracts. They contacted the Swedish ECC, which advised them to send the trader a written complaint referring to the cooling-off period. As a result, the contracts were cancelled and the consumers received a full refund.

Main economic sectors



UNITED KINGDOM

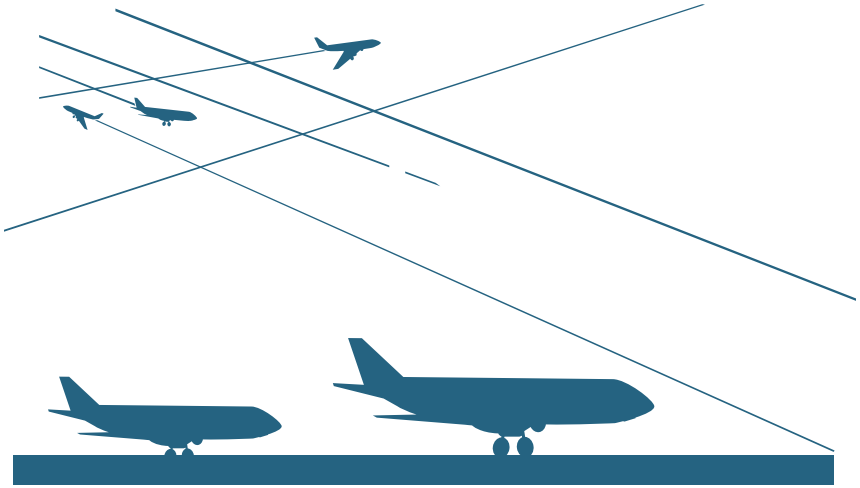
ECC United Kingdom's most visible activity in 2012 was its stand at London Gatwick Airport in July for the Air Passenger Rights Day organised by ECC-Net, where the Centre gave advice and handed out leaflets on air passenger rights. The Centre also had meetings with the Office of Fair Trading to discuss a case referral procedure via the CPC network. In order to speak about their role in FIN-NET, ECC UK met with the Financial Ombudsman Service. ECC UK participated in the joint project 'Ski resorts in Europe 2012/2013' by sending questionnaires to ski centres.

ECC UK continued to receive lots of requests on timeshares, holiday clubs and related products. The Centre met with ECC Spain to discuss recent changes in the relevant legislation and the effects on the current situation. The number of complaints concerning car rentals was also quite high. ECC UK therefore met with the car rental trade association in the UK to discuss the procedure for referring cases to the ADR entity. The UK ECC established contact with the CPC authority to provide a seamless referral procedure for cases that required the attention of enforcement bodies.

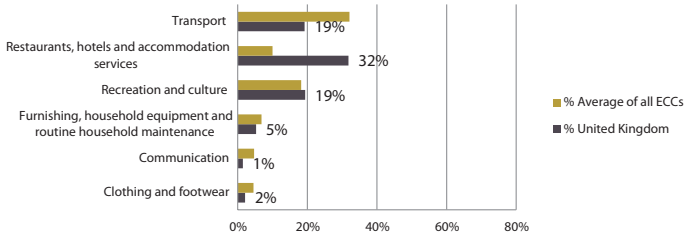
This could be you

A Greek consumer purchased snow boots and other items from an online UK retailer. The parcel was delivered but without the boots. The consumer wrote to the trader but never received any reply. He therefore contacted ECC Greece, who shared the case with ECC UK. The trader was informed about his legal obligations and the consumer was reimbursed the value of the boots — € 45.59.

A Hungarian consumer ordered a helmet from a UK trader and paid € 360 in advance, but after two months he had not still received his helmet. He contacted the trader, who replied that the parcel had been sent. As he could not obtain any satisfactory solution from the trader, he got in touch with the Hungarian ECC, who shared the case with UK ECC. Thanks to the intervention of the Centre, the consumer finally received his helmet.



Main economic sectors



NATIONAL CONTACT DETAILS

An updated list of the European Consumer Centres contact details is also available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/ecc-net

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